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HIGHLIGHTS

- Children paying a heavy price in the Syria crisis
- Humanitarian assistance delivered despite access constraints.
- The refugee exodus from Syria accelerated in February. The stream of people seeking safety continues.
- Funding UN appeals is essential to address the growing needs.

FIGURES

Population	22 million
Governorates	14
People in need of humanitarian assistance	4 million
Number of internally displaced persons (IDPs)	2 million
Number of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and North Africa	1,145,423

FUNDING

519 million

Requested for humanitarian assistance inside Syria (US\$)

21 % funded

1 billion

requested under the regional Refugee Response Plan (January-June 2013)

19% funded (as of 15 February 2013 funding update)

Syria enters its third year of crisis with civilians increasingly bearing the brunt

Civilians have almost no safe place to go

During the reporting period, Syria marked two years since the beginning of the conflict which has so far resulted in some 70,000 deaths and four million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country, including 2 million internally displaced and well over a million refugees. In the past two weeks, fighting continued in various parts of Syria, including in Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, Damascus, Dara'a, Homs, Idlib and Rural Damascus, leading to new displacement of people. Internal displacement (IDPs) and the numbers of those seeking refuge in neighbouring countries continue to increase.

According to the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, violence in Syria has reached new heights of destruction with indiscriminate and widespread shelling, the regular bombardment of cities, mass killing and the deliberate firing on civilian targets characterizing the daily lives of civilians. In its report (A/HRC/22/CRP.1) presented to the UN Human Rights Council on 11 March 2013, the Commission describes a dramatic erosion of civilian space with mass displacement exacerbated by diminishing areas in which civilians can seek refuge. It notes that conflict continues to be waged by both Government forces and anti-Government armed groups with insufficient respect for the protection of the civilian population.

On 15 March, ICRC issued a statement stressing that humanitarian needs in Syria are greater than ever. Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the armed conflict and are struggling to survive hardship on a daily basis. They endure fierce fighting and a steady deterioration of living conditions, with no end in sight to their suffering. ICRC stated that it is deplorable that high numbers of civilian casualties are now a daily occurrence to which people are unfortunately getting accustomed, and that ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and of basic humanitarian principles by all sides must stop.

Children are, above all, the innocent victims of the conflict

Out of the 4 million in need of assistance in Syria, half are children. UNICEF warns of a lost generation of children who have seen or known only fighting.

In its report "Childhood under Fire" issued on 13 March, Save the Children documents how children are paying the price of the conflict, from newborns being delivered in squalid conditions without skilled birth attendants, to girls being married at an early age in an effort to protect them from perceived threats of sexual violence, to children facing malnutrition, suffering preventable diseases and being killed and maimed by explosive weapons. The report, based on research carried out by the Bahcesehir University on Syrian refugee children in Turkey, also reveals that many children are showing signs of emotional difficulties as they struggle to come to terms with their experiences; nearly one third of children surveyed say that they have been separated from members of their families due to the conflict and three quarters have experienced the death of a close friend or family member.

The number of hepatitis A, leishmaniasis and typhoid cases continue to increase

(The report is available at: <http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/SYRIA-CHILDHOOD-UNDER-FIRE-REPORT-2013.PDF>)

Hundreds of thousands of children are also being deprived of education, with many having been out of school for as long as two years. One fifth of the country's 22,000 schools have been damaged, destroyed or are used as shelters for displaced people and many teachers no longer report for work; in Idlib, only 55 per cent of teachers report to work (UNICEF). Children attendance rate has decreased considerably; for instance in Aleppo, UNICEF reports that it has dropped to as low as 6 per cent.

Situation for internally displaced volatile

As just one example of the impact of the rapidly changing security conditions, internally displaced persons from Damascus and Rural Damascus come and go to Adra Oumaliya, situated just north of the city of Damascus. Heavy clashes close to the project area of the international NGO Help in early February 2013 led to new arrivals in Adra Oumaliya from Adra-Balad, the 'Industrial Zone' and from nearby villages, bringing the total IDP population to more than 300,000. Although most of the IDPs have now left Adra Oumaliya, about 100,000 remain. The situation in the area is unstable, unpredictable and extremely tense. Military operations continue and Adra Oumaliya remains exposed to targeted sniper activities.

Delivery of health services remains difficult whilst disease spreads

70 per cent of health workers cannot report to work in conflict areas

WHO reports that 20 per cent of public hospitals have been damaged and 36 per cent are out of service. Functioning hospitals are overwhelmed and operations are hampered by shortages of medicines and medical supplies. Fighting has resulted in substantial damages to Syria's main pharmaceutical plants in Aleppo and Rural Damascus. The ongoing economic downturn and the effect of economic sanctions are also having an impact on the production of medicines and pharmaceutical products and, as a result, local production of medicines has been reduced by 90 per cent. Many clinics and hospitals lack certain types of antibiotics, insulin and cancer medicines as well as blood test equipment, serums, intravenous fluids and supplies for anesthesia and surgery.

