

Save the Children's Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon OVERVIEW

Overall Context

During the first fifteen months of the crisis, the total number of Syrians who had fled to neighbouring countries was estimated at 83,000. In the second fifteen months that number soared past 2 million, with one million refugees fleeing Syria between March and August 2013 alone.¹ By the end of February 2014 that number had exceeded 2.5 million and the most recent UN projections are for four million refugees by the end of 2014 with another 9.3 million people within Syria needing emergency assistance.

Within Syria the numbers of displaced have risen fourfold in the past year and are now believed to exceed 6.5 million². Many more are trapped inside their homes and districts because of blockades and restrictions on movement, or because they are too old, ill or poor to seek refuge elsewhere, are as, if not more vulnerable.

The international community is struggling to respond to the humanitarian situation inside Syria and throughout the region. While world leaders are unable to agree on how to end the civil war, they seem to agree that humanitarian assistance is needed for the region as well as greater access within Syria for INGO's and UN agencies. But the UN's \$4.4 billion for 2013 was less than 60 per cent funded and funds are neither sufficient now nor likely to be sustainable in the longer term.

The UNHCR launched its biggest ever appeal for its regional response plan for 2014, asking donors for \$6.5 billion based on predictions that nearly three-quarters of Syria's population will need help in 2014. UN estimates indicate that close to half of Syria's population has been displaced, while the World Food Programme says a similar number need "urgent, life-saving food assistance".

Given the present stalemate, the lack of political progress at the Geneva 11 talks, the unwillingness of global leaders to press for robust action within the UN Security Council or thus far act upon the UN Presidential Statement urging humanitarian access, or agree on a resolution mandating humanitarian access, the most likely scenario is that the war and the suffering it is visiting upon the Syrian people will continue for the foreseeable future and Syrian families will continue to flee their homes to places they believe to provide them with a safer alternative.

Lebanon Context

Substantially more refugees have come here to Lebanon than to any other country in the region. The UNHCR puts the number of refugees that are registered or awaiting registration is more than 930,000⁴. The Lebanese government claims the number has already reached 1.3 million⁵. It is anticipated that by the end of 2015, there will be two million refugees in Lebanon, a number equal to half of the current Lebanese population.

¹ OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin Syria Issues 1-33

² According to official UN figures for April 22 2013, there were 4.25 million IDPs. This figure, which was still in use in September 2013, doesn't include internal movement between those dates. The higher figure of 5 million results combines OCHA figures with estimates from the seven northern governorates of Syria assessed as part of the Second Joint Rapid Assessment in Northern Syria (J-RANS II); see further, Syria Needs Analysis Project (SNAP), *Regional Analysis Syria*, 30 May 2013, <http://acaps.org/en/pages/syria-snap-project>, p. 9; OCHA, *OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin Syria*, Issue 33, 9 September 2013, www.unocha.org/crisis/syria

³ **BBC News** 'Syrian National Council rejects Geneva Peace talks' October 13, 2013 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24513538>

⁴ **UNHCR** <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php>

⁵ It has been acknowledged that the number of refugees registered or awaiting registration does not include all those who have fled.

partners and donors agreed to support Lebanon in offsetting the impact of the Syrian conflict on its economy and social sectors. A four track process was agreed that would provide immediate, interim and long term support, targeting communities that are directly affected by the crisis, supporting projects with a development impact as well as infrastructures, and longer term private sector investments. Whether the international community will follow through with the necessary funding is another matter entirely.

Save the Children is seeing an increase in negative coping mechanisms by host and refugee communities, including early marriage and early pregnancy, child labour, school dropout, especially amongst refugee children, poor nutrition and a spike in disease and illnesses related to poor hygiene and sanitation. There has been continued concern about inter-household tension, host community burnout, discrimination and bullying among both children and adults.

