

UN Inter-Agency Response for Syrian Refugees

Beirut, January 2013



Highlights of the month

- Over 38,000 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in January, in comparison with 24,000 having registered in December;
- On January 30, the donor community pledged more than US\$1.5 billion to help Syrians affected by conflict within Syria, Syrian refugees and hosting communities in neighbouring countries;
- The last week of the month witnessed the influx of over 750 people (150 families) to Arsal, 125 people (25 families) to Masharie Al Qaa, and 250 people (50 families) to Jdeideh, Fekha and Al Ain, in light of heightened unrest in the Qalamoun district in the suburbs of Damascus;
- The General Security Office (GSO) announced that Syrians will be able to renew their residency permits for 1 year rather than six months for the set fee of \$200 USD;
- Over 700,000 food and relief items have been distributed this month;
- ATM-cards worth US\$240 per month were distributed to the first group of refugees in Tripoli at the end of the month as part of a pilot cash project aimed to improve refugees' financial independence.



Donor contributions for 2013



Funding is also received in private donations from the following countries: China, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, and Spain.

¹ EU funding is received from DEVCO and ECHO.

Registration and New Arrivals

Currently, more than 242,000 Syrian refugees receive protection and assistance from the UN, NGO partners and the Lebanese government. Out of this number, some 165,000 are registered with UNHCR and more than 77,263 are scheduled to be registered. Over the month of January alone, UNHCR registered 38,000 refugees as compared to 26,000 in December.

Current distribution of the registered population is as follows:

North Lebanon: 80,450

Bekaa: 63,288

Beirut and South Lebanon: 21,265

The pace of arrival of Syrian refugees into Lebanon remained relatively constant with a slight increase at the end of the month. The main places of origin are Homs, Idleb, Damascus and Aleppo. Despite the increased capacity for registration (12,000 more registered in January as compared to the previous month), additional registration capacity is needed. A new centre in Bekaa is to open on February 11 and a new site in Tyre in late February. These will help enormously reduce the backlog, as experienced with the opening of the registration site in Tripoli. UNHCR is hoping to conclude negotiation on additional land in Beirut to further expand capacity there. Meanwhile the office has instituted double shifts to reduce waiting periods.

Assistance to unregistered is also being scaled up. The capacity of partner international and Lebanese NGOs who provide assistance to unregistered refugees is increasingly stretched. Municipalities and local religious charities have well established channels through which assistance can be provided in a timely manner. UNHCR is now expanding partnerships through these channels to respond better to the needs of new arrivals.

Assistance provided by UN and international and national partners includes:

- Emergency secondary health care
- Primary health care (initial consultation and access)
- Non-food items (such as mattresses, blankets and kitchen sets)
- Emergency shelter/winterisation and WASH interventions
- Collective education support (e.g. participation in remedial classes or accelerated learning programmes)
- WFP food parcel

Donor Support

The month of January concluded with generous funding commitments from donor countries at a high-level pledging conference in Kuwait City. On January 30, the donor community pledged more than US\$1.5 billion to help Syrians affected by conflict within Syria and Syrian refugees and hosting communities in neighbouring countries. While the details of the funding are now being worked out, the expectation is that the pledges will now support the Government of Lebanon and inter-agency joint plan of over US\$341 million dollars. These plans were combined just prior to the Conference.

Protection

Most refugees continue to cross to Lebanon through eastern borders, as reports of bribes, harassment and targeted shootings on the Syrian side hindered access into Lebanon from the northern border crossings. The majority of refugees continued to enter Lebanon via official border crossings, while a smaller number of people resorted to unofficial crossings mainly due to fear from being arrested at the Syrian side of the borders and lack of documentation.

Working hand in hand with local unions, municipalities, and religious leaders was also part of an effort this month to reach out to minority groups in the refugee community. UNHCR established contact with several key actors in Zahle and Akkar in an attempt to encourage refugees who feel reluctant to register and seek assistance to do so.

