

POLICY UPDATE

Syria's Crisis in Europe

It's not a European crisis. It's a Syrian crisis coming to Europe.



Summary

Syria's crisis is no longer regional. The effects of the crisis now reach into Europe. The latest wave of fast-moving migrants includes refugees from Syria and Iraq. They join other persecuted groups and migrants surging towards the European Union.

More than four years on, Syria's crisis is unabated. The number of Syrian refugees is increasing. As the number of Syrians fleeing persecution and imminent danger continues to increase while the capacity of countries bordering Syria continues to decrease, many are now travelling to Europe. Despite their own diminishing ability to cope, host countries continue to help those desperately fleeing the violence in Syria and Iraq.

As their resources become further depleted, others must step in to do more. Global funding contributions to both the Syrian Response Plan and Syria Refugee Plan have not yet met donor commitments pledged. Despite working harder to become more innovative, cost-efficient and effective, humanitarian and development actors are finding that needs continue to outstrip available resources.

In the wake of increased levels of refugees and fallout from the Syrian crisis, a long-term, international plan that emphasizes burden-sharing and overrides policies that were meant for more conventional times needs to be put in place. Moving forward towards this goal:

- Governments must provide asylum and protection to refugees, both in Europe and worldwide.
- Donors must deliver on commitments made to support Syria's Response and Refugee Plans.
- New host countries willing to take significant numbers of refugees must emerge.
- Existing United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Syria must be implemented.

REFUGEES FROM SYRIA

According to UNHCR, 381,412 people have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to journey towards Europe in 2015.¹ This number is expected to grow to 400,000 by the end of 2015.² The latest wave of fast-moving migrants includes refugees from Syria and Iraq.³ They join other persecuted groups and migrants surging towards the European Union.

There are now more than 4 million Syrian refugees living outside Syria.⁴ The majority of the refugees are concentrated in three countries: Turkey (hosting 1,939,999), Lebanon (hosting 1,113,941) and Jordan (hosting 628,887).⁵

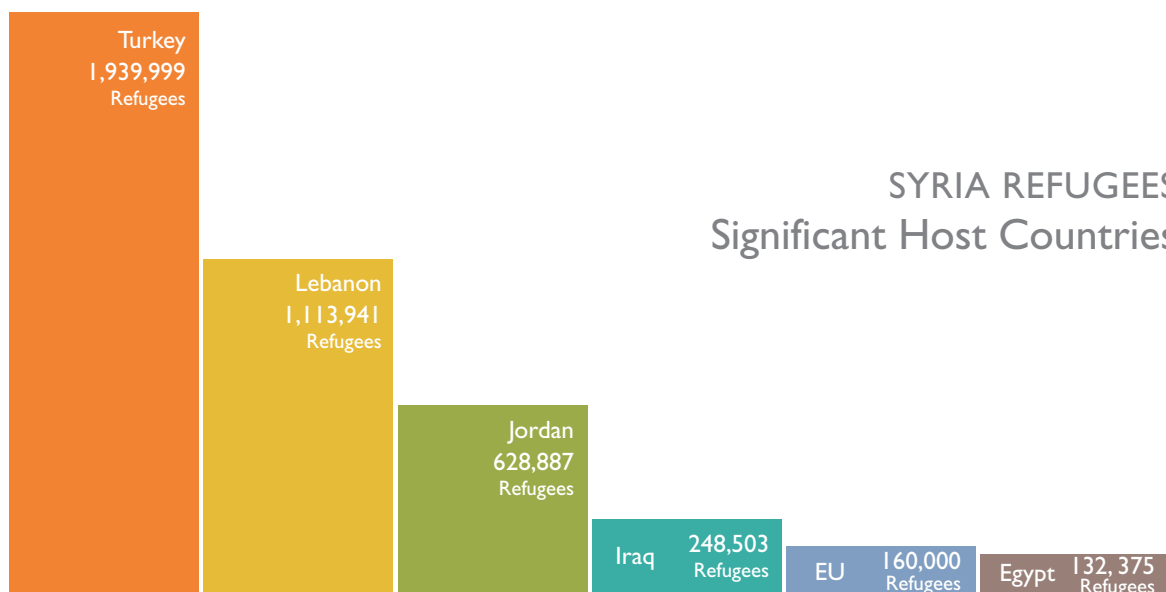
As the Syrian conflict expands into new territory to include areas in Iraq, new rounds of violence and persecution have forced civilians and people who had already been displaced internally to flee across borders. Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by all parties to the conflict are by far the primary cause of civilian deaths and injuries. Every single child in Syria today under the age of 5 years knows only life in a war zone.⁶