The deteriorating insecurity is preventing many health care workers from reporting to duty, with targeting of health facilities and workers now widespread. 70 percent of health workers living in heavily affected areas, including Aleppo, Homs, and Rural Damascus, face difficulties in accessing their work place due to security problems, contributing to severe staffing shortages in hospitals and other health facilities. The lack of accessibility, long hours of electricity cuts and fuel shortages have serious implications on the delivery of health services in Syria's most affected areas.

Hepatitis A and leishmaniasis cases continue to increase

According to WHO, 200 new cases of suspected hepatitis A were reported in the week up to 2 March 2013, mostly in Deir-ez-Zor (133 cases), Hama (22 cases) and rural Damascus (21 cases). In addition 302 new cases of the skin disease leishmaniasis were reported, with the most affected governorates being Hama (172 cases), Deir-ez-Zor (107) and Rural Damascus (19). The Syria health working group and the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector have established a task force to oversee the increasing numbers of Hepatitis A, Typhoid and Leishmaniasis cases and lead the response. Medication is being provided, in addition to support to hygiene promotion and household water treatment. Efforts are also underway to rehabilitate the water systems.

WFP is scaling-up its food assistance to reach 2 million people in March and 2.5 million in April

Palestine and other refugees in Syria face mounting challenges

Palestine refugees leave camps in conflict zones

Conflict has severely affected access to UNRWA camps in Syria, and as many as half of the 525,000 Palestine refugees may be displaced, most of them in the Damascus area. Increasing numbers of refugees are fleeing from Neirab Camp, Aleppo, due to ongoing conflict around the neighbouring international airport. Displacement and humanitarian needs are also increasing in Homs, where intense shelling and armed clashes are taking place in areas adjacent to the Palestine refugee camp. Damascus, Yarmouk, Sbeineh, Husseiniyeh and Qabr Essit continue to be heavily affected, and many UNRWA facilities remain closed. Of the 23 UNRWA primary health care centres across Syria, 9 are currently closed and another seven have substantially reduced hours. Fifty-five of UNRWA's 118 schools are non-operational due to conflict.

The majority of displaced refugees have moved to UNRWA camps and facilities in the Dara'a countryside, Hama, Homs, Latakia, as well as safer parts of Damascus. UNRWA estimates that over 400,000 Palestine refugees in Syria continue to be unable to meet basic food needs and require urgent assistance. Widespread difficulties in accessing drinking water, food, electricity, winter items and other non-food items continue to increase deprivation among Palestine refugees across the country. Palestine refugees also move across border to seek refuge in safer areas: as of March, 2013 a total of 32,000 Palestine refugees have left Syria for Lebanon and 4,000 for Jordan.

Challenges faced by other refugees in Syria

UNHCR reports that, as of 13 March, there were an additional 67,715 refugees in Syria from Iraq (representing the greatest majority), Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan. Besides heightened vulnerability, key protection issues reported include risks from shelling ; threats (especially for Iraqi refugees); incidents of abduction; absence of legal documentation hence inability to find accommodation and to move freely including problems at check points. Child protection issues are prominent including school drop-out, impact of deteriorated family livelihoods and psycho-social problems.

Humanitarian operations go on amid access constraints

Security incidents affect operations; 2 aid workers lose their lives in violence

The prevailing insecurity in several parts of the country negatively affects humanitarian access to people in need. During the reporting period, a United Nations inter-agency convoy with food, medical and other essential non-food supplies that had been planned to reach Dara'a al-Balad from Damascus, had to be postponed because of intense fighting in the area. The convoy delivery will take place as soon as the security situation allows it, but in the meantime agencies are redirecting Dara'a bound assistance to Homs. Also, WFP's main warehouse in Damascus – holding 1,300 metric tons of commodities, enough to feed half a million people - was struck by mortar fire. WFP worked hard to retrieve the goods and managed to salvage about 805 metric tons, but it will needless have an impact on distributions.

Continuing and acute conflict has also affected UNRWA's regular service provision across Syria, whilst the agency faces an increasing demand for emergency cash, food and material assistance to address the growing needs of Palestine refugees. Camps hosting refugees in Aleppo, Damascus, and Homs are becoming increasingly difficult to access due to conflict in surrounding areas.

WFP is scaling up its food assistance to reach 2 million people in March and 2.5 million by next month.

