



Western Balkans Refugee Response Report

September 2015-July 2016

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides a brief overview of World Vision's work in Serbia during the Western Balkans Refugee Response from September 2015 to July 2016.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

World Vision would like to acknowledge the generous support of governmental, multilateral and other agencies, as well as from private donors and individuals.

World Vision is an international Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

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Western Balkans Refugee Response Overview

In 2015, Europe witnessed the start of the highest migration flow since Second World War with more than one million men, women, children, boys and girls, young and old, singles and families, making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea. The majority crossed from Turkey to Greece through the Aegean Sea running from violence, persecution and fear in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries. Children were especially vulnerable on this long journey, often walking for weeks with limited access to food, water, adequate shoes and clothing. The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia reported that thousands of the children transiting through Serbia were separated and unaccompanied children, which made them even more vulnerable to deprivation, exploitation and violence.

World Vision initiated the Western Balkans Refugee Response in Serbia in September 2015 through mobile outreach teams delivering urgent aid in camps for refugees and along the border of Serbia with Hungary and Croatia; especially focusing on the most vulnerable groups including families, unaccompanied children, pregnant and lactating women.

With the closing of the border of Serbia with Hungary on September 15th 2015, refugees left camps for the actual border crossings, constantly moving and looking for entry points to Croatia. While borders remained closed for days, refugees waited in the open, without access to any infrastructure, sleeping in the corn fields and 'no man's land'¹,

relying only on life-saving support provided by NGOs. At this point, World Vision adjusted its work to ensure agile and mobile responses to the needs of refugees who were constantly 'on the move'. Parallel to distributions, World Vision begun with its child protection activities, opening Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) and Spaces for Women and Young Children (WAYCS) that provided most vulnerable refugees with the opportunity to rest, recuperate, play, receive psychosocial support and to raise awareness on critical safety and protection related issues, contributing to their ability to cope with the challenging events and uncertainty they were facing.

The influx of the refugees to Serbia continued in the following months, despite worsening weather conditions, with daily arrivals reaching up to 9,000 people in October 2015.

As the winter approached, World Vision expanded its work to the border of Serbia with Macedonia and started providing life-saving winterization support to ensure refugees are protected from the potentially catastrophic impact of the extremely low temperatures in Serbia.

On March 8th, the Balkan Route for refugees was officially closed, with World Vision continuing with provision of support to refugees who remained in Serbia.

¹ 'no man's land' is term used for area between two state borders that is unowned and uninhabited



154,117 refugees reached with food, non-food items, protection and psychosocial support.

World Vision's Western Balkans Refugee Response pioneered mobile, nimble approaches that effectively fulfilled the needs of the most vulnerable families and unaccompanied/separated children in search of a better life. We acknowledge the unique, complex risks and threats facing families and children on the move. The journey is long and wrought with peril. As our work deepened in the response it was critical to identify ways to address these very real challenges as one of very few humanitarian agencies responding.

We believe that it is not a crime to flee violence and seek asylum, in fact it is a fundamental human right. If we fail to recognize and protect these people, we fail as human beings, even worse, we may be taking a slippery slope towards creating a world in which human rights are only seen as belonging to those who hold a valid passport and visa.



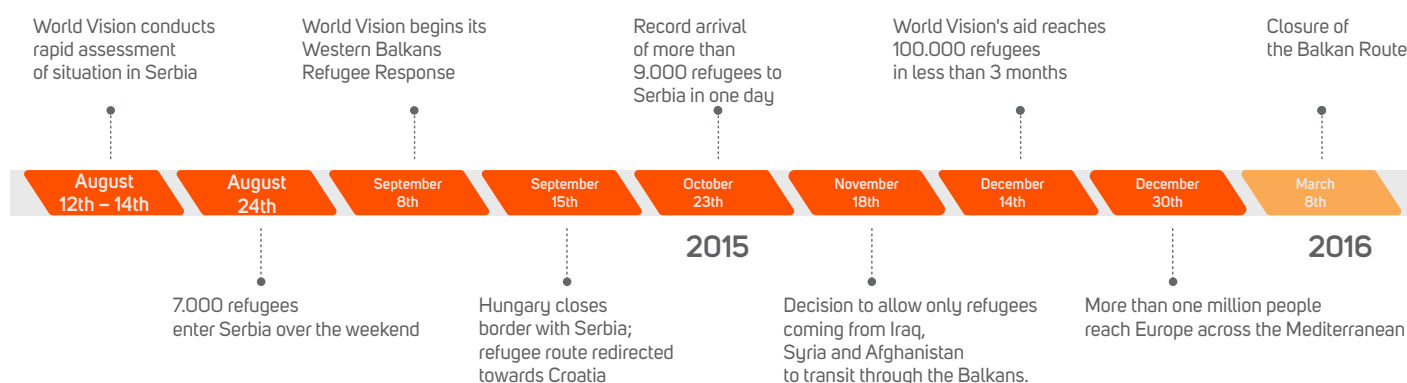
Sarah Bearup
National Director World Vision Bosnia and Herzegovina
Western Balkans Refugee Response

