



From slow boil to
breaking point:

A real-time evaluation
of UNHCR's response
to the Syrian
refugee emergency

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Introduction to the review

1. In the spring of 2011, the Syrian army was deployed to counter the large-scale political demonstrations that were sweeping across the country. It was not long before people began to leave Syria in order to escape from the ensuing armed conflict between government and rebel forces. While the movement began on a small scale, it escalated very rapidly in the second half of 2012.
2. In March 2013, UNHCR announced that the number of refugees fleeing the Syrian conflict had reached the one million mark. Since that time, the refugee exodus has continued, the largest numbers of people fleeing to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.
3. Responding to this emergency, the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations (AHCO) requested the Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES), to lead a real-time review of UNHCR's response to this refugee emergency, focusing on Jordan, Lebanon and Northern Iraq. In addition to UNHCR staff, two non-government organization (NGO) consortia (ICVA and InterAction) were invited to join the review team.
4. The AHCO stipulated that this review should be forward-looking and refugee-centred, focusing on the key protection and assistance gaps experienced by exiled Syrians. The AHCO also initiated a concurrent review, focusing specifically on human resource issues and the structure of the UNHCR operation. These issues are consequently not covered in this report.
5. This report provides a concise summary of the findings and recommendations of the real-time review, based on an 11-day mission to the field in May and June 2013. The review was undertaken in accordance with UNHCR's evaluation policy and real-time evaluation guidelines. The major constraint confronting the review was the limited amount of time spent in the field in relation to the scale and complexity of the emergency operation. While the team was able to visit Northern Iraq it was not possible for security reasons to visit Baghdad or other parts of the country.
6. Prior to the publication of this report, the review team provided briefings to senior UNHCR management, as well as the NGO, UN and donor state communities. The review team also prepared a separate paper which was used to structure and inform a one-day strategic planning meeting involving all UNHCR Representatives in the region.
7. The current report first examines some overarching issues associated with UNHCR's response to the Syrian refugee emergency and then proceeds to examine the operations in Jordan, Lebanon and Northern Iraq. In order to keep the report as concise as possible, a certain level of background knowledge about the country contexts and the UNHCR operations in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq is assumed.
8. In brief, the review found that UNHCR has scaled-up substantially in its response to the mounting Syrian refugee crisis, and in doing so has helped to avert the refugee crisis from spiraling out of control. There have been some significant achievements: most borders have been kept open; protection space has been preserved to a considerable extent; relationships

with governments have been positive and constructive; UNHCR's role in leading and coordinating the emergency operation has largely been acknowledged; refugees have benefited from access to basic public services, while malnutrition and mortality rates have remained relatively low. The recent expansion of UNHCR's registration and coordination capacity has been particularly appreciated by partners.

9. The growing number and needs of the refugees, however, as well as the serious pressures they are placing on host communities, now require UNHCR and its partners to complement their emergency response activities with comprehensive and proactive strategies that focus on: (a) more extensive and effective outreach to out-of-camp refugees; (b) improving standards and security for refugees living in camps; (c) reinforcing UNHCR's presence and capacity at the point of delivery; (d) ensuring the immediate involvement of development actors so as to mitigate the impact of the refugee influx on host states and communities; and (e) clarifying and strengthening UNHCR's approach to coordinating the international response to the Syrian refugee emergency.

Region-wide issues

Protection environment

10. The initial response of host countries to the Syrian refugee influx was one of great generosity. Despite the fact that they have not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, host governments largely promoted a positive protection environment, granting access to territory, registration and public services. Yet as the influx has continued, infrastructure and services for health, education, shelter, water and sanitation have faced increased pressure; competition for jobs has increased and wages have fallen; and the cost of basic goods has risen. This has tested the absorption capacity of host communities and fuelled emerging tensions between refugees and local populations.

11. These strains have not only undermined the protection environment for refugees, but have also contributed to a hardening of official attitudes towards refugee protection and assistance. This has included the closure of borders (either temporarily or indefinitely), insistence on the opening of camps (in Jordan and Iraq), and limitations on assistance to out-of-camp refugees.

12. Without a visible and tangible demonstration of international solidarity and responsibility sharing, the protection environment for refugees can be expected to deteriorate rapidly. One strategic priority must thus be to swiftly and substantially increase the level of support available to host states and communities throughout the region, thereby mitigating the socio-economic and political pressures generated by the refugee influx. As discussed below, this will require the immediate engagement of development actors.

Camp and non-camp settings

13. While international attention and resources have been largely directed at camps in Jordan and Northern Iraq, over 60 per cent of the Syrian refugee population in the region live outside camps. Their locations are diverse, spanning major cities, provincial towns, peri-urban and rural settings. The out-of-camp refugees are also confronted with a range of shelter conditions and differing access to services and livelihoods opportunities. Most live in precarious conditions and are vulnerable to a number of protection risks and socio-economic pressures. Ensuring timely registration, outreach and access to services for such a vast and geographically dispersed refugee population has been particularly challenging.

14. While there have been mounting efforts by UNHCR and its partners to support refugees living outside camps, there is a need to significantly boost the humanitarian community's outreach to non-camp refugees, to strengthen mass information activities, to ensure refugee access to public services and to expand international support to public services in host countries. Many interviewees recognized that there remains a need to develop appropriate tools and capacity, both within UNHCR and the broader humanitarian community, to respond to emergencies in urban and out-of-camp settings. Resources should be deployed so as to make full use of existing expertise amongst UNHCR and partners in community engagement and community organizing.

15. While they have attracted more resources and attention than the out-of-camp refugee populations, conditions in the existing camps are in urgent need of improvement. In particular, further efforts are required to ensure that a safe environment is established for all camp residents and that international standards are met in relation to education, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities.

