

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON SURPASS ONE MILLION *Lebanon faces intensifying spillover; host communities stretched to breaking point*

Beirut/Geneva, 3 April 2014 (UNHCR) - The number of refugees fleeing from Syria into neighbouring Lebanon surpassed 1 million today, a devastating milestone worsened by rapidly depleting resources and a host community stretched to breaking point.

Three years after Syria's conflict began, Lebanon has become the country with the highest per-capita concentration of refugees worldwide, struggling to keep pace with a crisis that shows no signs of slowing. Refugees from Syria now equal one-quarter of the resident population, with over 220 Syrian refugees for every 1,000 Lebanese residents.

“The influx of a million refugees would be massive in any country. For Lebanon, a small nation beset by internal difficulties, the impact is staggering,” said António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. “The Lebanese people have shown striking generosity, but are struggling to cope. Lebanon hosts the highest concentration of refugees in recent history. We cannot let it shoulder this burden alone.”

The influx is accelerating. In April 2012, there were 18,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon; by April 2013, there were 356,000, and now, in April 2014, 1 million. Every day, UNHCR in Lebanon registers 2,500 new refugees: more than one person a minute.

The impact on Lebanon has been immense. The country has experienced serious economic shocks due to the conflict in Syria, including a decline in trade, tourism and investment and an increase in public expenditures. Public services are struggling to meet increased demand, with health, education, electricity, and water and sanitation particularly taxed.

The World Bank estimates that the Syria crisis cost Lebanon US\$2.5 billion in lost economic activity during 2013 and threatens to push 170,000 Lebanese into poverty by the end of this year. Wages are plummeting, and families are struggling to make ends meet.

Children make up half the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon. The number of school-aged children is now over 400,000, eclipsing the number of Lebanese children in public schools. These schools have opened their doors to over 100,000 refugees, yet the ability to accept more is severely limited.

Local communities feel the strain of the influx of refugees most directly, with many towns and villages now having more refugees than Lebanese. Across the country, critical infrastructure is stretched to its limits, affecting refugees and Lebanese alike. Sanitation and waste management have been severely weakened, clinics and hospitals are overstretched, and water supplies depleted. Wages are falling due increase labour supply. There is growing recognition that Lebanon needs long-term development support to weather the crisis.

“International support to government institutions and local communities is at a level that, although slowly increasing, is totally out of proportion with what is needed,” Mr. Guterres said. “Support to Lebanon is not only a moral imperative, but it is also badly needed to stop the further erosion of peace and security in this fragile society, and indeed the whole region.”

And while the scale of the humanitarian emergency expands, and the serious consequences to Lebanon mount, the humanitarian appeal for Lebanon is only 13 per cent funded.

Aid agencies struggle to prioritise equally compelling needs and target assistance first and foremost to most vulnerable of a needy population. Limited humanitarian funding coupled with a steady erosion of refugees own reserves can have dire consequences. A growing number of refugees are unable to afford or to find suitable accommodation and are resorting to insecure dwellings such as tents, garages and animal sheds. 80,000 urgently need health assistance. More than 650,000 receive monthly food aid to survive.

The vast majority of children are out of school, many work, girls can be married young and the prospect of a better future recedes the longer they remain out of school.

“The Syrian children of today,” said Ninette Kelley, “will be the shapers of Syria tomorrow. We must ensure they have the skills to meet the vast challenges they are now consigned to confront in years to come.”

UN and partner agencies have mounted an unprecedented response, targeting both refugees and Lebanese host communities. Late last year, they appealed for US\$1.89 billion for 2014. Only US\$242 million has been received so far. “Lebanese communities are increasingly hard-pressed, and tensions are rising,” Ms. Kelley said. “Yet relocation spaces to wealthier third countries remain limited, and the appeal remains woefully underfunded. Morality and pragmatism demand we do more.”

Photos, video, infographics and other media materials can be downloaded from:

<http://www.unhcr.org/lebanon1m>
(<http://www.unhcr.org/manager/url/?l=1s1X1h1c0z1m0j0o0v0m0x1r1X1h1c0z0p0m0m0u0x1g1s1s1o0w0l011v1v1v0k1t1m1g1b1q0k1n1q1f011k1d1a1Z1m1n1m0n11>)

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