Map of Movement

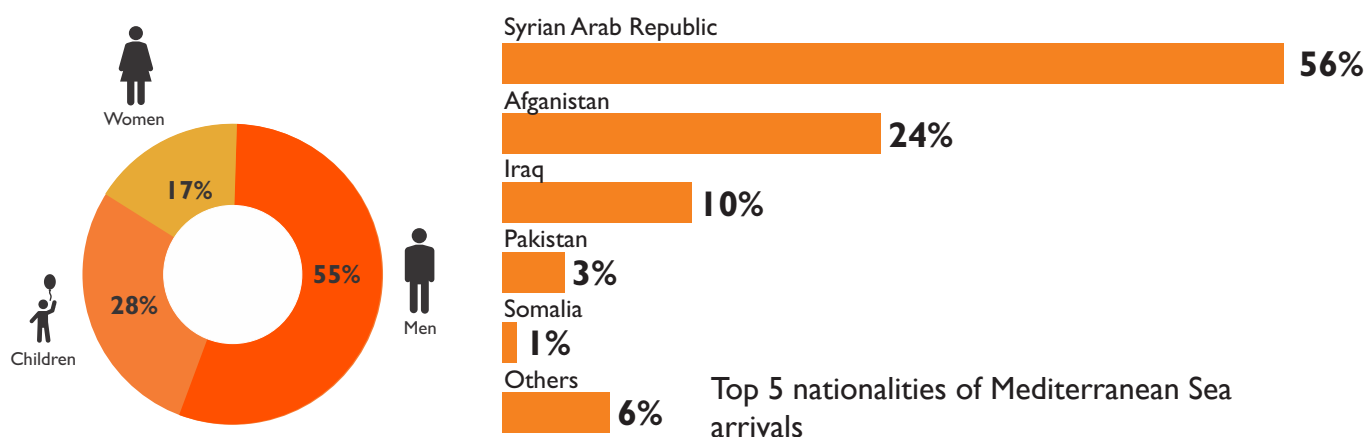
The rapidly changing situation and constant movement of refugees from one border point to another provided significant challenges for World Vision teams who worked at full scale to address the needs of the most vulnerable. The following map shows the main travel routes used by refugees at various points of time during 2015 and 2016.



Timeline of Events



Demographics



“Nothing but death behind us”

One thing is certain: for Mo Aziz and his family, there's no turning back to Syria. *“Life has stopped there,”* he says.

Mo Aziz completed two years of study at a university in Deir ez-Zor, Syria, a fact of which he's very proud. Despite intense fighting in the city – Syria's seventh largest and the home to several universities, according to Mo – classes continued. At the same time, armed forces attacked and took control of different parts of the city. Trade and transport were locked down, shutting out food supplies, and bringing the starving population to its knees.

“There was nothing but death behind us. We had to leave,” he says



The family sat on a mat in the shade of trees in a paved area near the border. They had slept on the ground near the border the night before. Teasadi, the mother, says “sleep” and pantomimes sleeping with her hands folded under her tilted head, then patting the ground.

Now she doesn't know when they'll move along and what their chances are for crossing the border from Serbia to Hungary. Last night while they were sleeping, the border was closed. Now the refugees have been told to move from one border crossing to another while they wait to see whether they will be allowed to enter Hungary.

Teasadi was a teacher in Daraa, Syria, before she and her husband decided to sell everything and take their family away from the war. As a helicopter buzzes overhead, patrolling the border from the Hungarian side, she points to it and says, “*In Syria, helicopter*”... then makes hand motions to show bombs falling. “*Children – mort,*” she says. “*Dead.*”

“Sad, so sad.” It sums up the losses she's known, along with everything around her: her family's perilous situation, the masses of anxious people around them, and the fact that there's no place to go back to.

Western Balkans Refugee Response Map







Sector highlights

As refugees arrived to Serbia exhausted, stressed and in need of food, water, reception facilities and medical attention, World Vision's work focused on providing help in the following three sectors: child protection, basic assistance and winterization.

Protection

CHILD PROTECTION

44,885 refugees assisted in Child Friendly Spaces and through protection outreach work

Due to the limited availability of critically needed child-focused interventions in provision of the effective protection and psychosocial support to refugees in Serbia, World Vision targeted assistance to families with children, pregnant and lactating women and unaccompanied and separated children.