16. Camp interventions have hitherto primarily been focused on the installation of infrastructure, while community engagement and development have assumed a lower priority. This has led to a lack of community ownership over camp services and infrastructure and considerable frustration on the part of refugees. Community-based protection activities should be strengthened in existing camps, and should be incorporated from the outset in the establishment of new camps.

Protection challenges

17. Some of the key protection issues that have emerged across the region include: large numbers of children who are not attending school; recruitment by armed groups, including of under-aged refugees; labour exploitation, including child labour; early marriage; as well as domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, particularly targeting women and children. In some locations, refugees have also had to contend with the pressures placed on them by political and criminal elements within the exiled population.

18. The wide geographic dispersal of refugees in all three countries poses extraordinary challenges in extending protection systems that are accessible to, effective for and trusted by those who need them. To varying degrees all three countries now have in place many of the essential elements of such systems (dedicated partnerships, agreed response pathways, access to national services, standard operating procedures, etc.).

19. In addition, in Jordan and Lebanon, significant progress has been made in recent months in establishing nascent outreach systems, building in part on established national community and social centre networks. Such progress notwithstanding, there is a critical need to extend protection coverage to all of the areas where refugees reside.

20. This expansion will require dedicated staffing, an increase in financial resources for community-based protection activities, an expansion of partnerships, coordinated and streamlined monitoring mechanisms, and enhanced coordination. Building trust and partnerships with communities will be of central importance in these endeavours. As such, it is essential that UNHCR national and international staff, as well as partners, are regularly present in communities, working with them to address the protection challenges they face.

21. All three country operations are to be congratulated for the exceptional progress that has been made in bringing registration waiting periods down to reasonable levels. One of the costs of this progress has, however, been in the quantity and quality of data collected, which at present can in most cases only serve as a notional basis for targeting assistance to those at greatest risk. As the need to accurately target assistance will almost certainly become more acute in the future, it is essential for UNHCR to develop strategies to enhance the existing data set.

22. While large-scale resettlement programmes for Syrian refugees are not yet being considered and seem unlikely to materialize, resettlement or humanitarian admission on a limited scale would provide an important tool of protection for those Syrian refugees with

specific needs and risks. At the same time, even small-scale resettlement might help to maintain protection space by reassuring host countries and communities that the international community is sharing responsibility for the Syrian refugees.

Access to services and assistance

23. In all three countries visited, the service and assistance issues most frequently identified as priorities by refugees, humanitarian organizations and government officials were shelter, WASH, health and education. Many refugees also emphasized the need for them to have access to employment and income-generating activities, thereby assisting them to pay for rent and food and to avoid debt and destitution.

24. Access to adequate shelter is a serious issue in both camp and out-of-camp settings. In camps, there are many different forms and standards of shelter, some of which are clearly below acceptable levels. Tents are an expensive and short-term intervention that should be avoided if possible.

25. For reasons of both quality and cost effectiveness, transitional shelter (T-shelter) solutions for camps and informal settlements should be developed and implemented as soon as possible. A rigorous but expedited process is needed to decide on which T-shelters will be used in each country, based on an assessment of their quality, durability, cost, local production capacity, and cultural acceptability.

26. Refugee access to health services differs according to country and context. Mortality and acute malnutrition rates are not currently elevated among Syrian refugees (although most of the available data derives from camps) and access to basic primary health care is sufficient for most of refugees, both in and out of camps. Nevertheless, health facilities for both refugees and local populations are coming under growing and perhaps unsustainable strain.

27. This situation is compounded by the fact that the demographic and disease profile of Syrian refugees is that of a middle-income country, characterized by a high proportion of chronic or non-communicable diseases (e.g. diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory disease), which are costly and complex to manage and which place considerable pressure on the limited resources available for secondary and tertiary care.

28. It is recommended that clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) for medical services be finalized and widely distributed to partners and refugees, where this has not already been done. To avoid confusion and frustration among refugees and health providers, these SOPs should not be subject to frequent changes. Refugee entitlements to health care should also be clearly communicated to refugees and service providers. Syrian health professionals should be offered incentives to liaise between refugee patients and service providers, assisting the former to understand the complex systems they are obliged to navigate.

29. Needless to say, public health services must be reinforced in densely refugee-populated neighbourhoods, a task which goes well beyond UNHCR's humanitarian mandate and which will require the involvement of development actors and donor states. UNHCR and its partners do have an important role to play, however, in monitoring the health status of refugees and the extent to which refugees have equitable access to medical services.

30. A crisis in refugee education looms across the region, with the majority of Syrian children currently being out of school. While refugees have been given access to public schools or camp schools in the three countries visited, many barriers to education exist.

These include lack of documentation; transportation and other auxiliary costs; psychosocial issues; the need for children to work to support their family; and the limited ability of schools to absorb such a large number of recent arrivals.

31. Lack of proficiency in the dominant language of instruction is a significant problem for refugee children in Lebanon and Northern Iraq, the former conducting many classes in French and English and the latter using Kurdish rather than Arabic. UNHCR, UNICEF and other education actors must address these constraints in a more concerted and coordinated manner. This will require, among other things, increased funding to public school systems, dedicated interventions to address language barriers, and enhanced coordination within the education sector, as well as between protection and education actors.

Support for host countries and communities

32. Host communities are becoming increasingly fatigued as services, resources and infrastructure come under mounting pressure from the continued refugee influx. Many refugees reside within the poorest regions of the host countries, and in some locations the number of refugees is equal to or even greater than that of the local population.

33. There is a growing recognition that traditional humanitarian responses will not be sufficient to address this crisis. While the Refugee Response Plan 5 (RRP5) began to incorporate support to host communities and local authorities in the refugee response, a far more substantial and coherent strategy is needed. In this respect, the involvement of development actors, financial institutions, donor states and the private sector will be crucial.

