

UN Inter-Agency Response for Syrian Refugees

Beirut, October 2012



Highlights of the week

- The number of Syrians receiving protection and assistance in Lebanon is now over 100,000;
- UNHCR registered close to 20,000 people in October;
- UNHCR launched registration in south Lebanon through Caritas' centre in Ghaziyeh-892 refugees have been registered so far;
- The Danish Refugee Council (DRC), World Vision (WV), the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNFPA distributed mattresses, blankets, sanitary napkins, hygiene kits, food vouchers and kits to 32,000 people;
- The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) announced it will provide books to all students enrolled in Lebanese public schools, including refugees, allowing UNHCR and UNICEF to now allocate extra funding toward heating schools during the winter months;
- 30% of the school-aged refugee population are now enrolled in school.



Registration and New Arrivals

This month, the number of Syrian refugees recorded by UNHCR in Lebanon topped 100,000. Currently the total is 106,280 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, of which just over 77,000 are registered and 30,000 are scheduled to be registered.

UNHCR registered over 20,000 refugees this month at its centres in Tripoli and Beirut, through mobile registration in Aarsal and Al Qaa, and with the opening of a centre in Ghaziyeh in south Lebanon. An average of 1,000 refugees are registered throughout Lebanon daily.

Current distribution of registered population is as follows:

North Lebanon: 41,648

Bekaa: 32,217

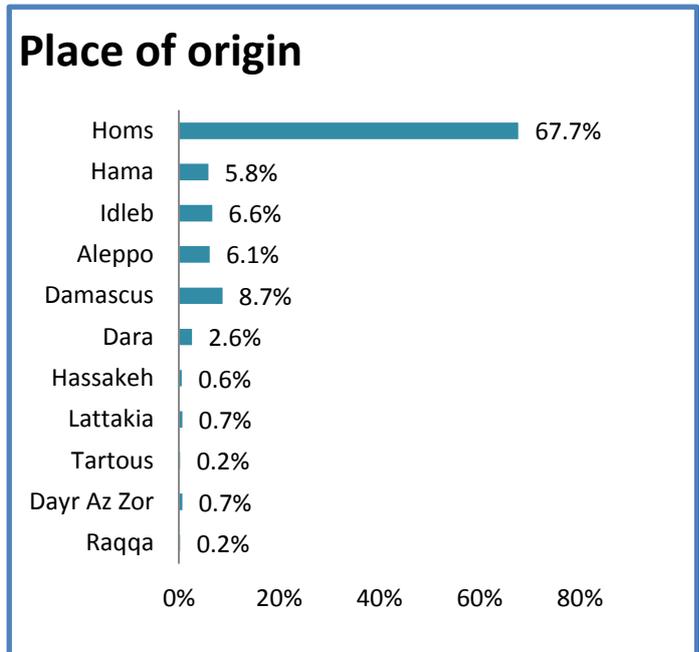
Beirut and South Lebanon: 3,149

Approximately 25,000 Syrians approached UNHCR for registration appointments in October, the majority from Homs and Qusayr. UNHCR assisted those who are pending registration with the Office through initial provision of WFP food kits, and DRC baby kits and mattresses.

Refugees report a number of difficulties in reaching Lebanon including being shot at en route and travelling long distances by night to avoid areas which are vulnerable to attack by land or air. Many new arrivals originating from Qusayr enter Lebanon through unofficial border points due to the closure of the official Al Qaa crossing. Consequently, they are not considered to be legally in Lebanon.

UNHCR registration capacity continues to increase. While 8,000 refugees were registered in July, 20,000 were registered in October, representing a 250% increase. Registration commenced in Ghaziyeh near Saida on 24 October, where 892 have been registered already, and with a continued expansion of staffing, monthly registration capacity is expected to grow.

Even with its expanding capacity, registration continues to be a challenge given that refugees are spread across 400 municipalities throughout Lebanon. Moreover, security incidents can disrupt the registration process leading to delays. For example, following the assassination of the head of Internal Security Forces Information Branch General Wissam al-Hassan, and the subsequent civil unrest, many refugees could not access registration and some



registration activities were interrupted for up to two days. Affected refugees were immediately rescheduled for appointments.

Another challenge is the reluctance of certain refugees, especially those from minority groups, to come forward. UNHCR continues to work with community and religious leaders to encourage registration.

Protection

UNHCR and partner agencies enhanced protection monitoring this month, improving outreach to people with specific needs and referring individuals to appropriate specialized partners for assistance. Among those most in need are single parents heading large families, pregnant women, separated children accompanied by their siblings or relatives, survivors of violence and torture and disabled persons. Findings point to a clear need enhance the provision of psycho-social support to those in need of it. UNHCR and UNICEF deployed additional social workers, psychologists and child protection and emergency focal points to 25 Social Development Centers (SDCs) of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) in areas with high concentrations of refugees in order to support families and children in dealing with trauma or grief.

