

Syria Crisis: An Overview of the Humanitarian Situation



Norwegian People's Aid



OLOF PALME
INTERNATIONAL
CENTER



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SOLIDAR is a European network of 59 NGOs
working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide.

SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in
three primary areas: social affairs, international cooperation and education.

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HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

The conflict in Syria began on 15 March 2011 with public demonstrations as part of the wider Arab spring, and developed into a nationwide uprising, and then a full-scale civil war. Protesters have demanded the end to nearly five decades of Ba'ath Party Rule, as well as the resignation of the president Bashar Al Asad. Syrian government characterises the insurgency as "armed terrorist groups". According to various sources, including the United Nations, between 34,000 and 40,000 people have been killed so far, of which about half were civilians, but also including approximately 15,000 armed combatants from both the Syrian army and rebel forces. According to the UN, between 500,000 to 1.0 million Syrians have been displaced within the country, but figures could also be higher. To escape the violence, hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees have fled the country to neighbouring Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Situation in Jordan

Since the beginning of the unrest in Syria at the start of 2011, Jordan has received more Syrians fleeing the conflict than any neighbouring country. From March 2011, according to Government of Jordan figures, more than 190,000 Syrians have sought refuge in Jordan; and UNHCR expect up to 250 000 by the end of the year. Jordan has left its borders open to Syrians and has a favourable protection climate which has supported the population movement.

Syrians have scattered throughout Jordan, with the largest concentrations in the border areas of Irbid and Mafraq governates and the capital Amman, as well as in other

governates throughout the country. With the intensification of the conflict from July 2012 onwards, there has been a surge in the number of refugees. August witnessed a record number of arrivals, peaking at over 1,000 per day. To date, over 53,000 Syrians have been registered officially with UNHCR. The Government of Jordan's figure of 190,000 refugees is based on border statistics and other estimates. Almost 32,000 Syrians are in the newly established Za'atri camp in Mafraq, and a further 1,400 in King Abdullah Park and Cyber City refugee sites in the North. The population of Za'atri camp is increasing rapidly.

Syrian refugees in Jordan are facing many kinds of shortages in basic needs and rights. There is a quite stable and relatively large number of actors in Jordan that are working in improving refugees situation with a large experience providing services and goods, as they are running projects related to refugees since the flux of Iraqi refugees started in 2003. Nevertheless, the needs of Syrian refugees are far away from being completely covered. More specifically, the conditions of the non-registered by UNHCR refugees are especially critical, as they don't have the right to be assisted by UN agencies and other institutions which require this condition to enter into their programs. The refugees in the camps that are registered by UNHCR face also a difficult situation but, at least, they have support and a clear reference. In general, the refugees have insufficient information about rights and assistance providers, but, for sure, this situation becomes more serious in the case of non registered refugees.

Situation in Lebanon

As of 7 November, 2012, UNHCR reports that there are 82,690 registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon and additional more than 30,000 refugees waiting for registration making the total of Syrian refugees in Lebanon 112,939. Local organisations claim that the number of refugees in Lebanon is higher than that as a large number of them are either afraid to register with the UN or unaware of the registration process. The number of refugees coming to Lebanon is increasing and the conditions in which most of them are living are below standards. It is estimated that around half of all displaced Syrians are children and adolescents, who continue to face interruption of schooling, limited access to basic services, and psychosocial distress caused by witnessing violence and displacement.

The Lebanese Government, represented by the Higher Relief Committee, began providing food and medical aid to the refugees yet it was halted on 10 July as they claimed lack of funds. MoSA is mobilising local Social Development Centers (SDCs) as much as possible to support the emergency response by outreach activities and community-based interventions both in the areas of primary health care (including vaccination), child protection and Early Childhood Development (ECD). Yet, in general, the response from the Lebanese Government is still considered insufficient. UNHCR revised the Regional Response Plan for Syrian refugees, launched by UN agencies and NGO partners, jointly appealing to help Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey. So far the appeal has been funded by 33% of the total needs.

An influx of Palestinians from Syria into Lebanon is an issue of particular concern. According to UNRWA's report on 2 November, around 1,860 Palestinian families from Syria have taken refuge in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. According to

the popular committees in the camps the figures are higher. The majority of these families are staying with host families inside the camps as they cannot afford independent housing. Others are being assisted in paying rent. They are entering Lebanon by a short-term visa (7 to 15 days) that costs 25,000 LBP (around 17 USD) per person and can be extended for an additional month by paying 50,000 LBP. And delay in residency in Lebanon past the allowed duration is subjected to a daily fine. As most of these refugees have to stay in Lebanon more than the allowed duration, they are at risk of becoming illegal residents in Lebanon. If they decide to leave Lebanon after the crisis ends, they cannot afford paying the fine accumulated due to their long stay. With the difficult situations the Palestinians in Lebanon are already facing, the presence of the Syrian refugees has negatively affected the situation of both groups.

For the Palestinian refugees from Syria, UNRWA has also prepared an appeal for assistance of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan for a total of 54 million USD for six months. The total appeal for Lebanon from this amount is 8.26 million USD covering areas of health, food, shelter, education, non-food items, and environmental health services.

