



Painful choices - funding gap threatens refugee response in Lebanon

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and partner UN agencies and NGOs today warned that lack of funding is forcing to cut basic programmes and humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

"The plans are in place, the staff is ready, but the funds are drying up..." said Ninette Kelley, UNHCR Representative in Lebanon." Agencies including UN and NGOs are forced into the impossible situation of having to prioritize equally compelling programmes. At this level of funding vital programmes to ensure food, clean water, schooling for children, health care and shelter for newly arrived refugees are simply impossible."

There are currently over 400,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, a country with a population of little more than four million. Over 3,000 people are registered every single day. Exactly one year ago, there were only 10,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The fourth inter-agency funding appeal's planning figure of 300,000 people by June 2013 was surpassed in mid-February. Only one third of the funding has been received.

"In one month, and with the current funding, more than 400,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon will no longer receive food assistance" said Etienne Labande, Head of Country Operation for the World Food Programme in Lebanon. "I am extremely concerned that without continued funding we will see increased tensions and further displacement in an already tense environment."

The number of Syrian refugees unable to pay their monthly rent is increasing and more families are finding themselves at risk of being evicted from their current accommodation. Agencies have so far weather-proofed 700 dwellings and rehabilitated over 100 collective shelters in order to provide minimum acceptable living conditions. Rehabilitations to host community houses have also helped shelter thousands of refugees while benefiting vulnerable Lebanese. Forty-four new buildings have been identified which require similar interventions, but the funding needed to start work is not there.

The risks of overcrowding in existing shelters are clear. This is causing increasing tensions with host communities that have been extraordinarily generous so far. Lack of services and support to refugees and hosting communities is deepening instability in the country.

Healthcare is a significant part of the budget. Secondary healthcare interventions at the 85 per cent level will have to be reduced. Currently over 11,000 refugees benefit from primary health care support on a monthly basis, and an additional 3,000 receive secondary health care.

The risk of diarrhea, hepatitis A and skin diseases will also increase without water and sanitation improvements. With summer fast approaching, receiving the funds to start these projects in the coming month is vital.

Some 30,000 school-aged children have registered in Lebanese public schools and have been assisted with school grants. Many adolescents require further support including through remedial classes to adapt and continue attending school.

Annamaria Laurini from UNICEF stated that, “The children affected by this crisis - making up more than half of the refugee population - are facing challenges that risk lasting, disastrous impact on their lives. If significant additional funding is not received soon, UNICEF will be unable to respond to exponentially growing needs of these most vulnerable victims of this human tragedy.”

Urgent funding is needed for education and children's programmes. Putting on hold programmes to help families get their children back to school, increase psycho-social support for traumatized children and put in place outreach schemes to identify children at risk is an essential part of the humanitarian response.

This Press release has been prepared in consultation with UN agencies and the NGO community in Lebanon.

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