34. This strategy should incorporate a two-pronged approach. First, UNHCR should immediately engage with development actors at the most senior level possible. To this end, UNHCR should consider convening a high-level meeting involving institutions such as USAID, EuropeAid, the World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF and WFP as well as relevant NGOs and think tanks, so as to catalyze their engagement around key priorities. Host governments should be involved at the earliest stages, and their leadership and ownership ensured as far as possible. Previous examples of development-oriented assistance to refugee hosting areas, such as the Refugee-Affected and Hosting Areas Programme in Pakistan, may provide useful lessons for the Syrian refugee situation.

35. Second, given the urgency of the situation and the relatively long timeframe usually required for large-scale and structural interventions to be implemented, UNHCR and its partners should build upon existing efforts to formulate an extensive Programme of Quick Impact Projects, designed to provide immediate and tangible benefits to those living in refugee-populated areas.

36. These interventions should be based on partnerships with local authorities and other actors with an established presence on the ground. NGOs with expertise in both humanitarian and development programming have a particularly important part to play in this context. There may also be scope to engage the private sector and other non-traditional partners in innovative livelihoods interventions. Such projects should be accompanied by an effective communications strategy, so as to ensure that their purposes are well understood and that messages of solidarity and community cohesion are conveyed to refugees and host populations alike.

Preparedness and planning

37. It is widely acknowledged that UNHCR, as well as many of its partners, found it difficult to cope with the growing number of refugees leaving Syria in the second half of 2012. The organization has largely been in reactive mode since that time, endeavouring to keep up with the mounting scale and scope of the crisis. While the RRP5 required significant forward-thinking, its purpose was primarily to raise funds for a limited time horizon, i.e. up until the end of 2013. As such, it does not constitute a practical contingency plan that can be translated into operational preparedness, nor does it encompass the full range of actors required to establish a comprehensive and longer-term response to the emergency.

38. A regional contingency planning exercise is currently underway with the support of UNHCR's Regional Refugee Coordinator's office. But it has yet to translate into an operational plan that can respond to a large new influx of refugees or meet the growing needs of host communities.

39. A concerted contingency planning and preparedness effort is now needed. This should build upon existing work and involve a determined effort to undertake joint planning with national and local governments, UN agencies, donors and NGOs with the greatest operational capacity. The capacities of the refugee community and civil society organizations must also be fully taken into account, so as to optimize outreach and coverage. Contingency planning and preparedness measures must be based on an on-going analysis of the situation within Syria and of cross-border dynamics, a task that will require effective information sharing and management.

40. In addition to preparing for further influxes, a longer-term strategy is required for the Syrian refugee situation to orient the response towards a set of common objectives. In addition to setting out a protection vision for both in and out-of-camp refugees, this strategy should focus particularly on infrastructural support, the strengthening of public services and the promotion of livelihoods amongst both refugee populations and host communities. Given the extent to which current UNHCR and partner staff are focused on meeting immediate needs, it is recommended that a small strategic planning team be formed in each country, comprised of dedicated personnel with relevant skills. Such teams should draw upon both local capacities and external expertise, and should elaborate the strategy in close consultation with operational partners and other relevant actors.

Inter-agency coordination

41. Inter-agency coordination is a preoccupation among UN agencies, NGOs, host government and donor representatives in all of those countries affected by the Syrian refugee emergency. This is to be expected, given the scale and complexity of the operation, and the risk that different agencies might duplicate their efforts, pursue different priorities or work to inconsistent standards. Such concerns have been exacerbated by a widespread perception that UNHCR did not provide effective coordination in the earlier stages of the emergency, although many interlocutors agree that the organization's performance in this respect has improved significantly in the last six months.

42. A number of related comments have been made with respect to this issue. First, some stakeholders consider that UNHCR's triple role as an operational organization, a funder of other agencies and a coordinating body can lead to conflicts of interest. Second, there has been a perception that UNHCR was at times more preoccupied with managing its own

operations than coordinating the overall refugee response. Third, it has been suggested that UNHCR has a tendency to focus on its relationship with the organization's implementing partners, rather than dealing with all agencies on an equal basis, irrespective of their size or contractual relationship. And fourth, the evaluation team heard complaints that UNHCR can be somewhat dismissive of the expertise and initiatives that other organizations have brought to the emergency operation.

43. These perceptions should be taken seriously, not least because UNHCR has a more general reputation as an organization whose commitment to and past performance in relation to inter-agency coordination has been called into question. In part, this can be seen as a consequence of the organization's unique mandate and mission, which is "to lead and coordinate international action for the worldwide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems."

44. For a new generation of humanitarian personnel who have become accustomed to working in the Cluster Approach, UNHCR's leadership role in refugee settings is not always understood or appreciated. These concerns have been exacerbated by attempts by some in the international community to introduce the Cluster Approach into refugee operations, which in the view of many in UNHCR would serve to dilute and ultimately undermine the international refugee protection regime. Consequently, UNHCR generally seeks to underscore its preeminent leadership and coordination role in refugee settings.

45. What can UNHCR do to enhance its reputation and practice in the realm of coordination? First, attitudinal change is needed, an outcome that could be attained by means of intensive training, particularly for new emergency operations. At the same time, positive attitudes and approaches towards coordination should be explicitly modeled, expected, monitored and rewarded by senior managers.

46. Second, UNHCR should develop a corps of staff members with specific coordination skills who can be deployed in refugee emergencies. The organization should also make itself more open to inter-agency secondments from OCHA, other UN bodies and NGOs.

47. Third, UNHCR should give particular attention to the issue of information management and sharing among and within the sectors. Information management plays an increasingly central role in relation to inter-agency coordination and is critical to the development of an effective collective response to a crisis. In this respect, there has been widespread appreciation of the Syria crisis web portal established by UNHCR.¹

48. To conclude this discussion of coordination in the Syrian refugee crisis, one notable feature of this refugee emergency has been the prominent role of non-traditional partners, such as the large number of Islamic organizations that are receiving significant funding from the Gulf states and elsewhere. Generally speaking, such organizations work outside of the conventional humanitarian coordination framework, making it difficult to ensure consistency of standards and equitable coverage in terms of assistance. Established lines of communication should be strengthened with these non-traditional partners in order to determine how such issues can be addressed.