Situation in Iraq

48,390 refugees are registered by UNHCR inside Iraq per 7 November, and the influx has been increasing. The major influx has been into Kurdistan region of Iraq. Since the crisis erupted in Syria there has been a steady influx, initially many young men fleeing military service, but also families. During the last months there has been a drastic increase and now up to 400 to 500 refugees coming on daily basis, mainly families. Border crossings between Kurdistan region and Kurdish areas in Syria are open, but controlled by Kurdish guerilla related to PKK. Humanitarian aid is as far

as we are informed being allowed from Kurdistan region in Iraq into Syria in spite of the border crossing not officially allowing this.

Crossing into Iraq properly has for political reasons been restricted, but following the reopening of Al Qa'im border crossing on 18 September 2012, 120 refugees were allowed to cross, including families with children, women, as well as the elderly and injured persons. Most were directed to the new camp of Al Qa'im which currently provides shelter to 2,647 individuals.

Iraqi and Kurdish authorities as well as UN-agencies and NGOs are assisting the refugees and the work in the Kurdish region to provide and speed up the process of issuance of resident permits for the refugees.

Situation in Turkey

There are clashes along the border to Turkey which also are affecting the border crossings. According to figures provided by the Turkish government there are currently 111,890 Syrian refugees registered in Turkey. The camps of Syrian refugees in Turkey are mainly managed by Turkish authorities, thus the role of UN and NGOs seems to be limited. Some humanitarian aid is being transported from Turkey into Syria, but information is lacking in this regard. The situation needs further assessment.

SOLIDAR Organisations and their Approach to Syria

There is all reason to expect that the humanitarian situation in Syria will be deteriorating. Internal displacement is increasing and host communities' ability to assist is being exhausted, destruction of residential areas in cities and towns are massive, infrastructure is being damaged and production and transport harmed. Most of these areas are accessible for formal organisations, except partly Syrian Red Crescent and some UN-agencies.

Assistance inside Syria is mainly provided through local networks and committees, informal channels through systems where Syrians transfer financial support to their families in country and to local committees on the ground which organise humanitarian assistance.

At the same time it is expected that the influx of refugees to neighbouring countries will increase. Total number of refugees is currently almost 400,000, a sharp increase during the course of the year from only 10,000 in January. The capability in all the surrounding host countries to care for the refugees is under severe pressure, and the crisis is also challenging the political stability in the region, particularly in Lebanon. For organisations in the SOLIDAR-network there are currently three relevant angles of approach:

1. Humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.
2. Training of Syrian activists on issues related to democratisation and human rights, organisation and use of media
3. Humanitarian assistance into Syria in cooperation with local organisations

Annex 1: SOLIDAR-assistance in the Syrian Crisis

Organisation	Jordan	Lebanon	Iraq	Syria	Global
SOLIDAR Switzerland		Humanitarian assistance to refugees from Syria, Palestinian and Syrian, residing in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Cooperation with NPA Norway			Planning of channelling humanitarian assistance into Syria in cooperation with local organisations and networks, both from Iraq – Kurdistan region into Kurdish controlled areas, from Lebanon through Palestinian camps, Yarmouk and Khan el Sheeh. Other options are being explored
NPA Norway		Mine Action programme with field office in Jableh, coordinating with Mine Action programme in Lebanon ready to assess the contamination, provide mine risk education and conduct clearance	Humanitarian assistance to refugees from Syria, Palestinian and Syrian, residing in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon – Focus food, NFI and winterisation. Cooperation with SOLIDAR Suisse	Training of Syrian activists in Duhuk, Kurdistan region Planning to expand the humanitarian program to Bekaa and North Lebanon. Training of Syrian activists.	Training of Syrian activists in Duhuk, Kurdistan region Preparing for humanitarian assistance from Iraq into Syria.
ARCI-ARCS Italy				Fundraising for humanitarian assistance to refugees from Syria, Palestinian and Syrian, residing in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon in cooperation with NPA Norway	

SI Spain	<p>Fundraising for humanitarian assistance to refugees from Syria; short term food security, shelter and NFIs in governorates of Mafraq, Zarqa, Irbid and Ajlun.</p> <p>MPDL Spain</p> <p>Making assessment of needs of Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Syria in Zarqa.</p>	<p>Improving the capacities of some agencies to better identify and include the needs of persons with disabilities in the assessments made to the Syrian refugees.</p> <p>Fundraising for providing non food items and wintering issues to the Palestinian refugees from Syria arriving to South Beirut Camps.</p> <p>Fundraising for Humanitarian assistance to refugees from Syria in Lebanon focus on improvement of health conditions of Syrian refugees with disabilities in the Central and West Bekaa and South Lebanon regions.</p>	
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Annex 2: Focal points SOLIDAR members for the Syrian Crisis

In case one would like to receive more information about the activities conducted by the mentioned SOLIDAR member organisations, please get in touch with the focal points for the Syrian Crisis.

Organisation	Name contact person	E-mail address	(Direct) Telephone	Fields of responsibility
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