The last week of the month witnessed the influx of over 750 people (150 families) to Aarsal, 125 people (25 families) to Masharie Al Qaa, and 250 people (50 families) to Jdeideh, Fekha and Al Ain, in light of heightened unrest in the Qalamoun district in the suburbs of Damascus. UNHCR, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) coordinated an immediate response to all new comers with blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets, hygiene kits, heating stoves, fuel, food kits, and winter clothes. This was further facilitated through close liaison with local municipalities that consistently shared information on newly arrived families to ensure a proper and timely response.

The General Security Office (GSO) announced that Syrians will be able to renew their residency permits for 1 year rather than six months for the set fee of \$200 USD. While this is a welcome development, the Office continues to advocate for the waiving of the fee which is prohibitive for many refugees.

Security

The main security issue this month continued to be ongoing shelling of border villages in the North, namely Boqaaia, Al Noura and Al Bebabiyeh. No Syrian families living in these areas have been injured, and none have expressed a desire to relocate so far. Nevertheless, UNHCR and staff remain vigilant in providing assistance as well as ensuring that refugee families feel safe. Abou Samra has recently witnessed increased security incidents such as sporadic shootings and grenade throwing.

Distribution

In January, refugees across Lebanon received World Food Programme (WFP) food vouchers. In addition, hygiene and baby kits, mattresses, sanitary napkins, heaters, blankets, warm clothing and heating fuel vouchers were distributed through the collective efforts of UNHCR, UNICEF, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), World Vision (WVI), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Shield and Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC). Newly arrived families receive food parcels until they are registered and eligible for food vouchers. Over 700,000 food and relief items have been distributed this month.

UNHCR is slowly moving from in-kind assistance towards cash assistance. At the end of the month, ATM-cards were distributed to the first group of refugees in Tripoli as part of the first cash pilot project. UNHCR is working to expand unconditional cash assistance to 30,000 beneficiaries by March. Families in need will receive an average grant of US\$240 a month to contribute to their monthly rent and living costs. This grant will increase refugees' ability to find accommodation, purchase needed clothes, kitchen, and other household items on the Lebanese market and therefore also contribute to the Lebanese economy. UNHCR is coordinating the implementation of this project with DRC, the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC), International Relief Commission (IRC), the Polish

Center for International Aid (PCPM), the Coalition of Islamic NGOs and a number of other actors to ensure close cooperation and avoid duplication of efforts.

Education

The month opened with Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) classes were provided to all registered children in Tripoli, Akkar, and the Bekaa to facilitate their easy return to classes after the holidays. Save the Children International (SCI) also provided public schools in the Bekaa and North with fuel coupons. In parallel, remedial classes are ongoing. UNHCR, UNICEF and SCI have conducted a number of monitoring visits to ensure that the remedial programmes are efficiently implemented and that centers where these classes are offered are well equipped for the cold.

By mid-January, the Back to School campaign that was launched by UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children and Amel Association last summer came to an end. Today, the total number of children enrolled in Lebanese public schools with the support of UNICEF and UNHCR is 24,000. Nonetheless, and despite the end of the Back to School campaign, Syrian children will be assisted on a case by case basis with catching up on the curriculum and enrolling in schools where the capacity allows it.

UNICEF and UNHCR continue to work closely with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) on providing needed support to Syrian refugee children in schools. In January, UNHCR deployed a Senior Programme Assistant to the ministry to help build and improve its capacity. In addition, Save the Children Japan (SCJ) provided MEHE with stoves and carpets to be placed the public schools most affected by this year's harsh winter.

Health

UNHCR continues to work closely with International Medical Corps (IMC), Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC), the Makzoumi Foundation (MF), Amel Association and partners in covering the costs of primary health care - diagnostic testing, basic treatment and the provision of medications - and 85% of the costs of secondary health care and hospitalisation. For emergency cases, UNHCR covers 100% the costs of secondary health care treatment to vulnerable cases.

Over 42,000 Syrian refugees received primary health care services, including chronic medication (e.g. for those with blood pressure problems, diabetes, etc.), and 7,840 Syrian refugee patients have been admitted to hospitals. Medical Units (MMUs) continue to reach locations where primary health care centers (PHCCs) are unavailable, providing consultations, diagnostic services and medication. Daily visits to hospitals and PHCCs are conducted by implementing partners to follow up on the cases and ensure the proper implementation of the programme. This month, hospitals have seen an increase in the number of patients with Respiratory Tract infection (+16%) probably due to the harsh weather conditions.