¹ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

Country-specific issues

Jordan

49. Jordan has shown enormous hospitality towards Syrian refugees. Camps were not established in the country in the early stages of the crisis, and refugees were able to settle in urban areas, largely in the north of the country and the capital city of Amman. However, as the numbers of refugees continued to increase, the government insisted upon the establishment of camps, to which the vast majority of new arrivals were required to go. Today, close to one third of Syrian refugees in Jordan live in camps, with the remainder in the host community.

Out-of-camp refugees

50. UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations have started to put in place a system of outreach and protection monitoring in the main refugee-hosting areas of Jordan. There is a need for much greater investment in this system so as to make it accessible to all refugees. Community-based protection strategies are required, such as the establishment of community centres that can be used by Syrians and Jordanians, volunteer networks drawn from the refugee population and partnerships with community-based organizations that have appropriate expertise, resources and neutrality. Mass communication to refugees regarding their rights and availability of services needs to be improved. Innovative approaches such as through cell phones, community centres, local radio or satellite TV should be expanded.

51. It is especially important for UNHCR protection staff, both national and international, to maximize their time in the field, making themselves visible and accessible to refugees. At the same time, steps must be taken to broaden and strengthen existing registration and referral systems, and to establish agreed vulnerability criteria, so that cash and other forms of assistance can be targeted at those refugees who are at greatest risk.

52. Shelter outside camps is expensive and inability to pay rent is a major concern amongst refugees. The cash programme implemented by UNHCR and partners for vulnerable refugees, a recognized good practice, has expanded in the past six months to over 10,000 families. Yet the waiting list has been growing, as thousands of families cannot be included due to funding constraints. Further expansion, depending upon funds, is encouraged, together with more standardized and refined vulnerability criteria.

53. While refugees have free access to public healthcare, the national system is increasingly coming under pressure, both in terms of financial and human resources. As the number of refugees grows, UNHCR's ability to continue to fund expensive referral care for refugees will become increasingly stretched. UNHCR should consider whether improving coordination with non-traditional actors working at the grassroots level could assist in this regard.

Camps

54. One of the peculiarities of the refugee situation in Jordan is the 'bailing out' system, which enables refugees to obtain official permission to reside outside a camp if 'sponsored' by a Jordanian citizen. While this system allows refugees to benefit from support networks they may have in the host community, it also presents a risk of exploitation. A UNHCR assessment indicates that in order to obtain sponsorship, a significant number of refugees have paid as much as \$500 to a person not known to them and with whom they have had no further contact. UNHCR should strengthen its existing efforts to monitor this system, so as to ensure that refugees are not exploited or placed in a vulnerable situation.

55. A major protection concern, which UNHCR has been working with the government to resolve, is the confiscation of refugee identification documents. In principle, those refugees who exit a camp through the sponsorship system should have their personal documents returned to them by the Jordanian authorities. However, inconsistencies in the filing and storage of documents have meant that some refugees' documents could not be returned. UNHCR is working to improve the system of registration and document storage to avoid such incidents, which have serious protection implications.

56. Security is a major concern and key protection issue at Jordan's principal camp, Za'atri, which accommodates approximately 130,000 refugees. Both organized crime networks and Syrian opposition groups operate in the camp, and use it to pursue their financial and political objectives. Za'atri is lawless in many ways, and the initial focus on establishing the infrastructure and hardware of the camp has contributed to the absence of functioning community governance structures. As a result, the camp's resources are constantly stolen or vandalized. At the time of the evaluation mission, the compound which accommodates the offices of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations was poorly secured and vulnerable to incursions. Despite UNHCR's numerous requests and discussions with the government to improve security for the camp, this has not yet occurred.

57. Services in the camp are currently highly centralized, which contributes to the difficulties that have been experienced in the management of Za'atri. In the health sector, there are too many partners with different specialties and varying hours of operation. This causes confusion for refugees and possibly encourages abuse of the system. Both of these issues require attention. WFP's delayed plan to provide food vouchers as opposed to food distribution should be implemented as soon as possible; this will provide more choice and dignity for the refugees.

58. UNHCR has developed a new governance plan for Za'atri which seeks to address security and governance concerns by restructuring the camp, empowering new community leadership structures, decentralizing services, strengthening the role of the Jordanian police and ending impunity for criminal behavior. It is essential to ensure the effective implementation of this plan, a task that will require close coordination with the Jordanian authorities, other humanitarian agencies and, most of all, the refugee community itself. Given the vested interests involved, opposition to the plan, possibly of a violent nature, can be anticipated. In that respect, a significant investment in staff security is urgently required, especially by reinforcing the perimeter of the UN/NGO compound.

59. Given the harsh physical conditions to be found in Za'atri, coupled with the high level of criminality in the camp, it is not surprising to hear refugees speaking of their desire to "escape." A growing number are doing so by returning to Syria, some of them taking advantage of changes in the security situation there and others going back to look after their

property or visit family members. Such returns should continue to be closely monitored, so as to ensure that the decision to return is being freely made.

60. The Emirates Jordan Camp hosts over 3,000 refugees, selected by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Red Crescent Society during the registration process at Za'atri. The selection criteria used are unclear but appear to favour middle-class families. Conditions in the camp surpass those found in Za'atri and elsewhere, creating a significant level of inequality. Certain arrangements, such as the provision of catered meals, may prove difficult to sustain when the camp is expanded, as is planned, to accommodate 30,000 Syrians. A dialogue with the UAE and Jordanian authorities is required to establish agreed selection and assistance criteria and to ensure that available resources are used to benefit the greatest number of vulnerable refugees, particularly in light of the growing number of refugees

61. Preparations are underway for a new camp at Azraq. The design of the new camp has taken into account many of lessons learned from Za'atri, including the need to decentralize services and to ensure the safety of women and girls. While some UNHCR staff anticipate an early opening of the camp, the evaluation team formed the impression that this would not be possible, given the significant amount of work needed to be done before it is ready to admit refugees. A number of transitional shelter models have been developed, for example, but have not yet been fully evaluated. The camp's WASH and health infrastructure has not been established, and WFP is not yet prepared to implement a food voucher system. These issues must be addressed in a systematic way and on the basis of an agreed and realistic timetable.