In October 2015, World Vision opened its first Child Friendly Space (CFS) and Space for Women and Young Children (WAYCS) at the Serbian-Croatian border. Due to the change in refugee routes, these spaces were moved and then expanded to other border crossings as well. Besides these two Spaces, World Vision established one mobile CFS and WAYCS team which helped more than 15,500 women and children. Both spaces were open seven days a week, one for 24 hours and the other for 12 hours per day.

The Spaces, which served as a safe and protective environment where children can play, mothers breastfeed, change the baby's diapers, rest, and receive nutritional and psycho-social support, has also been used for the distribution of women and baby kits in a much safer and needs-sensitive environment.

In cooperation with UNICEF, CFS and WAYCS were established and staffed with trained psychologists, CFS animators who are early childhood educators and interpreters/ cultural mediators, while the WAYCS employed maternal and child health officers who are trained nurses from the local Health Centre.

In partnership with UNICEF, World Vision worked to deliver capacity building trainings

to other nongovernment and government partners who were working in the area of infant and young child feeding, supported the development of the Migrant Youth Policy, and worked alongside the local Centre on Social Welfare to respond to children with high risks especially unaccompanied and separated children/youth.

In February 2016, World Vision prepared brief based on World Vision's experience in Serbia. The brief included interviews with refugees travelling through the country and showed that unaccompanied and separated children en-route to Europe were particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The brief pointed out the need for protection mechanism for unaccompanied children that includes case management and case tracking involving humanitarian actors such as UN agencies, civil society, and national governments to ensure access to a formal, confidential cross-country referral pathway. Children should also be provided with accurate information, in an age-appropriate language and child-friendly manner, on protection opportunities and procedures, legal pathways for resettlement, and available services.

World Vision staff in CFS and WAYCS identified and supported the assessment and referral of 34 children at high risk of abuse and exploitation to the appropriate service providers and in some cases developed safety plans to mitigate risks. Due to an increased need for specialized case management services for the most vulnerable refugees, World Vision initiated and led a mobile case management team aimed at supporting



“The boat crossing from Turkey to Greece was just so scary. Getting into that little boat and crossing the sea was the most frightening time of my life. It was horrible, horrible.”



Adolescent refugee boy
travelling with five younger brothers
and sisters

cross-border and in-country referrals, family tracing and follow up support. The Child Protection program also included a cross border mobile case management support to the most vulnerable refugees including adults and elderly.

In April 2016, upon request and in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, World Vision opened a Family room in Preševo that served as safe space for families to come together to engage in recreation activities, as well as a place for World Vision staff to identify families, teenagers and youth who needed additional support.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

As part of its Response, World Vision conducted Assessment of risks and vulnerabilities to gender based violence for which 209 refugee women were interviewed during the distribution of dignity kits in the Women and Young Children Space. The Assessment showed that the women felt safe in Serbia, but unsafe, vulnerable and scared during the journey, especially those who traveled alone or were separated from their families. Interviewed women also reported brutality of the police against both sexes (predominantly against men, but also women); thefts and robberies, one case of sexual harassment and one attack. They felt that dignity of the refugees has been degraded, especially of women and girls, having poor access to safe places for proper hygiene and menstrual cycle management. The report highlighted an important problem of female vulnerability in emergency situations.

Outnumbered by men, women were exposed to all kinds of violence if not traveling in family groups. Special attention to this issue and utmost gender and cultural sensitivity needs to be taken into consideration in all emergency response programming.

Basic Assistance:

FOOD AND NON-FOOD ITEMS

In order to provide assistance to refugees with their basic needs, World Vision distributed food, non-food items and hygiene packages, primarily focusing on families with children, unaccompanied minors and pregnant and lactating women.

Due to the constant changes in the routes refugees were travelling through, World Vision employed highly mobile teams who responded to the rapidly changing routes of refugees and distributed items where the need was, often travelling hundreds of kilometres in one day. From the outset, World Vision constantly monitored the refugees' needs and adapted its distributions in accordance. As refugees were travelling long distances and thus were able to carry very little, World Vision designed appropriate smaller sized, individual needs packages with

items that refugees could either consume right away or quickly pack and use on the remainder of their journey.

In addition to basic assistance, World Vision was approached to help provide safe passage of refugees by fixing the local road near camp for refugees. World Vision paved a three kilometre long road that refugees had to walk and that was in a poor condition after heavy rains and snowing. Due to the bad road conditions, it was very difficult to transport refugees and critical support services such as ambulances were not able to pass and respond to emergencies.

