

UNHCR Lebanon Operational Update

Syria Refugee Response

January - March 2017



A significant breakthrough towards facilitating refugees' access to legal residency was achieved during the first quarter of 2017. After concerted and sustained advocacy, the General Directorate of General Security (GSO) announced that the USD 200 fee for renewing residency permits would be waived for Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, namely those who had:

- Registered with UNHCR prior to 1 January 2015; and
- Not renewed their residency permit based on tourism, sponsorship, property ownership, tenancy in 2015 or 2016.

According to the GSO announcement, eligible refugees will receive a free six-month residency extension, renewable multiple times and not subject to late fees. Eligible refugees are required to present a number of documents to the GSO office. These include a valid UNHCR registration certificate and a housing attestation issued by UNHCR free-of-charge. UNHCR is supporting the GSO to scale up its residency renewal capacity in their offices across the country. In view of the increased number of refugees approaching UNHCR offices for renewal of their registration certificate and/or a housing attestation, UNHCR has also scaled up its registration capacity with, *inter alia*, an additional 95 temporary registration staff for a six-month period in order to respond to the needs of the refugees in a timely manner. Ensuring efficient implementation of this fee-waiver will be critical in the coming months in order to enhance the protection situation of refugees in Lebanon.

UNHCR sees the GSO announcements as one further step towards the amelioration of the precarious residency situation, and related protection problems, that refugees in Lebanon face. However, as the announcement does not encompass all Syrian refugees, UNHCR will continue

advocating for the gradual expansion of the categories of refugees included in the residency regularization exercise, in line with commitments expressed at the Brussels Conference.

At the same time, by the end of the first quarter, only nine per cent of the total funding needs had been covered through donor contributions. This critical shortfall not only jeopardises UNHCR's ability to support the government in its abovementioned regularization efforts, but also the organization's ability to provide essential and life-saving interventions and services for refugees.

PROTECTION

As of 31 March 2017, more than 1.011 million Syrian refugees were registered with UNHCR and are living in over 1,700 communities and locations across the country. UNHCR and partners continue to provide legal counselling and assistance to refugees, in particular regarding residency and civil documentation. In the first quarter, more than 13,500 individuals benefitted from legal counselling.

Collecting information regarding the intentions and views of refugees is part of ongoing activities undertaken by UNHCR to better address refugees' immediate, and prepare for their future, protection needs. In this regard, UNHCR conducted in February an interview survey with a representative sample of Syrian refugees residing in different governorates of Lebanon on their intentions and views on possible future return to Syria. In addition, focus group discussions on return intentions were conducted with Syrian refugees in five locations across Lebanon.

The findings of the survey confirmed that the absolute majority (89 per cent) wished to return to Syria at some

© UNHCR/ Diego Ibarra Sánchez



Growing up in Syria Jankidar, 31, knew he wanted to study political science. But soon after enrolling in Aleppo University, he had to drop out to support his family. Then, when war broke out, he fled his hometown of Kobane for Lebanon, where he tried once again to get his degree – this time juggling four jobs to pay for his tuition. “I worked in elevator maintenance, as a porter, painter, and as an extra on Lebanese and Syrian films,” he recalls. In 2015, Jankidar applied to UNHCR's higher education scholarship programme, known as DAFI, and won a full scholarship to study at the Lebanese University. Most Syrian refugees are not so lucky,

stage, while 85 per cent said that they were currently unsure when they would be ready to return. The three main factors influencing their intentions to return were, in order of priority, the security situation, access to housing, land and/or property, and livelihood opportunities. Of these, the security situation in Syria was by far considered to be the most important factor influencing the refugees' intention to return. In regard to the second priority, 57 per cent indicated that their property in Syria was destroyed, while 21 per cent were unsure about the state of their property, and 11 per cent indicated that their property is partially damaged.

Throughout the first quarter, UNHCR has observed a worrying increase in anti-refugee sentiments and xenophobic rhetoric in the media, including social media. Statements typically revolve around the impact of the presence of refugees on Lebanon's demographics, economy, national security and social cohesion. In order to further sensitize the public to the continuing protection needs of the refugees, and the importance of preserving a dignified protection space in Lebanon until durable solutions can be found outside the country, UNHCR is working with the Ministry of Information on a nation-wide information campaign.

UNHCR supports refugees to enhance their own protection through a variety of community-based interventions which aim to identify, prevent, and respond to protection issues. Since the beginning of 2017, close to 600 general and specialized Outreach Volunteers (OVs) have referred more than 6,000 persons at heightened protection risk to assistance providers. OVs act as an essential bridge between refugees and the assistance they require. In the first quarter of 2017, UNHCR-supported community centres continued to provide a wide range of activities and services to more than 30,000 persons. Activities provided include training sessions on upcycling, textile work, and artisan activities, as well as language, literacy and IT classes. Centres also provided psychosocial support activities and awareness sessions on birth and marriage registration, available services, prevention of fraud and exploitation, SGBV prevention, and child rights, among others.