62. While beyond the scope of this review, the evaluation team was struck by the amount of time and energy that staff members spend in travelling to and from on a daily basis between Amman, Za'atri and other locations in Northern Jordan. It is recommended that the plan to open up a sub-office in the area be pursued in order to address this problem.

Development considerations

63. Jordan is a highly indebted country whose economic performance has been seriously affected by the armed conflict in Syria and the volatility to be found in the rest of the region. The Syrian refugee emergency (not to mention the earlier influx of Iraqi refugees) has placed additional pressure on the country and strained its hospitality towards those seeking asylum on its territory.

64. In recent months, economic reforms encouraged by the international financial institutions, such as the withdrawal of electricity and fuel subsidies, have made life even more difficult for the people of Jordan and have helped to fuel resentment towards the presence of refugees. A dialogue is required between UNHCR, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and Jordanian authorities so as to ensure that their respective efforts are mutually reinforcing rather than working at cross-purposes. A recent \$150 million World Bank loan to Jordan, specifically related to the costs of the refugee influx, provides a fruitful starting point for such cooperation. USAID is a strong partner in Jordan and should be engaged in discussions on these issues.

65. Livelihood programmes for refugees are not openly discussed for numerous reasons, primarily the political sensitivity of the issue in light of increasing tensions between host communities and refugees around employment. Yet many Syrians are highly skilled, and well-designed livelihood interventions have the potential to create employment for both

Jordanians and Syrians. To the extent that it is politically feasible, this should be taken into consideration in the design of longer term strategies to assist refugees and host communities.

Coordination

66. Despite the existence of numerous sectoral working groups in Amman, a number of UNHCR's partners expressed the view that strengthened coordination was needed. According to those interlocutors, working group meetings tend to be used for information sharing purposes and have limited follow-up.

67. UNHCR has appointed an Inter-Sectoral Coordinator, an initiative which, it is hoped, will address such coordination concerns. The formulation of a coherent and longer-term refugee response strategy, developed by means of an inclusive process of engagement with all partners, would also provide a foundation for improved coordination.

Lebanon

68. At the time of writing, there were close to 630,000 Syrians registered or awaiting registration with UNHCR in Lebanon, while the government suggests that the actual number of Syrians in the country is closer to one million. With a population of just 4.3 million, Lebanon's generosity in hosting such a large number of refugees cannot be overstated.

69. But the refugee impact on Lebanon is not just a question of numbers. The country's already delicate political system and sectarian balance has been placed under further pressure by the consequences of the Syrian conflict. Official decision-making on refugee issues is further hampered by the difficulty of reaching consensus amongst representatives of the different confessions represented in government, as well as the dispersal of the Syrian population throughout more than 1,000 different municipalities.

Outreach and protection monitoring

70. The widespread dispersal of refugees across Lebanon, as well as the emerging instability in some parts of the country, present major challenges to UNHCR and its partners, particularly in the areas of registration, community outreach and protection monitoring. In this context, the UNHCR team in Lebanon is to be congratulated for the exceptional progress it has made in recent months in bringing registration waiting periods down to reasonable levels - currently around two to three weeks.

71. Of serious concern, however, is the \$200 government fee that foreigners must pay to extend their stay in Lebanon beyond 12 months, which has so far not been waived for refugees. With the vast majority of Syrians unable to pay this fee, a failure to provide the waiver would leave many Syrians without legal status. UNHCR, its partners and the UN country team should continue to advocate with the authorities on this matter.

72. UNHCR's decision to establish field offices across Lebanon provides an excellent platform for an expansion of its outreach and protection monitoring activities. As in other countries affected by the Syrian refugee crisis, it is essential for UNHCR staff, international and national, to spend as much time as possible in the community, building trust and

networks within the Syrian population. In some areas of the country, UNHCR and its partners have negotiated access for Syrian refugees to pre-existing community centers (Social Development Centres), a good practice that could be expanded in those areas and replicated elsewhere in the country.

73. UNHCR and its partners have also begun to set up a network of refugee focal points in some parts of the country (often referred to as refugee community outreach workers in other operations). While establishing such systems is essential, there is a need for UNHCR to work closely with partners to coordinate and harmonize the remuneration provided to these focal points as this appears to vary at present. National SOPs for the full range of protection cases will also need to be strengthened and expanded.

74. The dispersal of the refugee population makes information dissemination particularly challenging. Mass information campaigns should be further developed in collaboration with operational partners to ensure refugee awareness of their legal status, entitlements and obligations, where and how to access services and assistance and other information needs as identified through consultation with the refugees themselves.

Shelter and infrastructure

75. Shelter is the greatest concern in relation to the refugee response in Lebanon. No camps have been established and refugees are found in many different types of accommodation of varying quality. These include rented rooms, abandoned and refurbished buildings, collective centres and informal settlements. These settlements are scattered throughout much of the country and are usually established on private land. Their residents live in makeshift shelters with access to very rudimentary water and sanitation services. Improving such infrastructure in these settlements is not always easy, as agreement by private owners and/or government can be complicated to obtain. Of particular concern is that some refugees are living in flood-prone and/or in unstable areas with the potential for conflict.