After the closure of the Balkan route, World Vision began serving 200 hot meals per day to refugee children in the reception center of Preševo in the south of Serbia.



Mustafa's forehead is damp with sweat as he sits down on the concrete blocks at an improvised bus station with his wife, four children, sister, and two of her children.

They are taking a much-needed rest after a 10 day journey fleeing war-torn Syria. Between them a white plastic bag serves as a table cloth with canned food, bread, cookies and raisins.

Mustafa and his family had to travel through Turkey, Greece and Macedonia before reaching the south of Serbia, where they embarked on a long bus ride. *"The most difficult was in Greece,"* he says, where *"it was very crowded and kids had to walk 15 kilometers."*

Mustafa's family was one among many who received help through World Vision's project 'Child Focused Refugee Response' that aimed to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable refugees in Serbia: children, pregnant women, and families with children. It included the delivery of water and food packages to refugees consisting of bananas, canned food, bread, candy, raisins or nuts, wet wipes, and diapers.

**78,794 food and hygiene
packages distributed**



Winterization

The majority of refugees arriving to Serbia were travelling with very few possessions, dressed in light and worn-out clothes. Many of them lost all of their possessions while crossing the Mediterranean Sea and would wear whatever they found on their way to Serbia. Some refugees arrived in Serbia completely unprepared and equipped for extreme winter conditions, wearing flip-flops and short sleeved shirts and shorts.

Due to the border closings, mothers, fathers and children were often left to spend days

and nights in the open, suffering from rain, cold and snow in temperatures plummeting as low as -20 degrees Celsius.

World Vision recognized that winterization activities were of outmost importance for keeping refugees safe and in order to alleviate their suffering, World Vision teams distributed sleeping bags, rain coats, blankets, boots, jackets, and warm clothing to adults and children, as well as equipped Child Friendly Spaces with heaters to allow children and their mothers to rest in a warm and comfortable environment.

53.668 personal winterization items distributed



World Vision's Operations Manager in Serbia Katharina Witkowski holds 20-month old Nesme from Iraq as her mother puts on socks and boots donated by World Vision. As temperatures in Serbia dropped to below zero, World Vision continued with distribution of boots, gloves and socks to help refugees arriving to Serbia cope with difficult weather conditions.



As temperatures in Serbia decreased, thousands of refugees continued to arrive inadequately dressed and without proper footwear.

"When I see them walking wearing flip-flops, without any warm clothing... my heart hurts" says Admir Cigić, World Vision's staff at a distribution point in Serbia.

With winter approaching, adequate clothing of refugees and shelter became increasingly important, especially having in mind the particularly extreme conditions in the Western Balkans where temperatures can drop to -20 degrees Celsius. In order to respond to the needs of refugees during the cold season, World Vision distributed blankets, rain coats, warm socks, hats and shawls for children, and shoes. *"Refugees arrive carrying very little, with only plastic bags in their hands and are often wet from the rain,"* says Cigić.

Faten, 25-year-old from Syria, has been travelling for the past six days with her three children: Hatidze, 2.4 years old; Huteyb, 5, and Rafat, 6.

"It is very difficult to travel with children. They cry, they ask for toilet, they are not quiet...." she says *"But, it's better to travel with my children than all alone."* Faten and her family left Syria three months ago and have been in Turkey until recently. *"Turkey is very expensive,"* she says. *"[We] cannot survive [there],"* Faten says.

Dressed in a rain coat and jacket, Faten considers herself lucky. *"Good people and different organizations gave us clothing so we are not cold right now,"* she says.

Advocacy

World Vision played a significant role in the area of awareness-raising and advocating for issues and policies aimed at refugee protection in Serbia, the Region and Europe, with specific attention on most vulnerable groups including unaccompanied minors, refugee families, and pregnant and lactating women. World Vision's advocacy efforts were also directed towards local health centers: for their nurses World Vision organized training on infant and young child feeding.

In-country advocacy efforts were focused upon the needs of unaccompanied minors through Child Protection and Protection Cluster Meetings and direct meetings with UN and government agencies. World Vision staff ensured that key United Nations and government agencies were informed of all cases of abuse towards refugees, especially families and unaccompanied minors. World Vision Child Protection experts contributed to the development of the **Migrant Children Policy** which was approved by the inter-ministerial government and launched in March 2016, while World Vision independently published two advocacy pieces "EU Crisis Policy Update: Syria's Crisis in Europe" and "The European Refugee Crisis and the Dangerous Journey from Conflict to Safety".

The "EU Crisis Policy Update Syria's Crisis in Europe", while describing the effects of the Syria Crisis on Europe, called for the governments to provide asylum and protection to refugees, both in Europe and worldwide. It also called for the implementation of the existing United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Syria.