While the refugee population has a multitude of vulnerabilities and urgent needs that require an immediate response with basic life-saving interventions – health, FSL, CP and Shelter amongst them – the effect of the crisis has spread beyond the refugees and is placing intolerable pressure on the already fragile social fabric of the Lebanese population. Communities who once welcomed Syrian refugees are now becoming increasingly hostile as they are also suffering from this prolonged crisis in a country which is unable to cope with such overwhelming demand. In order to help diffuse this escalating tension, it is vital that aid interventions to assist vulnerable Syrian refugee households, also target vulnerable Lebanese communities.

Raising awareness within the international community and with stakeholders donors and urging them to respond to these needs is a key advocacy priority. Other priorities include:

- Raising awareness through our advocacy, media and communications about a likely drought in 2014 and the acute needs of newly arriving refugees
- Working with MEHE, UN agencies, donors and other groups to ensure all school age children are in education programmes by September 2014
- Pressing the need for unfettered access for humanitarian assistance into Syria
- Raising awareness amongst donors about the importance of targeting both Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities for assistance

¹⁵ Jeremy Loveless, “Crisis in Lebanon: camps for Syrian refugees?” *Forced Migration Review*, no. 43, May 2013, p. 66-68,

¹⁶ Loveday Morris and Suzan Haidamous, “Blast seen as omen of ‘dark era’ for Lebanon,” *The Washington Post*, 16 August 2013, www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/beirut-blast-seen-as-omen-of-dark-era-for-lebanon/2013/08/16/a5ddc3ee-06ac-11e3-bfc5-406b928603b2_story.html

Antoine Ghattas Saab and Wassim Mroueh, “Militant cells planning more attacks,” *The Daily Star*, July 12 2013, www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jul-12/223392-militant-cells-planning-more-attacks.ashx#axzz2djo2r6YA

¹⁷<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Oct-14/234567-bahia-hariri-stresses-need-to-protect-jezzine-christians.ashx#axzz2hgyJl>

Last year, the Lebanese government asked for an additional \$450 million to support its education, health and other infrastructures that have threatened to implode under the weight of the crisis.¹¹ It has stated repeatedly that its border will remain open and Syrians will not be returned, but there have been calls from prominent politicians, including the newly appointed Foreign Minister, Gebron Bassil, to close its borders. Over the past six months, the government has announced a series of measures that would make it more difficult for Syrian refugees to be allowed to cross Lebanon's border¹².

There is no legal obligation on Lebanon to receive refugees and the Lebanese people have shown great generosity, particularly in the early stages of the crisis, in welcoming refugees. But the government has not ratified the 1951 Convention on Refugees. Its sole agreement with UNHCR consists of an MOU which dates back to 2003 and was aimed at a far smaller number of Iraqi refugees – around 10,000 – who were entering the country.

Around 85 per cent of registered Syrian refugees cross into Lebanon through official border entry posts. They are given a six month residency permit including a limited right to work which is renewable for another six months. After that they must pay a \$200 renewal fee per person – an amount that is unfeasible for most given the limited employment opportunities, plummeting wages in the casual labour sectors and soaring rents and cost of living. However, the number of refugees that are arriving through non-official routes is increasing. In February this year, some 10,000 refugees crossed into Arsal following a fresh upsurge of fighting in the Qalamoun area. In November 2013, an offensive by regime forces prompted a massive exodus of more than 20,000 refugees into Arsal in a matter of days. Currently the population of Arsal is made up of 35,000 Lebanese and an estimated 50,000 refugees. The same pattern is repeated in other border towns in Lebanon, including Bar Elias, a small town which has seen its population more than double from 60,000 to around 130,000 in the past year, with no corresponding revenues to deal with the surge in demand for water, sanitation, electricity, and other basic services.

The Lebanese population, initially welcoming is now less so¹³, and there have been sporadic outbreaks of violence between host and refugee communities as well as an increasing number of evictions and incidents where refugees have been forced to leave informal settlements. A 2013 poll found that 52 percent of Lebanese respondents believed that Syrian refugees pose a threat to national security and stability and more than 90 percent said that the Syrian conflict has had a negative impact on the Lebanese government's capacity to protect Lebanese citizens and to govern. Two-thirds of those polled said the UN should open camps in Lebanon for Syrian refugees¹⁴.