76. Secondary movements of Syrian refugees within Lebanon are already taking place in response to different livelihood opportunities, rental charges and insecurity, including targeted attacks on refugees. These movements seem certain to increase as the refugee crisis persists. This issue must be factored into contingency planning, as must the need for (a) additional emergency shelter capacity, given the risk that major new influxes might take place; and (b) relocation sites for refugees affected by adverse weather or armed conflict. The establishment of large scale cash programmes to assist vulnerable refugees to pay for numerous services including shelter is critical. Much work has been undertaken in working out the technical details. The programme now needs to begin in earnest and be scaled up as soon as possible, a task that will require the authorization of the government.

77. While Lebanon continues to resist the establishment of camps (in part because of the Palestinian legacy and in part because of the perceived risk of having large numbers of refugees in the same location), UNHCR has proposed the establishment of smaller 'transit sites'. Continued discussions on this matter are required, given that they may be the only real option in future.

Health

78. As health systems in Lebanon are largely privatized, the costs are higher than in Jordan and Iraq and access to health services is more limited at all levels of care for both refugees

and nationals. UNHCR covers a percentage of the health care costs for registered refugees according to vulnerability category. However, the growing number of refugees and scarcity of resources has required a shift to an even more targeted approach, with the consequence that many refugees now have to cover a larger proportion of the costs. This has caused confusion and distress among refugees and care providers alike. However, limited funding with an increasing refugee caseload requires difficult decisions to be made.

79. Clear SOPs for health care in the country have been developed, but communication about these to refugees and partners needs to improve. Support to primary healthcare centres should be increased if at all possible, particularly by enhancing their human and diagnostic resources and improving the availability of medicines. Audits of particularly expensive treatments should be considered so as to achieve cost savings.

Education

80. Reports from 2012 indicate that a substantial proportion of all Syrian students enrolled in Lebanese public schools dropped out before the end of the year. Many others did not enroll. One reason for this high dropout level was the language of instruction. In Syria, Arabic is the main language of instruction, whereas Lebanese schools are bilingual, with either French or English being used in addition to Arabic.

81. Targeted programs to address the language barrier, provide remedial education services and address the other major barriers to education for Syrian refugees are now urgently needed. Other barriers include the need for children to work for the family to get disposable income, lack of space in schools due to limited teachers and infrastructure, and expensive transport or school materials and uniforms.

82. No simple solutions exist to address this complex and costly problem, but UNICEF, UNHCR and other partners need to examine their programmes and budgets, prioritizing them in ways that help the largest number of children. Current efforts to established community-based education for Syrian children who cannot enroll in formal schools should be continued and consolidated.

Targeted assistance

83. Due in large part to financial constraints, UNHCR plans to shift in the months to more targeted provision of non-food items, based on vulnerability. There is considerable unease amongst UNHCR and partner staff about the process and implications of this shift. Such concerns relate in particular to the fact that the vulnerability criteria on which the targeting is to be based are not yet clear and that insufficient data is available to undertake targeting in a satisfactory manner. There is also unease with respect to the fact that WFP will simultaneously be shifting to targeted assistance. Early action is required to address these issues in a coordinated manner and to ensure a strong communication strategy to keep refugees fully informed of these changes.

84. Given the highly precarious situation in which many refugees live and the tense atmosphere that already exists in many refugee-populated areas, a thorough analysis should be made of the potential impact of targeted assistance on vulnerable refugees and host communities. Contingency plans should also be made to avert or at least mitigate any backlash that might threaten the protection environment and the security of UNHCR and

partner staff. Close coordination is required with WFP as targeting plans are formulated and implemented.

Coordination

85. The urgency of effective coordination in the Syrian refugee operation is especially felt in Lebanon. This arises from the particular challenges of coordinating an out-of-camp refugee response, the significant and pervasive impact that the refugee presence is having on host communities and a potential need for a broader humanitarian response, should the political tensions in Lebanon give rise to violence and displacement. Some commentators also suggest that the issue of coordination in Lebanon has risen to prominence as a result of confusion between the leadership role of UNHCR and the Humanitarian Coordinator, and the fact that some of UNHCR's critics have advocated for the introduction of the Cluster Approach.

86. Regarding the coordination of the refugee response, UNHCR has made considerable effort to respond to the expectations of partners, including by meeting regularly with the Lebanon International NGO Humanitarian Forum, locating its offices in proximity to NGO consortia at the sub-national level, and assigning dedicated personnel to develop appropriate coordination arrangements at the national level.

87. In the design of coordination arrangements from national to sub-national levels, UNHCR should strengthen its current practice of sharing leadership responsibilities for certain working groups or sub-working groups with other UN agencies and NGOs. UNDP's long history and local knowledge in Lebanon should be further leveraged in order to gain a better understanding of developments in the country and to mobilize support for local infrastructure, public services and economic opportunities.

88. Given the potential for an expanded and escalated crisis within Lebanon, UNHCR should undertake additional forward thinking and planning, in conjunction with other UN agencies and the NGO community, based on likely contingencies and evolving coordination requirements. The Inter-Agency Contingency Plan for Syrian Refugees released in June 2013 provides a platform for ongoing discussion.

Support to host communities

89. In its examination of region-wide issues, this report drew attention to the need for host states and communities to be effectively supported by means of rapid interventions, supported by both humanitarian and development actors. This is a particularly important issue in Lebanon, given the number of Syrians who have sought refuge there, the extent to which they are dispersed across the country and mixed with local populations, as well as the sheer fragility of Lebanon's social and political structures. Without such support, there is a real risk that existing tensions in Lebanon will escalate further and that popular discontent will be targeted at the refugee population.

Northern Iraq

90. Iraq can be characterized as the overshadowed corner of the Syrian operation. While the number of Syrian refugees in Iraq is considerably smaller than in Lebanon and Jordan, it is by no means insignificant and has received considerably less attention than the other

operations. There were close to 160,000 Syrians in Iraq at the time of writing, the vast majority of them hosted in the Kurdistan Region (KR) of Iraq.