The briefing "The European Refugee Crisis and the Dangerous Journey from Conflict to Safety" gathered World Vision's experience during the response in Serbia, as well as interviews with refugees travelling through the country. Through the discussions with refugees, many travelling with children, three priorities emerged in this document: 1) Establishment of safe and legal routes to and within Europe; 2) Protection of children, including unaccompanied and separated children, through psychosocial support, family tracing and reunification; and 3) Comprehensive, long-term, and common approach to the refugee crisis.

World Vision actively participated in protection sector meetings and consistently advocated for the rights of vulnerable refugees and unaccompanied and separated children including confidential and safe referral mechanisms.

Accountability

• **Providing information**

World Vision offered and actively sought coordination and complementarity of action with all major players on the ground becoming an active and regular member of all relevant sectoral coordination bodies run by United Nations agencies and the Government of Serbia.

• **Promoting participation**

Throughout its operation, World Vision involved local authorities in programme design through consultation sessions with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, municipal authorities, and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. Through these meetings, World Vision established most critical needs and gained support from the local authorities to implement the proposed activities.

• **Consultation with beneficiaries**

World Vision constantly observed the needs among refugees and received feedback from travelling families on which food and non-food items are needed and culturally accepted by the refugees. During distributions, World Vision provided refugees with the opportunity to select the items they

need rather than distributing pre-packed winterization kits. Presence of cultural mediators (i.e. translators for Arabic, Farsi and other languages) was crucial to ensure successful and effective communication with beneficiaries.

• **Collecting and acting on feedback and complaints**

Within the Child Friendly Spaces, mothers and children were actively engaged on an individual level and encouraged to leave feedback in World Vision's feedback box to advice on how services could be improved and to identify important gaps and needs unaddressed.

• **Continuous improvement**

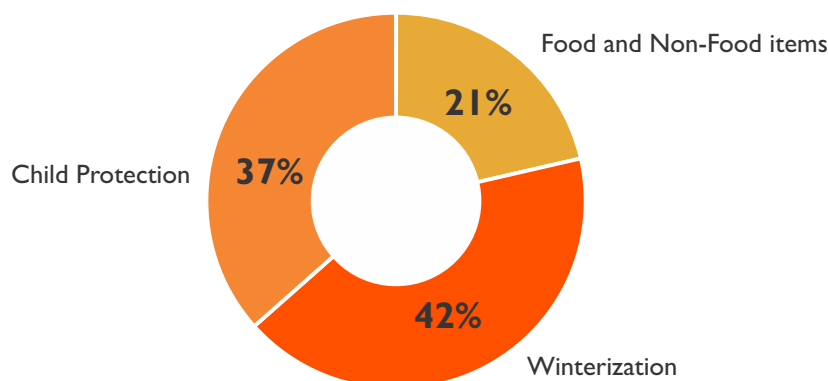
In December, 2015, World Vision conducted Real Time Evaluation to assess the quality of its response in Serbia against four criteria: programme effectiveness and timeliness, relevance and appropriateness, coordination and influence, and organisational efficiency. Findings from all four criteria showed that World Vision's work was relevant to the needs of refugees and operational context. Key failures were addressed and relevant improvements introduced.



Financial Summary

***World Vision's Western Balkans
Refugee Response is valued at USD
3,283.533.***

WBRR IN SERBIA FUNDING BY SECTORS



Partners and Donors

World Vision would like to acknowledge the generous support of governmental, multilateral and other agencies.

We are thankful to our donors: Aktion Deutschland Hilft, EOMatterdaad, Irish Aid, United Nations Children's Fund, ECHO and DFID/Start Network and to our partners: Atina, Care International, Center for Social Welfare, Čovjekoljublje, Danish Refugee Council, Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of Republic of Serbia, Foundation SOS Children's Villages Serbia, HCIT - Humanitarni centar za integraciju i toleranciju, International Organisation for Migration, Intersos, Life Aid, Médecins du Monde, Médecins Sans Frontières, Ministry of Health of Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social policy of Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Interior of Republic of Serbia, Norwegian Refugee Council, Novosadski humanitarni centar, PRAXIS, Primary Health Care Centers, Red Cross, Save the Children North West Balkans and Women and Health Alliance International.

.... as well as all other dedicated humanitarian workers and volunteers working to help vulnerable refugees along the Balkans Route.