UNHCR's Office in Qobayat has assigned special reception hours for refugees with specific protection problems, including children at risk (children not enrolled in school or separated from their parents), disabled people, women with specific needs, and survivors of gender-based violence, in order to better assist and inform them about services. UNHCR will replicate this system in the Bekaa and the South in the coming weeks. The Office is also looking into ways to enhance the hotline by creating information desks that will help field offices better receive and respond to phone calls on the hotline.

In addition, protection and security experts visited Masharie El Qaa, a high-risk village located in a stretch of land between the Syrian and Lebanese border, following reports of urgent winterization needs among some 1,500 refugees living in the area. A number of NGOs, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), and the local community have been providing basic assistance such as food, tents, and mattresses to families in the area. A first assessment showed that pregnant women have been delivering at home and have not registered their new born babies, which is of concern. UNHCR is working with local authorities and NGOs to immediately intervene and assist refugee families in this area meet their basic needs while raising awareness about the importance of child registration at birth.

A notable development this month was the Prime Minister's establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee tasked with co-leading the response to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The Committee includes the Ministers of Social Affairs, Education, Health, Interior and Defence in addition to the High Relief Commission (HRC). While the modalities of the work of the Committee are currently being developed, UN and NGO partners continue to work with the involved Ministries and local authorities to support and assist Syrian refugees.

A positive advancement this month was the Lebanese government's decision to permit Syrians in Lebanon legally to renew their residency coupons within Lebanon, to waive the renewal fee and to permit those who entered unofficially to regularize their status within Lebanon. UNHCR is reviewing how operational these directives are in various locations across the country. The Office is following-up with the GSO directly on how to improve dissemination and operationalisation of these recent decisions.

Security

Following the assassination of the head of the Internal Security Forces Information Branch, General Wissam al-Hassan, deadly armed clashes, road blocks and civil unrest followed for several days throughout the country, resulting in the suspension of many UNHCR activities, including registration and distribution. In Tripoli, UNHCR and partner staff were unable to access refugees in Akkar as the highway was blocked and sniping activities were reported between the neighborhoods of Bab al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. Field operations were suspended in the Bekaa for two days and roads were blocked in Saadnayel and Bar Elias. South Lebanon also witnessed unrest but at a lower intensity than in Beirut.

The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) monitors the situation closely to ensure that staff and beneficiaries remain safe.

Shelling targeting northern Lebanese villages continued throughout October, negatively impacting both refugees and Lebanese families residing in border areas. The Lebanese Armed Forces intensified their presence in the area and staff exercise vigilance in their outreach activities while offering those residing in dangerous areas the option of relocating.

Distribution

One of the most pressing priorities for agencies this month was the procurement, stockpiling, and distribution of warm clothes, mattresses, blankets and other winterization items in addition to the normal programme including food vouchers and hygiene and baby kits. UNHCR and partners will begin with the distribution of fuel for heating as of the month of November.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC), World Vision (WV), the World Food Programme (WFP), Makhzoumi Foundation, and UNFPA distributed mattresses, blankets, sanitary napkins, hygiene kits, food vouchers and kits to 32,000 people in Beirut and north and east Lebanon. Newly arrived families in Tripoli were assisted by Caritas Migrant Center with food and non-food items.

Refugees in south Lebanon received distribution assistance through Caritas throughout the month of October. During the last week of the month, UNHCR, Makhzoumi Foundation, and Caritas began distribution in the area with 250 people receiving rent assistance and 1,000 receiving food vouchers. Partner agencies will launch formal distribution in the south as of the 1st of November.

Education

With the academic year underway, UNICEF, UNHCR and partners continue to enroll students, provide support in the form of remedial classes and liaise with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) to ensure all refugee children registered for school are absorbed into the Lebanese Public School system.

Currently 30% (approximately 7,500 students) of the overall school-aged Syrian refugee population is enrolled and supported by UNHCR and UNICEF. So far, Lebanese public schools have been able to absorb students in the North and parts of the Bekaa, however in Aarsal, where there are over 1,800 school-aged children, UNHCR, UNICEF and partners are exploring alternate options to increase capacity for accommodating all students. Some families have agreed to have their children attend school in neighboring villages, with free transportation provided, however many families are hesitant to send their children far from home as night falls early during the winter months and there is harsh weather. UN and international and national partners are sensitive to these concerns and as an

alternative are discussing with the MOEHE the option of providing afternoon school shifts to accommodate the large number of students in the area.