91. The operational environment in Northern Iraq is a particularly complex one. Tense relations exist between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the Iraqi government in Baghdad, as well as Kurdish political actors in Syria. The overall security situation in Iraq remains highly volatile, and over a million internally displaced people are to be found across the country.

Engagement with the KRG

92. The response of the KRG to the Syrian refugee influx was initially very welcoming. Refugees have been issued with residency permits, which provide them with the right to work, and have also allowed refugees to move freely throughout the Kurdistan Region. Such generosity is grounded in a sense of ethnic solidarity with the overwhelming Kurdish character of the Syrian refugee population in the KR, a shared experience of armed conflict and displacement, as well as a desire to be seen by the international community as a capable and responsible host.

93. The scale of the Syrian influx has, however, exceeded all expectations, and as international funding has failed to keep pace with refugee needs, there are signs that official policy is becoming more restrictive. The KRG has opposed assistance to refugees living outside camps and placed certain restrictions on the provision of residency visas. The border with Syria was also recently closed, although for reasons related to the KRG's relationship with the Kurdish leadership in Syria rather than hostility towards the refugees per se.

94. Nevertheless, the foundations of a more supportive government policy towards Syrian refugees remain intact, and UNHCR has an important role to play in engaging with the KRG, building up its refugee response capacity, preserving protection space in Northern Iraq and working with the authorities to develop a comprehensive strategy for the management of the emergency. The secondment of UNHCR staff to government offices should be considered as a means of supporting this process.

95. While beyond the scope of this review, the evaluation team gained the impression that UNHCR's in Northern Iraq should be strengthened, in accordance with the increased demands being placed on the organization in that part of the country.

Protection and outreach

96. Using the Protection Assistance and Reintegration Centre (PARC) model, which is well established in other areas of Iraq, UNHCR was able to quickly establish a registration network (in Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah) in response to the Syria emergency. As in Jordan and Lebanon, the team in Northern Iraq is to be congratulated for the enormous effort that has been put into reducing waiting periods for registration to an acceptable minimum, taking account of prevailing circumstances.

97. Some remaining gaps continue to need attention. For example, some refugees are unaware of how or where to register. UNHCR should enhance its efforts to disseminate key information to refugees. UNHCR should also engage the KRG regarding the expansion of registration points, ensuring that existing and new facilities provide suitable reception conditions.

98. In addition to registration, the PARCs provide refugees with legal advice and other information, and serve as a protection monitoring tool by identify individuals who are at risk. The PARCs are run by partner organizations Harikar in Dohuk, and Qandil in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah.

99. As the protection team in Erbil is reinforced, it will be important for UNHCR to come to an arrangement with PARC partners that allows for the regular presence, and perhaps co-location, of UNHCR national and international protection staff. This will provide UNHCR with more direct access to the refugee population, deepen the organization's understanding and analysis of protection problems, facilitate the use of resettlement as a protection tool and allow the office to more effectively exercise accountability in relation to the core protection activities undertaken by the PARCs. In addition, UNHCR must ensure that the PARCs provide adequate reception facilities for refugees and enable confidential interviewing to take place.

100. The PARCs provide the beginnings of an outreach and protection monitoring system for out-of-camp refugees in Northern Iraq. This promising start needs to be enhanced, not least because risk assessment and the targeting of assistance outside camps will be a critical element of UNHCR's future response in the territory. As in Jordan and Lebanon, several of the humanitarian actors present in the area have proven experience in establishing elements of such a system. UNHCR should work with the KRG to provide an effective coordination platform that brings this capacity together in a cohesive manner.

101. Making use of existing community centres and sports facilities, establishing refugee volunteer networks, mass information campaigns, and ensuring that both national and international protection staff maximize the time they spend in out-of-camp refugee communities, should all be prioritized. As part of this expansion, existing referral pathways should be enhanced, so as to address SGBV, child protection and other protection problems within larger and more geographically dispersed caseloads.

Assistance outside camps

102. As noted above, the KRG has not welcomed the provision of assistance to Syrian refugees living outside camps. While refugees have been permitted to access public services free of charge, these services are beginning to come under strain. Very little additional assistance has been provided to refugees outside camps. No widespread programme of food assistance (either in kind or vouchers) has been established for out-of-camp refugees.

103. While UNHCR was able to launch a limited cash pilot programme for 300 refugee families living outside camps, the future of this initiative is unclear. The pressures faced by refugees living outside camps are significant, particularly in meeting the costs of rental accommodation. As such, permission to commence the provision of assistance to out-of-camp refugees, particularly the most vulnerable, should be pursued as a matter of urgency. Significantly expanded cash and voucher assistance to refugees living outside camps should be incorporated into a comprehensive response strategy for Syrian refugees in Northern Iraq, as discussed below.

104. Further, efforts should be made to capitalize on the fact that Syrian refugees have permission to work in the KR. A significant livelihoods programme for both in and out-of-camp refugees should be developed by UNHCR and partners. To this end, relationships with the burgeoning private sector in the KR should be explored.

105. Concerted and coordinated efforts are also needed in the realm of education, with many Syrian students not attending school. Difficulty with the language of instruction, which is predominantly Kurdish, is a major barrier and requires targeted interventions.

Camps

106. Although the KRG has allowed Syrian refugees to live amongst the host community from the beginning of the crisis, a camp near the border at Domiz was established in March 2012. It is widely recognised that Domiz camp is now critically congested. While UNHCR has advocated for the allocation of additional land by the government, this has for the most part not occurred.

107. The current situation is exacerbated by the fact that refugees have spontaneously erected tents in some areas, making it difficult to ensure that standards are met, particularly for WASH and shelter. The camp is below standards in many sectors and the living situation in many parts of Domiz camp is unacceptable. Efforts should be made, in close cooperation with the authorities, to decongest the camp.

108. This may prove difficult to achieve as unassisted refugees living elsewhere choose to move to Domiz when their resources are exhausted. However, a continued influx into the camp puts everyone at risk of increased insecurity and health risks. While the Dohuk authorities have recently announced that a new camp will be established in the east of the governorate, work has not yet started on its construction.

109. At the request of the KRG, additional camps will be opened in Erbil and Sulaymaniah governorates, with capacity limited to some 25,000 refugees combined. Work has started on Dara Shakran camp in Erbil, and a site has been identified in Sulaymaniah. The site plan for Dara Shakran includes a number of positive features, such as family latrines and kitchens, and an employment office run by the Ministry of Labour to identify job opportunities for refugees. However, the services planned for the camp appear to be quite centralized and relevant stakeholders were not substantively involved in the design of the site. The decentralization of services in Dara Shakran should be considered as soon as possible, as should transitional shelters, rather than the current proposal of tents on a concrete base.

110. It was initially hoped that Dara Shakran would be used to decongest Domiz camp, which is very overcrowded. However, the Erbil authorities have stated that Dara Shakran will not be used for this purpose, but instead be used to accommodate vulnerable out-of-camp refugees in their own governorate. It would be very advantageous for the function of the new camp to be clarified as soon as possible. Furthermore, it appears as if the camp will not be ready to receive refugees until late August. A mass information campaign should be conducted so as to inform refugees of these developments.

Comprehensive and longer-term strategies

111. There is currently no agreed strategy in place to deal with the existing refugee population in Northern Iraq or any future influxes into the territory. Receiving new refugees in the existing camp of Domiz is untenable, due to the overcrowding and the variable standards that are already to be found there. As indicated earlier, a new camp, Dara Shakran, is under construction but will take some time to complete, and it remains unclear as to whether the Erbil governorate, where the camp is located, will allow it to be used for refugees in Dohuk, where the largest number of refugees are to be found. Although modest

assistance has been provided to a limited number of non-camp refugees, there has been reluctance on the part of the authorities to engage in discussions on a broader strategy of targeted support to those refugees who are living outside of camps and unable to sustain themselves.

112. With the border closure believed to be a temporary measure, this lack of preparedness to accommodate new arrivals leaves Northern Iraq (and any new arrivals) in a very vulnerable position. As such, there is a pressing need for UNHCR, other humanitarian actors and donor governments to redouble efforts to engage with the KRG and the authorities in Baghdad to agree at minimum on the immediate shelter and assistance measures to be taken for the most vulnerable new arrivals should the border re-open. Beyond this, a concerted contingency planning exercise should be undertaken, together with the KRG, to prepare for possible future scenarios, building on the work already initiated with support from the Regional Refugee Coordinator's office.

113. UNHCR and its partners must also support the KRG in elaborating a longer-term refugee response strategy, addressing both camp and non-camp populations. As long as assistance to urban and out-of-camp refugees is excluded, vulnerable refugees will be drawn towards Domiz and will also face heightened protection risks. This scenario reinforces the need for a robust component of targeted assistance to out-of-camp refugees, as well as additional support to host communities and infrastructure. Providing the KRG with the support they need to elaborate such a plan, and ensuring that it receives the necessary profile and resources, must be given the highest priority.

Coordination

114. UNHCR and NGOs in Northern Iraq hold directly opposing views with respect to the degree of consultation and joint planning that has been undertaken for the development of an out-of-camp assistance strategy and in the RRP5 process. The need to develop a shared vision and strategy for the Northern Iraq refugee response presents an ideal opportunity to address this issue. The review acknowledges that a more consultative inter-agency relationship does not imply that UNHCR has to take on board all of its partners' proposals, but finds that UNHCR should take full advantage of the capacities of other agencies in meeting common objectives.

Conclusion

115. Just three or four years ago, there was a sense within UNHCR that the era of large-scale refugee emergencies might be over, and that in future the organization would be more likely to find itself addressing other forms of humanitarian crisis. Since 2011, however, UNHCR has been confronted with a series of massive refugee exoduses, most notably from Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Somalia, Sudan and Syria. These emergencies have uprooted millions of people, placed enormous strain on host states and communities and stretched the capacities of UNHCR and other members of the humanitarian community to breaking point.

116. In the Syrian context, delivering an effective refugee emergency response has been particularly demanding. While countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq are relatively developed by the standards of sub-Saharan Africa, they are all confronted with serious economic and/or economic challenges. The speed and scale of the Syrian influx, coupled with the likelihood that the armed conflict in that country will continue for the foreseeable future, has made an already fragile part of the world even more tumultuous.

117. In terms of humanitarian history, the Syrian refugee emergency seems likely to be remembered for a number of things. First, it has reinforced a growing awareness in the international community of the need to address the situation of refugees in urban contexts and in out-of-camp areas, while at the same time highlighting the risks associated with conventional camp responses.

118. Second, it has revealed a yawning gap in emergency response arrangements in terms of support for host communities. While UNHCR has a partial role to play in this respect, it is evidently not a task that the organization can shoulder alone.

119. Third, emergency response in middle income countries is expensive and complex. Difficult decisions need to be undertaken and prioritization is paramount. Community-based approaches that favour a large amount of people need to be prioritized over individual responses in many sectors.

120. Fourth, the Syrian emergency has seen the emergence of many new actors, working outside the established humanitarian coordination framework. While their interests focus at present on the Middle East, it would not be surprising to see those organizations extending their geographical coverage in the future.

121. Fifth, the crisis in Syria has demonstrated that the international refugee protection regime continues to function, even in countries which have not formally adhered to the basic instruments of international refugee law. Far from being irrelevant to contemporary needs, as some politicians in the world's more prosperous states have suggested, the Syria emergency has demonstrated that the refugee protection regime has the ability to save the lives of individuals, families and communities who have been uprooted by violence and human rights abuses in their country of origin.