The Lebanese government has consistently opposed the creation of refugee camps for the Syrian refugees and opposes any INGO policies or programmes – including livelihoods trainings and shelter programmes that would provide more durable structures - which might be viewed as enabling refugees to prolong their stay in Lebanon, notwithstanding the predictions of a protracted conflict which will likely mean refugees may not be able to return to Syria for years. However, the policy relating to refugee camps appears to be softening and may change if there is a sudden and persistent upswing in the numbers and UNHCR has already identified possible sites for a number of small camps with populations that would not exceed 20,000, and has built 'transit sites' in Arsal.

¹¹ SNAP, *Regional Analysis Syria: Part II – Host Countries*, 26 June 2013, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/a-annex---information-products-overview-june-2013.pdf>

¹² Daily Star <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Aug-14/227277-aouns-bloc-proposes-closing-borders-to-syrian-refugees.ashx>

¹³ Daily Star <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Oct-07/233753-jezzine-evicts-some-30-syrian-refugee-families.ashx#axzz2hgyJlliW>

¹⁴ Fafo, *Local response to Syrian refugees in Lebanon: Summary of Poll Findings*, May 2013, www.fafo.no/ais/mideast/lebanon/91369-syrian-refugees.html

Lebanon and Syria have a complex and frequently hostile history. Until 2005, Syria occupied parts of Lebanon for decades until it was pressured to leave following the assassination of President Hariri. There are many close family relationships and even before the crisis 15 percent of Syria's workforce – an estimated 500,000 migrants – was in Lebanon.

The involvement of Hezbollah as a key supporter of the Assad regime in Syria is a serious concern. Hezbollah, one of the most powerful political and military groups in Lebanon, has been sending fighters to support Assad forces and their involvement was widely believed to have helped reverse the momentum of the conflict earlier this year when government forces recaptured the strategically significant town of Quaysr. The security situation in Lebanon deteriorated sharply during the summer with massive car bombs in Beirut and Tripoli¹⁶ that killed dozens of people and injured hundreds more. There have been many smaller incidents and the situation in Tripoli, where a large Sunni population, including as many as 200,000 Syrian refugees, co-exist uneasily alongside a pro-Assad Alawite population of around 35,000. In recent months outbreaks of violence in Tripoli have become more frequent and protracted.

Meanwhile, The Al-Qaeda-linked [Abdullah Azzam Brigades](#) has become a deadly new presence in Lebanon's political and military arena. The group has been responsible for several suicide bombings in Lebanon since its attack on the Iranian embassy in November which killed 23 people and injured more than a hundred. It describes its attacks on targets in Hezbollah dominated areas as reprisals for Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime. There is a sense that the edges of the fragile sectarian, religious and political patchwork quilt that has held the country together since 1990 are starting to fray. The ongoing string of bombings linked to the Syrian war has left Lebanon on edge and raised international concern as militant Sunni factions have warned they will continue their strategy of taking the Syrian battle to the Lebanese homeland of Hezbollah.

Future context: the coming months

Put simply, even without the Syria refugee crisis, Lebanon is in a state of increasing upheaval and high vulnerability. We are dealing with a crisis on two fronts – providing emergency assistance to the refugees and critically, gearing up for the humanitarian consequences that stem from the deteriorating political and economic situation in Lebanon itself.

Now that the most severe winter months have passed, Lebanon is facing a new threat; the very poor rainfall this winter means that the threat of drought – with all of the health issues and potential for escalating tensions that it brings – is now very high. Already, wells have become contaminated and the municipality leaders in Bekaa cited it as their biggest fear during recent briefings with SC Lebanon's advocacy team. Meanwhile as the number of refugees continues to increase, the need for shelter becomes ever more urgent. The existing rental market is close to saturation and data gathered by the UNHCR shelter team shows that an increasing proportion of new arrivals are seeking shelter in makeshift, substandard accommodation.