The volatile security situation continues putting at risk the life of aid workers. On 12 March, a policy officer working at the European Union Delegation in Syria was killed during a rocket attack in the Deraya's neighbourhood of Damascus. On 14 March, a member of UNRWA teaching staff also died from conflict-related injuries in Khan Eshieh camp, south-west of Damascus, thus bringing to 9 the number of UN staff members killed since the onset of the crisis. Meanwhile some 15 Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) staff members have been killed since the crisis began.

2 million Syrians to receive food in March; 2.5 million by April

WFP continues addressing food needs of vulnerable Syrians, displaced by conflict and an ever growing resident population affected by the crisis. The UN agency is scaling up its food assistance from 1.75 million people target in February to 2 million this month, with the aim of reaching 2.5 million people on a monthly basis starting in April. During the February food distribution cycle, close to 1.7 million people were reached (i.e. 97 per cent of the planned figure) in all 14 governorates within Syria, independent of the nature of control. The 3 percent shortfall arose mainly from insecurity rather than a lack of logistics or distribution capacity.

Non-food items distributed across front lines

During the period March 5-17, UNHCR dispatched 284,874 items reaching 102,758 people. Main areas of dispatch included Al-Raqqa, Hama, Homs and Deir-ez-Zor - including opposition areas. For the overall 2013 programme UNHCR has dispatched 1,039,858 items and reached an estimated 380,000 people - more than one third of the six-month target of 1,000,000 people.

The Danish Refugee Council convoys over the last two weeks have reached both Deir-ez-Zor and Dara'a governorates with non-food items. DRC transported 15,000 pieces of winter clothes; 5,000 blankets and 5,000 mattresses to Deir-ez-Zor on 8 March, escorted by SARC. The convoy also carried 500 food parcels from WFP. Earlier in the week, 5,900 blankets and 7,500 sets of winter clothes were transported to Israa in Dara'a Governorate, and 7,500 sets of winter clothes to Nawa. As part of the rapid response to the IDP influx, ACF between 6 and 15 March delivered 10,702 hygiene kits (9,400 consumable, 1,302 non-consumable ones) to Deir-ez-Zor. During the reporting period, Premiere Urgence distributed 12 700 winterization kits in Homs, Hama and Tartous governorates, reaching 63 500 individuals.

The Logistics Cluster common transport services transported 125 cubic metres of health items (blankets, diapers) to Aleppo on behalf of UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO. This is enough for 25,000 people. The common storage capacity received 248 cubic metres of early recovery, health, education, and WASH items (blankets, diapers, hygiene kits, cooking stoves, and recreation kits) for common storage at the JAD warehouse in Damascus on behalf of IOM, UNFPA, and UNICEF.

About 80,000 children benefit from school clubs

UNICEF continues to support school clubs providing children with remedial classes along with a selection of recreational activities in public schools. It has reached 250 schools (achieving 50 per cent of the target) reaching over 70,000 children (46.6 per cent of the target). Additionally, the Danish Refugee Council and Premiere Urgence are supporting 15 schools clubs benefiting 9,000 children. About 83,700 children have also received essential school supplies.

UNICEF has completed light rehabilitation work on 70 schools throughout the country. The rehabilitation of an additional 21 schools in Rural Damascus and Dara'a has been temporarily put on hold due to the security situation. Action Contre la Faim has completed the rehabilitation of one school as part of a school rehabilitation project aimed at rehabilitating a total of five schools in Hassakeh.

If the conflict continues, the number of refugees could double or triple by the end of 2013.

Moreover, UNICEF and partners continue providing psychosocial support to over 32,000 children in Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, and Rural Damascus.

Mobile health services expanded throughout the country

UNICEF, in cooperation with local partners, is operating 28 mobile health teams in 12 governorates, providing medical care to 17,744 internally displaced children since the beginning of 2013. During the first week of March 3,865 children were reached by the teams: 1,980 girls and 1,885 boys. On 10 March, 22 additional teams were established, thus bringing to 50 the total number of teams currently operating in 13 governorates, with the aim of providing medical care to 280,000 IDP children.

UNFPA has also expanded its mobile services via its Syrian NGO partners, SAHPAD and SFPA, to service 16 mobile teams and 5 clinics in the Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, Damascus, Homs, Idlib, and Rural Damascus governorates that constitute over 60 per cent of the IDP population, resulting in 1,800 women being provided with reproductive health care.

Given the critical shortage of emergency medicines and medical supplies in Syria, WHO and Syrian health professionals have established a list of essential medicines as a tool to effectively quantify needs for the next 12-month period. The total amount estimated to procure emergency medicines for one year is US\$467 million. Moreover, on 5 March, critical medical supplies were sent by UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO and the Ministry of Health to attend the needs of 20,000 people in Aleppo which has been suffering from a shortage of critical medical supplies.

Palestine refugees receive UNRWA assistance

UNRWA is working with local partners to distribute approximately 3,500 food parcels to benefit at least 14,000 people, in Yarmouk, which continues to see regular armed clashes and shelling, and had not previously been accessible for humanitarian agencies.