As shown through several participatory consultation processes and case management experience, exposure to SGBV and child protection risks increases in displacement settings. UNHCR and partners in Lebanon work to ensure refugees have access to national SGBV prevention and response services, strengthen the capacities of national and local actors, and respond directly to gaps in service provision with case management and other services. During the first quarter, capacity building of front-line social workers focused on a survivor-centered approach, aiming at ensuring principles such as confidentiality, non-discrimination, accountability, safety, rights and dignity of the survivor, throughout the entire case cycle. Some 85 caseworkers and 27 supervisors were trained. UNHCR's interventions during the first quarter also facilitated access to services in safe spaces for 3,404 Syrian refugees, among which 641 cases related to boys and girls under 18. Sensitization on SGBV to encourage behavioural change remains at the core of UNHCR's interventions. Between January and March 2017, more than 2,500 individuals were sensitized on SGBV, among which 428 were under 18 years old.

As part of efforts to empower refugees to enhance their own protection, UNHCR continued to provide Protection Cash Assistance (PCAP) to specifically assist refugees in, or at risk of falling into, harmful situations. PCAP provided has been used by refugees to relocate away from sources of harassment and abuse, overcome SGBV incidents, and prevent the worst forms of child labour such as working or begging on the street. Specifically during the first quarter, some 1,927 persons were assisted with PCAP.

Practical efforts have been made during the first quarter to prevent statelessness. Thus far, over 6,000 Syrian refugee families have been counselled on how to register the birth of their newborn babies with the Lebanese civil registry. In 2016, some 52 per cent of Syrian refugees with newborns registered their child's birth certificates with local registry offices, bringing them a step closer to full birth registration. To reach the highest number of families, counselling sessions are regularly held with refugees approaching UNHCR to add newborns to their files. To complement this, counselling and referral mechanisms are also in place through OVs and other front-liners, including protection monitoring teams and health personnel.

In the first quarter of 2017, a total of 2,945 Syrians departed on resettlement and UNHCR submitted a further 3,937 Syrians for resettlement consideration to third countries. During the first quarter of last year, some 6,522 Syrians departed on resettlement and UNHCR had submitted 7,000 Syrians for resettlement consideration. As local integration in Lebanon is not an option, and return to Syria in safety and dignity is currently not possible, resettlement provides an important lifeline for the most vulnerable, and constitutes a concrete expression of international solidarity with Lebanon, which is hosting more refugees per capita than any other country in the world. Reductions in resettlement quotas – already below the 10 per cent target – are thus of major concern since it is important that resettlement, as well as other complementary pathways, continue to be provided.

Riyak Evictions

In late March, the Lebanese Armed Forces ordered the eviction of settlements surrounding the Riyak Airbase in the Bekaa Valley, due to a security operation. This operation affected more than 10,000 Syrian refugees. Several municipalities, and principally Zahle in the Bekaa Valley, also conducted evictions the justifications of which were not based on Lebanese law.

Forced evictions can compound the vulnerabilities that refugees already face, as losing their shelter without compensation exposes them to further displacement, possible exploitation by landlords and worsens their access to basic needs and essential services, including education.

UNHCR and partners across various sectors including WASH, Shelter, Child Protection, Education and Protection are working closely to advocate against unjustified evictions and to ensure that refugees affected by evictions are assisted and supported in re-establishing themselves in a safe alternative location. The response remains ongoing.

HEALTH

The high cost of health care in Lebanon's largely privatized health care network remains a major cause of refugee indebtedness. In response, UNHCR provides access to subsidized care at hospitals and primary health care clinics across Lebanon. By the end of the first quarter of 2017, UNHCR had supported more than 20,000 hospitalizations for lifesaving and obstetrics care as well as almost 50,000 subsidized Primary Health Care (PHC) consultations.

Since 1 January 2017, the company NEXtCARE has taken over as the Third Party Administrator (TPA) facilitating access to hospital care for refugees. This change is the result of a yearly re-tender to provide secondary health care referral services, which aims to ensure that the best value for money is procured. The change of TPA was preceded by several training sessions and communication to partners and refugees. Efforts at making the process as smooth as possible have continued through refresher trainings and numerous meetings between UNHCR and NEXtCARE.