Conditions for families living in informal settlements are abysmal. Many of the estimated 450 informal settlements in the region lack even the most basic water and sanitation services. Small children often have to walk long distances along dangerous roads to access clean water. Raw sewage and rodent infestation provide additional health hazards. Given the surge in numbers living in informal settlements and substandard accommodation – now thought to be well over 250,000 people, a drought and a chronic lack of water this summer would compound their misery and vulnerability to disease.

Unless we act effectively and quickly, tens of thousands of children will face increased risk of illness and disease this summer. In the context of drought, providing adequate WASH through our shelter programme is a life-saving measure.

Struggling host communities also need help to cope with the additional cost of living imposed by the Lebanese winter as increased poverty levels in already poor localities, combined with a spiraling refugee caseload equate to high vulnerability and increased risk of destabilization and civil unrest.

In Lebanon, there are 206 such localities according to the UNHCR and the Government of Lebanon's vulnerability mapping, most of them are in the northern and eastern regions of Lebanon. We are working in these localities with field offices in Tripoli, Bekaa, and Akkar, providing services to host communities and refugees alike, focusing also on supporting newly arrived refugee families.

How we propose to respond

Save the Children Lebanon embarked on its biggest ever humanitarian project to support vulnerable families during the 2013/2014 winter in Lebanon. Having raised some \$20 million, this has been used to fund a new arrivals and winterization programme, which helped to ameliorate the worst effects of the Lebanon winter for more than 70,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees. Our comprehensive approach means that thousands of newly arrived families have, and continue to receive shelter support, cash, vital non-food items such as mattresses, blankets and basic cooking utensils. We also continue to provide integrated support through our health, education and child protection sectors, which are also rapidly expanding to meet needs.

Our winterization programme is providing **12,140 families** with monthly cash grants to help them equip themselves with stoves, fuel and basic essentials throughout the winter. Families living in sub-standard accommodation have been receiving Quick Fix Kits to help repair and improve their existing shelter.

The Lebanon country programme is in the process of a massive scale up; we have reached more than **201,767 individuals** beneficiaries to date and plan to reach 400,000 by the end of 2015.

Sectoral Responses

Shelter:

In the context of the harsh Bekaa and Akkar winter, providing adequate shelter is a life saving measure. Save the Children was the largest shelter actor in Lebanon for 2013 in terms of reach. We targeted the most vulnerable families living in the worst living conditions and focused on high altitude areas that are subject to the lowest temperatures and highest rainfall. Save the Children is now leading the Shelter Working Group review of shelter-winterisation activities and is leading on the development of standard kits and operating procedures. This gives us a unique opportunity for the views and needs of children to be considered. With the arrival of fierce winter storms in early December, the need to protect children and vulnerable families against the elements took on a new urgency. Our winterization campaign, which got underway in September 2013, had reached more than 90 per cent of our targeted families before storm Alexa had started to wreak havoc in the northern and eastern regions. In preparation for the onset of winter, Save the Children had provided winterization shelter kits to 6,682 households. Our support helped to protect more than 35,000 of the most vulnerable refugees from the ravages of winter. In addition we provided New Arrival shelter kits to a further 1,900 households and New Arrival NFI's (kitchen sets, mattresses, blankets and hygiene kits) to almost **30,000 people**.

By the end of December 2013, the Lebanon Shelter team had finished the first phase of their winterisation programme for Informal Settlements and unfinished buildings. UNHCR data shows Save the Children's shelter team distributed 9,249 shelter kits for winterisation during 2013, more than 35% of all winter kits distributed in Lebanon.

We have continued to distribute shelter kits to address on-going needs. These include New Arrivals, evictees and those who have experienced secondary displacement. The Shelter team has now distributed more than **11,000 shelter kits** to vulnerable families living in sub-standard shelters. This included a reactive distribution in areas of Tripoli + 5 that had received no assistance in preparation for Storm Alexa.

The majority of our distributions of winterization kits were to families living in informal settlements. These are highly vulnerable populations with large numbers of children. We **reached our initial target of 4,200 HH on schedule** and have **now reached a total of over 8,600 families in the Informal Settlements**. We have also supported vulnerable families in unfinished buildings with vouchers for shelter and emergency WASH materials.