SYRIA'S CRISIS IN EUROPE

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



Appendix

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 boarding 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

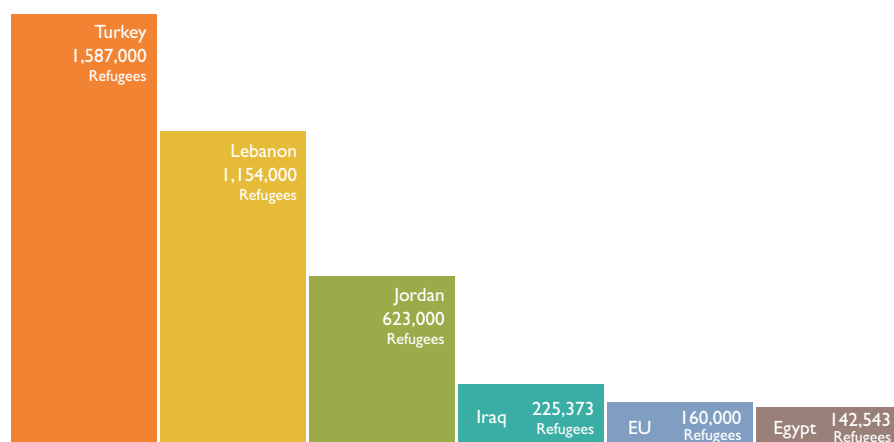
The majority of the refugees are concentrated in three countries: Turkey (hosting 1,587,000), Lebanon (hosting 1,154,000) and Jordan (hosting 623,000).⁵

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.

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 UNCHR (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 More than 10 million Syrians are displaced: 6.5 million Syrians are displaced within the borders of Syria and 4 million are refugees living outside of Syria.

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

CURRENT HOST COUNTRIES ARE WEARY PARTNERS

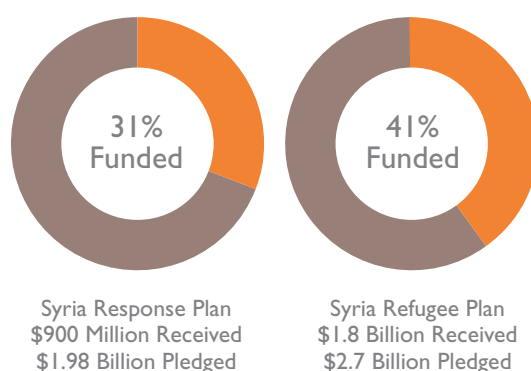
The magnitude of the crisis has overwhelmed Syria's neighbours. Strains on infrastructure and public services, security concerns and fears over the long-term presence of refugees have led governments to put increased restrictions aimed at stemming the flow of asylum seekers in place while also encouraging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

The 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

Donor Commitments & Contributions to the Syria Crisis



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.

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>

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

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-defeatingsurvival-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>.

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.

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 millions more 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.

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-middleeast-34173139> (last accessed September 9, 2015), in total the Gulf States have given over \$900m (£589m) to Syrian refugees.

THE EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND THE DANGEROUS JOURNEY FROM CONFLICT TO SAFETY

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This briefing and conclusions are informed by World Vision's experience in our response in Serbia, and from interviews with refugees travelling through the country in late January 2016. The majority of the refugees interviewed came from Syria, but there were also interviews with refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan—and with partner agencies working in Serbia.

CONTEXT

The European refugee crisis is a startling reminder of the tremendously difficult decisions that refugees are forced to make for the safety of their families. An unprecedented number of men, women and children find their situation in their countries of origin so challenging that they risk their lives to reach Europe. Last year alone, over 880,000 people crossed from Turkey to Greece.¹ Many refugees subsequently travel through the Western Balkans towards Central and Northern Europe.

The ability of countries neighbouring conflict zones, such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, to continue accepting additional new waves of refugees is strained and at breaking point. The EU and others countries in the region continue to wrestle with how best to respond to the European dimension of the refugee crisis. A key priority must always be action at the political level to address the cessation of violence in countries where refugees are fleeing, such as Syria. Alongside this overarching priority, we recommend continued humanitarian support and interventions to address other causes of

refugee flows, including lack of economic opportunity and social growth within the neighbouring refugee hosting countries.

An increasing number of children are journeying across Europe. According to UNICEF, 37 percent of refugees and migrants in December 2015 who came through Macedonia were children, compared with 23 percent in September of that year. In Serbia, 36 percent were children in December; 27 percent were children in September.² Children are particularly vulnerable to abuse, neglect, exploitation, or other forms of violence along the route.

PRIORITIES

Through our discussions with refugees, many travelling with children, three priorities emerged—especially for those fleeing the Syrian conflict:

- Establishment of safe and legal routes to and within Europe by host countries;
- Protection of children, including unaccompanied and separated children, through psychosocial support and family tracing and reunification; and,
- Comprehensive, long-term, and common approach to the European refugee crisis.