From the outset of the crisis, over 9,900 Syrian refugees have benefited from health awareness sessions aiming to enhance health behaviours and lifestyles. Awareness sessions are ongoing and include topics related to mental health, food storage, gender-based violence and early marriage.

In January, increased focused was provided on improving the support to refugees who suffer from mental health conditions, as many refugees arrive in Lebanon with signs of depression, post-traumatic stress, psychotic and mood disorders, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorders.

UNHCR and IMC provided a mental health training to DRC, NRC and Handicap International outreach workers on how to properly detect, screen, and refer mental health cases. In the Bekaa, a Child Psychiatrist has started counsel children under the age of 18 and also to provide the proper awareness needed among parents and field workers in the detection and screening of probable cases as well as their appropriate management.

Assessments also showed the need to increase awareness on nutrition of infants and young child feeding as well as measles vaccination. The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), along with UNICEF, WHO, UNHCR and the local NGO "Beyond", launched an enhanced nationwide round of routine vaccines for Lebanese and non Lebanese nationwide, targeting children in schools, tented settlements and collective shelters.

Shelter

Assessments this month revealed that the majority of registered refugees (60%) rent accommodation which is often substandard and for relatively high monthly costs. Approximately 27% live with host families, while a growing number of refugees, currently 8.5%, are accommodated in unfinished host community houses which have been sealed off and rehabilitated by UNHCR, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), DRC and other shelter actors. In exchange, owners have provided free rent to refugees. This programme has proved to be very successful in benefiting both refugees in the immediate term, and Lebanese families on the long run. A further 5% of refugees live in tented settlements and 2% are accommodated in renovated collective shelters.

Field staff continue to report the struggles faced by Syrian refugees in covering the high cost of rent in Tripoli and surrounding areas. UNHCR provides the most vulnerable families with cash assistance to meet their rent cost. This burden on refugees will be further alleviated with the expansion of the above-mentioned unconditional cash programme.

The sealing off of houses and the draining of flooded tented settlements were prioritized by UNHCR, NRC and partners this month, namely after the heavy storm that negatively impacted both Syrian refugees and Lebanese families. As most refugees showed reluctance to be relocated to alternative shelters, UNHCR and partners rehabilitated affected shelters and distributed diesel vouchers as needed. A comprehensive tented settlement assessment mission ran throughout the month of January in the Bekaa where urgent needs were identified and addressed. Partners have also focused on the identification of vacant collective shelters that can be renovated and prepared to host more refugees. The latter will be further prioritized next month as part of contingency planning.

Water, Hygiene and Sanitation

Water, hygiene and sanitation projects were one of the most pressing priorities this month as a heavy winter storm deeply affected shelter conditions, namely of those living in tented settlements in the Bekaa Valley. While some refugee families were offered to relocate, UNICEF, UNHCR, Premiere Urgence (PU-AMI), and Action Contre La Faim (ACF) continued improvement works in some of the most heartbreaking living conditions since the beginning of the crisis.

In the Bekaa, UNHCR and Action Contre La Faim (ACF) distributed 85 latrine cleaning kits and conducted hygiene promotion and awareness sessions in Jeb Jenin, Taibe and Addous benefiting some 1,400 people. Also in Taibe and Jeb Jenin, ACF installed 37 hand washing sources benefiting just under 1,000 people. ACF constructed 58 latrines in Dalhamiye, Saadnayel and Fayda, where WASH refugee committees have been formed to help report water and sanitation problems inside the different tented settlements. In Hermel, Talabaya, Saadnayel, Jeb Jenin and Bar Elias, UNHCR assessed the waste management in these villages in close coordination with the respective municipalities. A plan to address gaps and problems should be put into effect in the coming month.

In Sidon, the Chouf and Beirut, UNHCR and PU-AMI conducted hygiene promotion sessions with 1,025 refugees, while over 70 water samples were collected from 37 families for bacteriological testing. In addition, January marked the completion of rehabilitation works of 123 sanitation facilities (latrines/wash rooms) in the area, benefiting some 1,800 people.