The team has prioritised areas that have received no assistance from shelter agencies to date. This has included the more challenging areas of Lebanon such as Aarsal in North Bekaa and Wadi Khaled in Akkar. The highest concentrations of refugees in Lebanon are in the high altitude areas of Bekaa and Akkar.

The focus of the Shelter team is now on supporting new arrivals, evictees, those who have experienced secondary displacement or are without shelter. We are also working to increase longer-term capacity needs through our Rehabilitation activities. Our innovative scheme for the rehabilitation of unfinished buildings will expand through 2014. Under this scheme, vulnerable refugee households are provided with a conditional cash grant of **\$1,500** and the technical expertise to help them make substantial improvements to unfinished buildings they are renting. Landlords whose buildings benefit from Save the Children funded rehabilitations reduce rents and provide security of tenure in exchange. The result is families pay less rent for greatly improved accommodation and are protected from eviction by a year long rental agreement. The mutual benefits to the landlords and the refugee families help foster better relations between the communities.

Since November 2013, we have been running a large scale winterisation programme, providing cash & blankets to households in informal settlements and unfinished buildings in Bekaa and Akkar. By the end of December, we had reached a total of **4,000 households** (20,000 individuals approximately) and have now reached more than **7,000 households** (which equates to roughly **35,000 individuals** according to the national average household size, although our PDM is showing that the average household size in Akkar is tending to be significantly smaller, so we will in due course need to revise these numbers downwards slightly).

Through its Shelter and NFI programmes Save the Children has helped more than 50,000 of the most vulnerable refugees prepare for, and protect themselves against the winter conditions in the north and eastern regions of Lebanon.

Food Security & Livelihoods:

We will be building on our existing Food Security & Livelihoods programming throughout 2014 by scaling-up our programming through the provision of cash assistance for food and non-food needs for registered as well as unregistered refugees. We will continue to provide food parcels & cash assistance to newly arrived families in Akkar and Bekaa. We are also meeting the immediate food needs of approximately **16,000** registered refugee households throughout Akkar through the provision of e-vouchers (redeemable in local stores) in partnership with WFP.

Since November 2013, we have been running a large scale winterisation programme, providing cash & blankets to households in informal settlements and unfinished buildings in Bekaa and Akkar. By mid-January, we had reached more than **7,000 households** (approximately 35,000 individuals).

In communities where we are providing integrated shelter and winterisation support, we have been complementing this assistance with Community Support Projects (CSPs) intended to involve Syrian and Lebanese labour in community-led public works. This has been ongoing since December in **30 sites throughout the Bekaa involving 3,330 Lebanese and Syrian labourers and 10 sites in Eastern Akkar involving 2,220 workers**. In particular we will be improving the condition of Informal Settlements where we already provide shelter interventions.

As of January 2014, we are providing more sustainable income-generating activities in these locations through home-based skills development activities designed to meet the needs of the refugee population, with a particular focus on especially vulnerable households. Through this programme 800 women will benefit from skills training on home-based activities (food processing; soap production; dairy production etc.), combined with business management and entrepreneurship training.

Research carried out by Save the Children in July 2013 in Bekaa and Tripoli Governorate identified distinct opportunities for youth skills training and job matching in specific sectors. In particular, there are pockets of demand for specialised agricultural and vocational skills, and high demand for humanitarian skill sets. We used this research to design skills training options for youth depending on which sets of skills they felt were most useful to them. Participants receive cash assistance for attendance and the trainings run over a 3 month period. We are

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currently mentoring **110 youth** in Bekaa and **170 youth** in Tripoli in the first phase of these specialised training and support packages. In 2014, we will be scaling up these programmes, with the main objective being viable work outcomes for youth through humanitarian traineeships and apprenticeships in local businesses.

Save the Children has now benefitted more than 100,000 people through FSL activities to date.