Reports surfaced this month of children who are dropping out of school due to bullying and violence from their peers. This can be a common problem for school children worldwide, however it is a particular concern for refugee youth who have already endured trauma from their recent displacement only to find violence at school too. UNHCR and partners are conducting teacher trainings to educate school personnel on alternative methods of teaching focused on discipline as well as ways to identify children who are being targeted for bullying and/or are in need of psycho-social care.

UNHCR, UNICEF, Save the Children and partners also continued to support children who are struggling with the transition to the Lebanese curriculum through after-school classes. Vulnerable students, such as those who have been out of school for extended periods due to displacement or those with specific needs, are provided with free transportation to community centres and nearby public schools where they are given educational support and provided with French and English language classes, as well as mathematics. WarChild Holland also has seven child friendly spaces throughout north Lebanon (two in Tripoli, five in Akkar) that are offering remedial classes and psycho-social support to children.

UNESCO is supporting four schools in the Bekaa through the implementation of a school library, teachers' training as well as psycho-social and after-school support to the refugees and vulnerable Lebanese students.

A positive development this month was the MOEHE's announcement that they will be providing school books to all students, including refugees. Now that UNICEF and UNHCR no longer need to provide these materials, the additional money will be allocated to providing fuel to heat schools, which will benefit both refugees and their Lebanese peers.

Health

UNHCR continues to work closely with the International Medical Corps (IMC) in providing and covering the costs of primary health care, which includes everything from diagnostic testing to basic treatment and provision of medications. From the outset of the crisis, over 21,000 Syrian refugees received primary health care services including doctor consultations, diagnostic tests, and medication including chronic (e.g. for those with blood pressure problems, diabetes, etc). IMC, Medecins Sans Frontieres, Amel Association, MOSA and other health actors intensified health awareness sessions this month in order to raise awareness about basic health and sanitation, helping prevent certain problems such as gastroenteritis caused by unsanitary conditions, and in general, improving the overall health response. As Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in an urban setting, the communication of available health services to refugees remains a priority. Health actors updated the health services brochure in October in order to reflect newly established services and distributed them through local community NGOs, community centers and most importantly, upon registration.

UNHCR and IMC continued to cover 85% secondary health assistance to registered refugees. Critical emergency cases are expedited for registration, following assessments by IMC experts. The most recurrent problems include pregnancies, gastroenteritis, dehydration, and cardiac diseases. IMC and partners provided training of trainers to health professionals in the North and Bekaa this month to prepare them to better receive and care for patients. Some refugees have difficulties covering even the remaining 15% of the fees, however, limited funding makes full coverage by UNHCR and IMC not possible at the present time.

Shelter

Shelter remains a critical priority, especially with winter fast approaching. Providing suitable shelter for incoming refugees is an integral part of the overall protection strategy, as it not only protects from harsh weather elements, but also constitutes a basic element for refugees to maintain normalcy throughout displacement.

As the numbers of refugees fleeing to Lebanon continue to rise, some Syrian refugees are living in tented settlements throughout the Bekaa. Bedouins and long-term Syrian migrant workers previously inhabited these settlements and refugees have now joined them. UNHCR is coordinating with Medair and CLMC in an effort to profile the numbers of families and tents, assess the current living situation and organize a response.

A myriad of shelter options are being explored to properly assist refugees, as well as provide support to hosting Lebanese communities. This month, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) assisted 54 households with 'cash for rent.' During distribution, DRC outreach workers identify families who are renting and assess those who are most vulnerable, such as single female-headed households, injured breadwinners, those who are at risk of eviction and families with a high level of debt. Once families are pre-selected, home visits are conducted to verify their needs and then up to a 70% contribution of the total rent is provided. Ensuring Water and Sanitation (WASH) standards are up to par is also part of the overall shelter strategy. Routine WASH interventions are undertaken at collective shelters to ensure sanitary living conditions and access to clean water. In the Mounseh collective shelter in north Lebanon, two toilets and two washing machines were installed as part of the renovation work. Solar panels will be added to ensure a constant supply of hot water is available to refugees living in the dwelling. High WASH standards not only increase the livelihood of the refugee and host communities, but also contribute to the health response by diminishing the likelihood of preventable diseases often caused by poor sanitary living conditions. UNICEF and Action Contre la Faim (ACF) continue to provide water vouchers to refugees in the Bekaa, with some 4,500 people receiving water so far.

Support continues as well to Lebanese hosting families who have graciously opened their homes to refugees. Close to 50% of refugee families live in host homes, adding to the urgency in finding alternative shelter solutions given that many local Lebanese have been hosting since the onset of the conflict and are now feeling fatigued.