EDUCATION

For Syrian refugee children, the Lebanese public school system is a vital lifeline in their pursuit of a brighter future. Approximately 195,000 refugee children have been enrolled in the 2016-17 school year, including in kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools, thanks to the efforts of a successful Back to School campaign. This is a significant increase on the previous years' enrolment figures. Refugee students have access to both the morning and afternoon shifts in Lebanese public schools. Through its partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), UNHCR plans to cover the school fees of more than 39,400 refugee children in the first shift of the 2016-17 academic year.

Despite this progress, only 57 per cent of refugee children between 6-14 years old are enrolled in Lebanese public schools. In addition, retention remains problematic as children face difficulties adapting to a new curriculum and languages of instruction, struggle to make up for missing years, and for some, to cope with bullying or harassment. UNHCR has therefore continued to support initiatives such as homework support and parent community groups, which encourage the engagement of children and parents in schools, and help with the retention of students. In 2016, UNHCR established more than 180 parent community

groups, almost 300 homework support groups, and mobilised and trained some 170 Education OVs and 109 Education Community Liaisons. These structures support children to stay in school by helping them to deal with the daily challenges they face pursuing an education.

SHELTER

Almost seven years into the Syrian crisis, refugees' shelter conditions remain a source of vulnerability. A majority of refugees still live in sub-standard shelters and have limited or no access to basic services. During the first quarter, almost 20,000 individuals living in substandard buildings and informal settlements received shelter kits, designed to help refugees secure and insulate their shelters.

Informal settlements are often located in areas prone to flooding and fire. UNHCR and partners undertake site interventions to improve the accessibility to and inside the settlements, and to provide protection against floods and other risks. In the first quarter, UNHCR's partners conducted preliminary technical assessments in informal settlements that have experienced flood and accessibility problems. In-depth assessments will be conducted in the second quarter of 2017 in order to define the necessary site improvement works to ensure adequate drainage and accessibility at those sites.

Over 80 per cent of refugees rent their accommodation, with the average rent being USD 164 per month. Some 59 per cent of all rentals are for apartments, generally small basic lodgings shared with other refugee families in overcrowded conditions. More than half of the refugees live in inadequate shelters, such as tents, garages, unfinished buildings, worksites, animal stalls, overcrowded apartments or are at risk of eviction. With regard to the rehabilitation activities in substandard buildings, during the first quarter, UNHCR's partners have conducted the identification and selection of eligible households, as well as technical assessments of the necessary works. Negotiations with landlords, establishment of MoUs/agreements and work preparation are planned for the second quarter in order for the rehabilitation works to start.

WASH

The presence of high numbers of refugees continues to add pressure on the country's existing water and wastewater



Before and after: A primitive latrine (left) was constructed by refugees in Aaddousiyeh, South Lebanon. It presented significant protection risks, especially for women and girls, as well as environmental and health concerns. In response UNHCR replaced this with three standard latrines (right) connected to a cesspit, providing a significant health and protection improvement for the families concerned. ©UNHCR/Martin Dudek

infrastructure. UNHCR's WASH strategy targets the needs of refugees in informal settlements, urban and peri-urban settings through implementation of water and wastewater projects that strengthen and/or rehabilitate existing infrastructure. These interventions are identified in coordination with the Lebanese authorities at Central as well as at Governorate and Municipal levels. They range from the rehabilitation of storm water channels to the construction of reservoirs and even the drilling and equipping of boreholes.

In the first quarter of 2017, UNHCR's WASH interventions have led to improved sanitary conditions for close to 6,000 refugees. Between January and March, access to safe water has been provided to some 6,825 refugees, and more than 1,460 refugees have benefited from hygiene promotion activities, aimed at assisting them to adapt their hygiene and sanitation practices to conditions of displacement.

The rehabilitation of nine water supply systems in the Bekaa and North Lebanon continued in the first quarter of 2017. To date, more than 127 km of pipeline have been installed including some 3,370 household connections. The construction of three reservoirs and drilling of three boreholes is on-going. Upon completion of these projects, over 192,000 Lebanese and refugees will gain better and more reliable access to potable water.

BASIC ASSISTANCE

The Multi-purpose Cash Assistance Programme (MCAP) aims to reduce the socio-economic vulnerability of the severely vulnerable refugees, in order to reduce their susceptibility to exploitation and other protection risks, and increase their capacity to meet their basic needs. The desk formula, which was rolled out in the second half of 2016 to identify the vulnerability level of each refugee family in Lebanon, has been the basis for the inclusion of the most severely vulnerable households into the MCAP. As per this formula, more than half of the Syrian population were found to be severely vulnerable, and 21 per cent highly vulnerable. In the first quarter of 2017, UNHCR verified that the case-

load for MCAP only included refugee populations who have been identified as severely vulnerable, and that those ranking the most severely vulnerable receive assistance first. The transition toward the use of the Lebanon One Unified Inter-Organisational System for e-Cards (LOUISE) was also completed during the first quarter. By March, the entire MCAP caseload of 33,524 families received their cash assistance on the common card.