The number of Syrian refugees is increasing because the number of Syrians fleeing persecution and imminent danger is increasing.

CURRENT HOST COUNTRIES ARE WEARY PARTNERS

The magnitude of the crisis has overwhelmed Syria's neighbours. Strains on infrastructure and public services, security concerns and fears over the long-term presence of refugees have led governments to put increased restrictions aimed at stemming the flow of asylum seekers in place while also encouraging refugees who are already in-country to return to Syria or to seek asylum in third countries.⁷

The risk of instability in countries bordering Syria should not be underestimated.



UNHCR Statistical Snapshots Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and the European Union, www.unhcr.org

¹ UNHCR (2015), Refugee/Migrant Emergency Refugee Response – Mediterranean, <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.html>; EU Observer, 'UN Asks Europe to Relocate More Refugees,' (September 9, 2015), <https://euobserver.com/migration/130174> (last accessed September 9, 2015).

² Ibid.

³ UNHCR (2015) 'Mediterranean Crisis 2015 at six months: refugee and migrant numbers highest on record,' 1 July 2015, UNHCR stating one third of men, women and children crossing the Mediterranean towards Europe are Syrian. See www.unhcr.org/5592b9b36.html.

⁴ 7.6 million Syrians are displaced within the borders of Syria and 4 million are refugees living outside of Syria. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

⁵ OCHA Updated Overview: 2015 Syria Response Plan and 2015-2016 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, 31 March 2015 https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Syria/Overview%20of%202015%20Response%20Plans%20for%20Syria%20Crisis_150322.pdf

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/651

⁷ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, accessed 16 February 2015, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#doc_3

The high concentration of people is further exacerbated by limited resources. The protracted crisis has slowly eaten away life savings and the assets offered by host communities. Syrian refugees living off savings are now destitute. Access to quality and affordable housing is restricted for local communities as rents have increased by as much as 400 per cent. Competition for jobs has led to rising social tension in countries where unemployment was already chronically high.⁸

All of these facts illustrate the deep sacrifices that host governments and communities in countries bordering Syria have made.

As their resources become further depleted, others must step in to do more. The risk of instability in countries bordering Syria should not be underestimated.⁹

GLOBAL FUNDING CONTRIBUTIONS LESS THAN PLEDGES¹⁰

Global funding contributions to both the Syrian Response Plan and Syria Refugee Plan have not yet met donor commitments pledged. Without these pledges in hand, current funding is not enough to sustain the levels and needs of refugees, especially children. Despite working harder to become more innovative, cost-efficient and effective, humanitarian and development actors are finding that needs continue to outstrip available resources.

Recommendations

Rather than investing efforts to address short-term consequences, Syria's crisis demands a long-term, international plan that emphasises burden-sharing and overrides policies that were meant for more conventional times.

Governments must provide asylum and protection to refugees, both in Europe and worldwide

Countries in the EU must urgently develop comprehensive integration policies for the arriving refugees and increase the number of refugees they are willing to accept. Countries affected by the rapid flow of refugees must organise an effective response to alleviate the treacherous effects on those desperate enough to challenge legal and physical barriers.

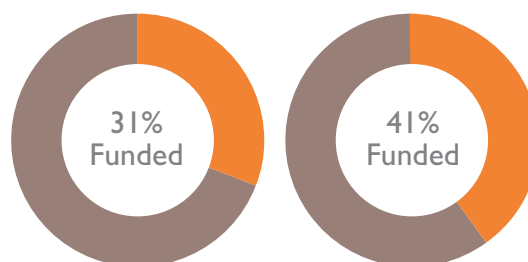
Donors must deliver on commitments made to support Syria's Response and Refugee Plans

It is essential that donor governments who made explicit pledges at the third donor pledging conference in Kuwait earlier this year convert these pledges into contributions. New funding contributions in recent days provide a strong foundation, but must continue past the media's recent attention on Europe.