Education:

The participation of Syrian children in the public education system has been set at a ceiling of **85,000 children** (45,000 in 1st shift and 40,000 in 2nd shift). Using UNHCR's current registration/ awaiting registration data, there are an estimated **500,000 children** of school going age in Lebanon, which means that the public education system and the Ministry's ceiling still fails to reach **415,000 Syrian children**. To address this deficit, Save the Children's Lebanon programme will also focus on delivering community-owned, driven, and managed education, potentially working in consortia with other INGOs. As part of our Back to School programme, **12,120 teachers and refugee children** have received teacher boxes, and **School-in-a-Box kits, providing them with stationery and learning materials**.

Save the Children continues to provide non-formal educational support to more than **4,100 children** through its accelerated learning programs and remedial classes.

Health:

We are providing free healthcare services for pregnant women and children (Syrian refugees and vulnerable host community families) in two clinics in Bekaa (Bar Elias and Qab Elias). We are currently seeing a patient flow rate of 3,000 cases per month.

By March 2014, we will be implementing a Health Voucher System, under numerous grants, which will guarantee free medical care for pregnant mothers, which includes antenatal care, medically assisted birth, including caesarians where required, and postnatal and infant visits for mothers and children under five. This will be implemented in the two clinics in Bekaa, as well as in clinics in Tripoli and Qobayat, which are about to open.

So far more than 14,414 women and children have received free health care in the two clinics in Bekaa, which we are currently supporting. We are also providing reproductive and sexual health awareness programmes for teens and adolescents. Our Health team has launched reproductive health sessions in Tripoli, Qobayat and Zahle. In Tripoli, the sessions have reached **49 adolescents aged 11-14 and 14 adolescents aged 15-18**. In addition to that, a session for parents was conducted in Bedawi to familiarize them with the information being given to adolescents. In Qobayat, we have trained **a total 1,562 10-14 year olds and 1,234 15-18 year olds with sessions on reproductive health**. Sessions for Bekaa, the sessions have reached 159 adolescents aged 11-18 so far. Save the Children is also distributing hygiene kits, mother kits, dignity kits and new born kits to vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee families.

Save the Children benefited more than 21,000 women and children through its health programme to date.

Child Protection:

More than **1,400 children** regularly attend activities in our Child Friendly Spaces and we plan to at least double these numbers over the coming months including through more innovative psychosocial out-reach and mobile activities prioritizing informal settlements. In Tripoli, we are also operating a drop-in CFS located at the only permanent UNHCR registration center in North Lebanon. To date, **11,000 children** have benefitted from our recreational activities in the centre.

Mothers support groups, positive parenting programmes and community mobilization activities will continue to be a central component of the current response as a way to strengthen resilience and contribute to increased protection of children at both the family and community level. Mainstreaming of child protection interventions in other sectors, primarily education, remains a priority to address children's needs in a more holistic way and to scale up coverage.

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Providing adolescents and youth with life skills training and age and gender appropriate opportunities for social integration is critically important when you have a society as fragile and volatile as Lebanon with large numbers of disaffected young people. Youth unemployment and lack of hope can very quickly increase young people's vulnerabilities and lead to societal violence and conflict. In the current context, the risk of "militancy" of youth is high across the whole political and confessional spectrum. We are planning to have 400 youth entering life skills and other training as a part of our SIDA HOM projects across Tripoli and Bekaa, and a further 700 as part of a UNICEF supported child protection project in Akkar. New implementation strategies are being devised, in close consultation with other sectors, to substantially scale up child protection targets in 2014 both for school aged children and adolescents and youth. Piloting child protection case management working in targeted areas will ensure we respond to the most urgent needs whilst contributing to strengthening existing and emerging local systems and structures.

Save the Children benefited 31,382 children, and 5,449 adults through its Child Protection activities during 2013.

WASH:

With regard to waste management and sanitation, services are unable to keep up with demand. There is very little access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation facilities in the refugee settlement areas and this is causing, and will continue to cause the spread of disease. These settlements are also plagued by rodents and parasites as piles of rubbish are allowed to accumulate for lengthy periods. We are currently planning our Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) interventions and are including WASH components into our current programming.