The lack of options available to refugees en route to and in Europe often compromises their safety, their physical and emotional wellbeing, and even their dignity. Refugees face immediate risks that particularly threaten the wellbeing of their children. Far too many children are haunted by the brutal violence and the devastating consequences of war.

¹ European Commission. "Implementing The European Agenda On Migration: Commission Reports On Progress In Greece, Italy And The Western Balkans"[Press release], February 10, 2016, available from: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-269_en.htm.

² UNICEF. "News note: Concern over health of children on the move during harsh winter," January 19, 2016, available from: http://www.unicef.org/media/media_89845.html.

Now, the dangerous European refugee route adds yet another layer of mental stress and physical exhaustion on children and their families. Once in Europe, they face an uncertain and challenging future.

REFLECTIONS FROM SERBIA

World Vision operates in Serbia and offers protection, material, and psychosocial support to children and their families on their journeys.

CHILDREN: MOST AT RISK AND LACKING BASIC PROTECTION

"My children have not slept through the night for four years. They wake up screaming from nightmares from the bombing. They are scared."

Refugee children experience the horror of war and its devastating aftermath, including from the Syrian conflict which approaches its sixth year. If their families then take the treacherous journey to Europe, initially from areas devastated by war, then through Turkey, and then across the Mediterranean, this can have a further significant impact on a child.

A refugee mother told World Vision that she and her six-year-old daughter were charged an exorbitant rate by two smugglers as they made their journey through Turkey and into Europe. Her daughter broke her leg along the route, yet they could not stop. Failing to address the emotional impact and stress children experience over the course of the conflict and then on the journey to Europe has the potential of a generation of children experiencing long-term psychosocial problems.

Greater emphasis on children's unique needs along the route is critically needed and could be met through child specific interventions such as safe spaces for play and rest. Psychosocial interventions need further

emphasis, both during the journey and after children reach their final destination. World Vision places a large emphasis on psychosocial work through child-friendly spaces along the refugee route through Serbia, where children engage in recreational activities that encourage self-expression through art, crafts, and storytelling. For children, the power of play is critical for them to learn to cope with the horrors of their war experiences, and promotes mental, social, and emotional wellbeing.

Robust psychosocial support is also necessary once refugees reach their final destination. Refugee integration must take into account the high levels of mental stress experienced by refugee children so they can eventually regain a sense of normalcy.

Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) who are en-route to Europe are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.³ A protection mechanism for unaccompanied children is needed across European migration routes. This protection mechanism should include case management and case tracking that involves humanitarian actors such as UN agencies, civil society, and national governments to ensure access to a formal, confidential cross-country referral pathway. Governments along the refugee route should appoint a single national authority with child protection expertise who facilitates state coordination for UASC.

Correct and consistent information needs to be released about the procedures for identifying minors. It can be daunting to identify as an unaccompanied child, particularly when the next steps are unclear. Protection and communication systems for refugees need to be established by governments and other international actors that do not deter unaccompanied children from identifying themselves. Often after UASC identification, children continue the journey with limited support and protection.

3 UNHCR. "Europe Refugee Emergency—BRIEFING NOTE: Unaccompanied and separated children," October 9, 2015, available from: <https://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=85>.

Children should be provided with accurate information, in an age-appropriate language and child-friendly manner, on protection opportunities and procedures, legal pathways for resettlement, and available services.

Upon arrival in a final destination, a thorough assessment needs to be conducted to ensure family tracing and reunification (FTR) is carried out in a timely manner. Special care arrangements which are child friendly and age appropriate should be made available and access to education, legal support, and psychosocial care made a priority. If family reunification is not possible or appropriate, long-term solutions should be considered in line with child protection best practices and ensure the best interests of the child.

Sometimes, family separation occurs along the route. Practices that prevent family separation should be introduced at all points, including integrating practices that allow families to be processed and move together. When family reunification en route is not possible, there should be provisions in the destination country to ensure safe and appropriate reunification.

CREATING A SAFE PASSAGE: THE UNSUSTAINABILITY OF THE STATUS QUO

"The boat crossing from Turkey to Greece was just so scary. Getting into that little boat and crossing the sea was the most frightening time of my life. It was horrible, horrible."

These are the words of an adolescent refugee boy with five younger brothers and sisters who told World Vision that the most difficult part of the journey for him and his family was the boat crossing across the Mediterranean. Refugees who have initially fled war zones should not have to endure additional hardships as they attempt to find new opportunities for their families. Current European policies fail to protect those who

desperately need safety and encourage smuggling activities. The status quo must not continue: there need to be safe and legal ways for victims of conflict to seek further refuge in Europe.