New host countries willing to take significant numbers of refugees must emerge

World Vision welcomes the new efforts in Europe and calls on the European Union to follow through on UNHCR's request to guarantee relocation for 200,000 refugees. Increasing opportunities for resettlement and other forms of humanitarian admissions will only be possible if Europe shows the adequate level of solidarity and political will needed to respond to the unprecedented nature of this crisis.

Donor Commitments & Contributions to the Syria Crisis



Syria Response Plan
\$900 Million Received
\$1.98 Billion Pledged

Syria Refugee Plan
\$1.8 Billion Received
\$2.7 Billion Pledged

The World Food Programme reports that its current resources only allow the distribution of food packages until December 2015.

Financial Tracking Service (FTS) managed by OCHA,
<https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=special-syriancrisis>

⁸ Tim Midgley and Johan Eldebo in "Under Pressure: the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on host communities in Lebanon," (World Vision: July 2014).

⁹ International Crisis Group, 'Lebanon's Self-Defeating Survival Strategies', (20 July 2015) Middle East Report No. 160, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/160-lebanon-s-self-defeating-survival-strategies.pdf> (last accessed September 9, 2015).

¹⁰ 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015–2016 in Response to the Syria Crisis; Financial Tracking Service, The Financial Tracking Service (FTS) is a global, real-time database that records all reported international humanitarian aid contributions (including NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, bilateral aid, in-kind aid, and private donations). FTS is managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=special-syriancrisis>.

In the wider region, action by Arab Gulf countries, notably: Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain must also advance. World Vision applauds the Gulf States for their strong financial contribution of \$900 million,¹¹ however, the expansion of willing and able host countries is now in demand. The use of humanitarian visas, community-based private sponsorship, scholarships and facilitated access to family reunification should be further explored by the Gulf States.



Existing United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Syria must be implemented

Despite the unanimous adoption of UNSC resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191 in 2014, humanitarian access in Syria has decreased and 7.6 million people have been displaced and are in need of assistance. For tangible, measurable and meaningful humanitarian results on the ground, an end to violence and the development of political dialogue must occur. For this to happen, individual governments with real political, diplomatic and financial influence must take action to make sure these resolutions do not remain merely words on a page.

Conclusion

Syria's crisis is no longer regional. The effects of the crisis now reach into Europe. Leaders and policy makers in key humanitarian capitals and in corridors of wealth and prosperity can no longer underestimate the proportion of the crisis. Instead, they must act to create a long-term plan that mitigates further harm to civilians affected by the crisis living inside and outside of the conflict zone.

WV PROGRAMMING FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

Serbia: World Vision has been supporting parents and caregivers of young children in the Serbian camps, with “family packs” that contain basic items such as diapers, baby cream, baby soap, wet wipes, a toy, toothbrushes, toothpaste, hand sanitizer, shampoo; cotton swabs; as well as sanitary pads for mothers. World Vision is also currently transporting further aid to the camps in the coming days, which will include hygiene kits. World Vision hopes to help approximately 1,000 people in the first week.

Middle East: The work being done in Europe complements World Vision's long-standing relief efforts to help Syrian refugees in the Middle East, which began in May 2011. Since that time, World Vision has reached more than two million people with food and food vouchers, water, household and hygiene supplies and educational support for children who have been without access to schooling. World Vision is active in working with Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan and with displaced populations within Syria itself and in Iraq. World Vision is also assisting vulnerable local populations in Lebanon and Jordan.

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¹¹ Michael Stephens, 'Migrant crisis: Why the Gulf states are not letting Syrians in,' BBC News (September 7, 2015), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34173139> (last accessed September 9, 2015), in total the Gulf States have given over \$900m (£589m) to Syrian refugees.