Preparation for an outcome monitoring exercise on MCAP beneficiaries commenced. A representative sample of MCAP beneficiaries has been selected and will be visited and surveyed. The aim of this exercise is to examine changes in outcomes, including expenditure, coping strategies, and ability of households to meet their needs since receiving MCAP.

UNHCR's winter assistance came to a close at the end of March 2017. Almost seven years into the Syria Crisis, the needs and vulnerabilities of refugee and host communities are increasing, and become particularly acute over winter. Thanks to the generous support of donors, UNHCR was able to help tens of thousands of refugee and vulnerable Lebanese families to cope during the winter season.

By the end of winter, monthly cash assistance worth USD147 had been uploaded to the ATM cards of more than 120,000 vulnerable Syrian refugee families. Families who already received monthly MCAP were provided with a top-up of USD 75 per month to help them cope with the extra expenses they face over winter. By the end of the season, close to 45,000 Syrian refugee families had been provided with this top-up.

Due to the volatile security environment in Aarsal, as well as the lack of an ATM network, winter assistance was delivered to vulnerable refugee households in this town through fuel cards that could be redeemed at Medco gas stations. Almost 42,500 cards worth USD100 per month were distributed to 8,676 vulnerable refugee households in Aarsal.

Launch of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan

On 19 January, Prime Minister Hariri, UN Special Coordinator Sigrid Kaag (right) and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Philippe Lazzarini launched the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2017-2020 at the Grand Serail. The LCRP brings together more than 104 partners to assist 2.8 million highly vulnerable people living in Lebanon.

As the conflict in Syria approached its seventh year, the Government of Lebanon and its national and international partners appealed for USD2.8bn to provide critical humanitarian assistance and protection, as well as invest in Lebanon's public infrastructure, services, and local economy in 2017.

Speaking at the launch, Special Coordinator Kaag noted that "the New York Declaration on large movements of migrants and refugees has given us a global compact based on the principle of global responsibility-sharing. This now has to be implemented."



Photo courtesy of: © UNSCOL/Dalati

UNHCR Lebanon Achievements at a Glance

Syria Refugee Response
January - March 2017



KEY FIGURES 2017

1,011,366

453m

9%

29

Registered refugees

UNHCR funding requirement (millions USD)

Funding level

Partners



Funding for UNHCR Lebanon was also received through private donations from Austria, Italy, Singapore, and the United States of America



PROTECTION

Reached January - March

Target if Fully Funded

Legal counselling	13,548	37,000
Persons submitted for humanitarian admission and resettlement	2,942	4,200
Persons of Concern assisted in detention	1,302	1,800
Children assisted through case management	1,038	5,000
GBV actors trained	117	500
Specific needs cases referred through volunteers	6,795	51,100
Outreach Volunteers mobilized	595	1,000
Community centres supported	34	50
Individuals participating in community centre activities	30,326	240,000
Individuals receiving emergency and protection cash	3,620	6,200
Individuals receiving information on birth registration through individual counseling	6,231	20,500



EDUCATION

Children supported for primary education in school year 2016/2017 through co-financing support to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE):

1st and 2nd shift	39,488	50,000
Children supported for vocational education in school year 2016/2017	1,563	10,000



HEALTH

Individuals receiving primary health care (including reproductive and mental health)	48,804	300,000
Individuals benefitting from life-saving and obstetric referral healthcare	20,414	100,000



BASIC ASSISTANCE

Reached January - March

Target if Fully Funded

Households assisted at least once with multipurpose cash grant	33,524	82,000
Households receiving seasonal support (winter 2016/2017)	164,673	168,000
Households receiving fuel vouchers and/or in-kind items (winter 2016/2017)	8,676	10,000



SHELTER

Individuals benefitting from the provision of weatherproofing and shelter kits	19,172	233,390
Individuals benefitting from an occupancy agreement in rehabilitated buildings	146	73,050



WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

Sanitation infrastructure, maintenance, desludging	5,958	63,860
Hygiene promotion campaigns, hygiene items	1,469	93,237
Access to safe water	6,825	350,000

CSP

INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

2017 Planned Budget

Institutional support (rehabilitation of infrastructure, staffing and training, equipment, supplies, medications and vaccines)	22 million
Community-based projects (health, education, livelihoods, WASH, roads and communities facilities)	14.5 million
Total invested	36.5 million

© UNHCR/ Diégo Ibarra Sánchez



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi visits the Taalabay Mixed Intermediate School in the Bekaa Valley. High Commissioner Grandi visited the school in February as part of an official visit to Lebanon and Syria. He was the first high-level UN official to visit Syria following the most recent ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey.