

REGIONAL EMERGENCY WINTER ASSISTANCE

FLASH UPDATE - Syria and Iraq situations

22 January 2017



UNHCR STEPS UP WINTER ASSISTANCE AS SNOW STORMS HIT SEVERAL PARTS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Since the start of the year, freezing cold has gripped the Middle East, accompanied by strong winds and rain. In Turkey, heavy snowfall and below-freezing temperatures have enveloped most parts of the country. In Lebanon, fresh snow last week has blanketed the high-altitude towns in the Bekaa valley and northern Lebanon. Parts of Syria and Iraq have been hit by snowstorms as tens of thousands of newly-displaced struggle to find adequate warmth in tents and sub-standard shelter. The longer the cold temperatures continue, the more difficult it becomes for the millions of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, many of whom are living in vulnerable conditions in substandard housing and without means to insulate homes.

UNHCR is implementing a number of proactive and emergency efforts to identify and immediately respond to the most vulnerable who may not be able to cope – ensuring that the elderly and children are warm, safe and have access to needed support. Teams are working around the clock in refugee camps fixing storm damage and ensuring immediate responses and referrals for those in need. Core relief items have been prepositioned, ready for immediate release. These emergency interventions are through UNHCR's own staff, government agencies, partners, community outreach volunteers, and the broader inter-agency response platforms.

UNHCR is particularly concerned about the situation of people living in desperate conditions in locations severely affected by winter and where there is no humanitarian access, particularly in several besieged and hard-to-reach locations inside Syria, at the Berm (Jordan-Syria border) and in western Mosul city in Iraq.

ADDITIONAL CASH ASSISTANCE AND WINTER KITS IN TURKEY

- UNHCR and municipality staff are visiting apartments and unfinished buildings to find vulnerable refugee families and offer them additional one-off cash assistance. This urgent referral mechanism, established with the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) and municipalities is prioritized for families living in areas with the harshest weather conditions, and is in addition to the regular winter cash assistance.
- UNHCR is also responding to the urgent referrals received from the DGMM and municipalities with winter packages consisting of winter clothes and high thermal blankets.

EMERGENCY SHELTER ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION HOTLINES IN LEBANON

- Protection hotlines are open 24x7 in all UNHCR field offices and urgent response is provided to those in need through partners and community outreach volunteers. All cases who call the hotline requesting assistance receive a visit within a few hours for an assessment or referral.
- Specific high risk locations, where the most vulnerable refugees and host communities live, have been mapped out and the situation is monitored regularly with the help of local authorities, partners, outreach volunteers, and community leaders. People in need of emergency response are supported with winter items from the stockpile maintained in these locations.
- UNHCR, in coordination with local authorities and partners, has developed emergency and preparedness response mechanisms to respond to any emergency situations. Secondary response networks at district level are in place to assist local authorities or UNHCR in coordinating response.
- Weatherproofing shelter kits consisting of timber, plywood, plastic sheet, toolbox, and insulation foam have been delivered and installed in substandard buildings and informal settlements. In the Bekaa valley given the harsh winter conditions UNHCR has launched an assessment of all settlements. In Tripoli, around 7,500 vulnerable families have been provided with the weatherproofing kits.
- Preparedness reserve stocks have been pre-positions to respond to urgent cases, especially in higher elevations, with UNHCR offices as well as partners.

MONITORING OF CONDITION OF VULNERABLE REFUGEES AND MOBILE HELP DESKS IN JORDAN

- In Zaatari and Azraq camps, UNHCR has a mechanism to check households, tent-by-tent, on a 24-hour response capacity. Contingency stocks of high thermal blankets, plastic sheets and other non-food items have been put in place.
- UNHCR mobile help desks specific to winter visit higher elevations areas, and visit identified vulnerable households to check on their well-being. Outreach teams are also monitoring vulnerable families regularly during winter months.
- A Winterization Task Force has been established which designed guidelines and procedures for harsh weather conditions, including a harsh weather alert system to strengthen partners' coordination and efficient use of resources.
- A public awareness campaign has been launched on the dangers and risks of harsh weather conditions including contacts of relevant UNHCR and national authorities in case of any emergency. In view of the worsening weather conditions, a minimum emergency stock of 150 high thermal blankets is maintained in community centres to be distributed to vulnerable refugees and local communities.
- At the Berm (Jordan-Syria border), the distribution of high thermal blankets (15 pieces per household) and plastic sheets (three pieces per household) was completed on 14 January and these items will help beneficiaries to endure the worsening of the weather conditions expected in the upcoming weeks.

EMERGENCY WINTER KITS TO NEWLY DISPLACED AND INCREASED SHELTER REHABILITATION WORK IN SYRIA

- UNHCR has provided emergency winter assistance in areas hosting newly displaced people and areas hit by the recent winter storms. Last week, over 10,000 IDPs in Aleppo Governorate were provided with lifesaving winter support (high thermal blankets, plastic tarpaulin, winter clothes, and sleeping bags), including to those residing in collective shelters and those returning to their homes in eastern Aleppo.
- Given the bitter winter conditions, UNHCR and partners have stepped up winterization activities in the collective centres in Aleppo. In Jibreen, which currently accommodates over 4,000 newly displaced families from eastern Aleppo, insulation of doors and windows was completed, and carpets and stoves were provided.
- In the last two weeks, UNHCR also provided 2,000 winter clothing kits to IDPs in Moadamiyeh (Rural Damascus) and replaced tents and plastic sheets destroyed by storms in Tartous. UNHCR has also provided mattresses, high thermal blankets, plastic sheets and sleeping mats to around 8,500 individuals (1,700 families) fleeing recent fighting in the Barada valley (Rural Damascus).
- A contingency stock of 20,000 winter clothing kits is maintained for any emergency response. Starting January, UNHCR started the distribution of two supplementary items (winter jackets and warm underclothing) as part of the emergency winter response. To date, distributions have taken place in Aleppo and Qamishly (Al-Hassakeh Governorate) and will continue to be rolled out to all other UNHCR field locations.

ACCELERATED DISTRIBUTION OF WINTER ASSISTANCE IN IRAQ

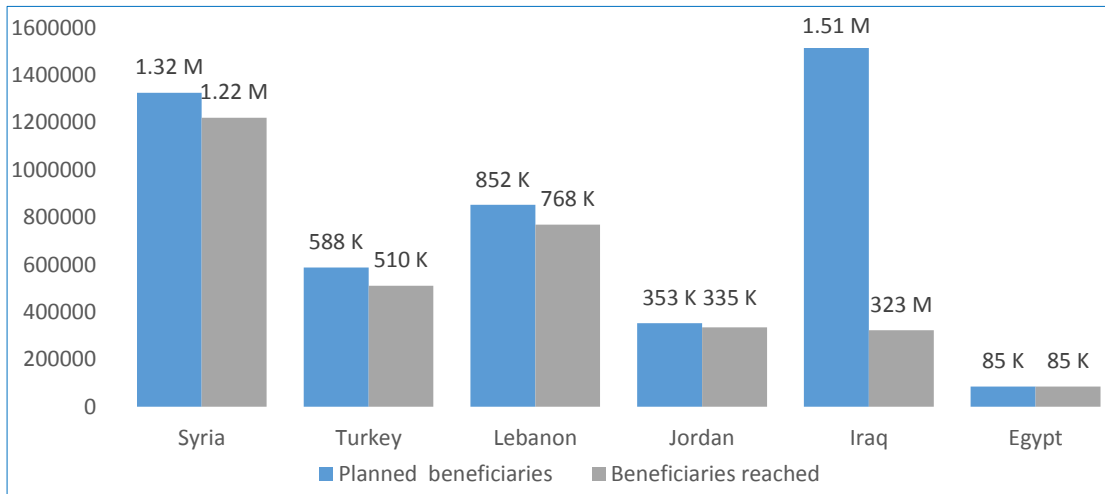
- Distribution of winter assistance has been accelerated in the camps, targeting the newly displaced from Mosul and other areas. In camps, IDPs and refugees received a full tent insulation kit (tent inner liner and insulated mats), heating stoves and blankets, and fuel for heating.
- Outside of camps, the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs, identified through a network of community representatives, local authorities and community outreach volunteers, received winter items including heating stoves, sleeping mats and blankets, as well as fuel for heating.
- Stocks of winter items have been pre-positioned in order to meet urgent needs identified by UNHCR and partners and specific attention has been given to vulnerable people living in the cold mountainous parts of the country.
- UNHCR, as the Shelter Cluster lead also stands ready to cover gaps identified by the cluster, while various partners have included winterisation in their programme.

PREPAREDNESS FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE AND MEDIA CAMPAIGN IN EGYPT

- While winter in Egypt is generally milder compared to the other countries in the region, UNHCR has regular communication with refugees directly and through partners and is in a position to respond to any exceptional additional needs. Based on needs assessment, extremely vulnerable families can be provided with an emergency grant.
- UNHCR is also working on a social media campaign to inform refugees on how to stay warm.

SYRIAN AND IRAQI IDPS AND REFUGEES IN THE REGION REACHED THROUGH UNHCR'S REGULAR WINTER PROGRAMME 2016-2017

UNHCR and partners have put into place a robust winterization programme for the region. Winterization has included significant investment in preventative measures, such as heating, insulating repairs to buildings and provision of sealing-off kits in urban areas, heating, tent insulation and drainage in camp settings. Refugees have received winterization cash grants in late 2016, before the recent harsh weather has set in, enabling them to prepare themselves in advance. Core relief and cash distributions have been nearly completed in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey, building the resilience of communities before the storms have hit. This regular winter programme has so far reached over **3.24 million Syrian and Iraqi IDPs and refugees** in the region (figures as of 31 December 2016).



A displaced boy tries to wear his sweater to keep himself warm at Jibreen collective shelter in Aleppo. Given the bitter winter conditions, UNHCR and partners are focusing on providing the displaced families in collective shelters in Aleppo with the means to keep warm. Over 300,000 people have received aid across Aleppo via the distribution of heaters, blankets, mattresses, winter clothes, insulation kits, family tents, carpets, sleeping bags and jerry cans. Much more is needed to help weather the freezing conditions in the city. © UNHCR/Bassam Diab