Refugees in Serbia spend weeks and sometimes months making the dangerous journey to Europe. During last year alone, over 3,700 men, women, and children drowned as they were smuggled across the Mediterranean.⁴

While the journeys are chaotic and dangerous, there are few alternatives. Currently, there are few legal processes⁵ that allow refugees to seek safety in Europe without exposing themselves to the treacherous refugee route. Children and families who witnessed bombs fall on their towns carry emotional scars and face renewed stress as they head to Europe. The fact that children and families describe this journey as the most frightening thing they have experienced when they have experienced so much already is a damning indictment on the global response to the European refugee crisis.

One refugee from outside Damascus told World Vision that he had "died a thousand times on this journey." When asked to elaborate, he talked of the treatment he and his family endured: the conditions; the lack of hygiene; his untreated illness; and the almost unbearable stress. He travels with his wife and three children. His youngest is only eleven-weeks old.

In Europe, unpredictable border closures make refugee journeys more complex. Men, women, and children who flee conflict have a right to claim asylum and countries have a moral and legal right to do so. This becomes difficult when border closings occur. When the current situation of border closings occur, shelter needs to be available to refugees who sometimes wait twelve hours or more

4 UNHCR. "Over one million sea arrivals reach Europe in 2015," December 30, 2015, available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html>

5 One exception is the UNHCR resettlement application process.

to be allowed to the next country along their journey. Furthermore, routes could be made more efficient and cost effective, both for refugees and transit countries through Europe. Along the Macedonia-Serbia crossing, for instance, refugees still need to walk over three kilometres in deep mud to reach a series of bus routes to take them through Serbia, despite there being a direct rail line through the country.

Communication along the various legs of the refugee route through Europe needs improvement. Many refugees and partner organizations interviewed expressed concern about the lack of clear communication, particularly at border crossings, about processing procedures at checkpoints, directions about the location of buses and trains to combat smugglers taking advantage of refugees, and which types of humanitarian relief is available. To address communication needs at border crossings and processing centres, we recommend radio announcements on loudspeakers in multiple languages at these critical locations along the refugee route.

A LONG-TERM SOLUTION: THE NEED FOR A COHERENT REFUGEE APPROACH

"There is nothing there for us. No food, water. Nothing. There are no jobs. No future."

The international community needs to anticipate future refugee flows and possible repercussions on European countries currently along transit route into Northern Europe. Countries that host significant numbers of refugees, such as Germany and Sweden, may ultimately limit the flow of refugees into their countries. Meanwhile, protracted conflicts in the Middle East and other places continue to push civilians to journey onwards. Decreased humanitarian assistance, mass displacement in Iraq and Syria, and saturation of refugees in Turkey,

Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, for instance, add even more reasons for victims of war to seek further refuge in Europe. A young refugee mother traveling through Serbia with her family said that, *"If I knew the war in Syria would be over in a year or two, I would not have left. I would have stayed in Syria or waited in Turkey. Syria is my home, but I need to make a new life for my family since there's no end in sight to this war."*

A sustainable response that addresses anticipated refugee flows is critically needed for all governments hosting refugees. For the EU this should include including a common EU asylum system based on shared responsibility whilst other wealthy countries, such as the U.S., should also consider ways to resettle additional refugees. EU asylum procedures are currently applied in many different ways under the Dublin Regulation. Many EU member states compete to become the least attractive for refugees and would rather send them to neighbouring countries instead of establishing a common European solution.

European transit countries, especially Greece and the Balkans, could soon face pressure to resettle refugees as Northern European countries reach their refugee capacities. International donor assistance, in addition to resettling refugees and supporting relief in Syria and neighbouring countries, should support economically-burdened countries in Europe that resettle refugees. These projects can include developing sustainable infrastructure capacity for both the local populations and resettled refugees. In addition, integration into local host communities that includes language and life skills training will be key for refugees to effectively transition and contribute to the economy.

The greatest challenge the EU currently faces undoubtedly is the refugee crisis. The EU estimates that another two million refugees will arrive by the end of 2017⁶. The recent upsurge in heavy violence in northern Syria may result in further influxes of refugees in the coming months.

As the European refugee crisis is simultaneously unpredictable, it requires a flexible and highly mobile response capacity for fluctuating refugee flows, potentially allowing for longer term support as violence wages on in places such as the Middle East. Consequently, refugees continue to make the journey to Europe and want to start a new life for themselves and their children. A comprehensive approach is critical. Recommendations to establish a unified, sustainable path for refugees to gain asylum in Europe must not continue to fall on deaf ears.

⁶ European Commission: Economic and Financial Affairs. "Winter 2016 Economic Forecast: Weathering new challenges," available from: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu/forecasts/2016_winter_forecast_en.htm.