UNRWA also continues providing cash to people in need. In the past month, it has reached over 13,000 people in Damascus and over 16,500 people in Aleppo thus bringing to over 44,000 the number of Palestine refugees reached with cash assistance between September 2012 and February 2013.

Refugee numbers exceed projections for end-June 2013

Refugee exodus accelerated in February, increase continues in March

The number of Syrian refugees either registered as refugees or being assisted in Syria's neighbouring countries and North Africa is now over 1.1 million, exceeding the projections for end June 2013 as per the Regional Response Plan (RRP) for Syrian Refugees. The number increased dramatically since the beginning of the year, when the number was about 575,000. However, the number of Syrians may be higher given that not all refugees have approached UNHCR to be registered. During a visit to the region, on 9 March, the High Commissioner for Refugees warned that, if a solution is not found to the conflict, the number of people fleeing Syria could double or triple by the end of this year.

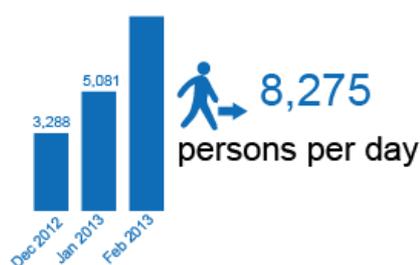
Lebanon and Jordan are the countries hosting the highest number of refugees – 62 per cent of the total, followed by Turkey (23 per cent), Iraq (10 per cent), Egypt (3.9 per cent) and North Africa (0.7 per cent). Such a massive influx, is making it extremely difficult for the generous local communities to effectively absorb the refugees. As the cost of food, rent and other essential goods and services continue to increase, whilst the cost of labour diminishes given the availability of Syrian refugees to work for lower wages, the risk of tensions between refugees and host communities is increasing.

Some 8,275 Syrians left the country every day in February, and the outflow continues.

In a press conference in Amman on 13 March 2013, the High Commissioner for Refugees indicated that, if the crisis in Syria continues to unfold at the current level, host countries and humanitarian agencies will not be able to respond unless stronger support from the international community is made available. In the HCR's words, it is "not only a moral obligation" to step up international aid but also "essential to preserve global peace and global security."

Country	Refugees registered and/or assisted as of 18 Feb 2013	Refugees registered and/or assisted as of 18 March 2013	Estimated number of refugees by June 2013
Egypt	18,245	44,758	30,000
Iraq	92,523	115,648	90,000
Jordan	269,110	356,980	300,000
Lebanon	287,571	359,419	300,000
Turkey	182,621	260,356	380,000
North Africa	7,642	8,262	N/A
Total	857,712	1,145,423	1,100,000

Source: UNHCR as of 18 February 2013 and 18 March 2013. For updated figures, please visit <http://data.unhcr.org/syrian-refugees>. Above figures are based on numbers registered in each country and/or those who are assisted while waiting for registration. In addition to the above figures, around 28,000 Syrians have fled to various European countries.



Graph showing the average number of Syrian refugees arriving every day in neighbouring countries over the last three months (Source: UNHCR).

FAO assesses the impact of the Syria crisis on the region

Last month, FAO conducted an assessment mission that analysed the impact of the Syrian crisis on agriculture, livelihoods and food security in the region, and identified the immediate and medium-term food security and livelihood needs of affected people and their host communities in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. The mission's findings indicate that although all Syria's neighbouring countries have been negatively impacted, Jordan and Lebanon are the most vulnerable to the Syrian crisis: the small size of their economies can hardly accommodate large economic shocks such as changes in trade patterns as well as the high influx of refugees estimated as 5-10 per cent of their own population. The priority areas of intervention identified by the FAO multi-disciplinary mission team include: threat of trans-boundary animal and crop diseases and pests; deteriorating condition of food traded across official and unofficial border crossings; increasing malnutrition among farm families of host communities, and medium-term needs of rural host communities to recover their food production and income generating functions following the shock of the Syrian crisis. The mission findings and proposed response plans were presented to donors and other partners in Amman, Jordan, on 7 March.

Funding gaps threaten scaling up

80 per cent of UN appeals remain unfunded

The two UN appeals, the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) and the regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) are only around 20 per cent funded, half way into the planning period since they were launched in December 2012. For the SHARP,

80 per cent of the appeals remain unfunded half way into funding period – and the needs are increasing.

humanitarian assistance initiatives at the value of \$411 million are uncovered, while the refugee plan still shows that there is a \$843 million funding gap up to June 2013.

Without adequate funding, the humanitarian community in Syria and the neighbouring countries would not be able reach the numbers of people planned for at the end of last year, let alone scale up further to address the growing needs. Donors have given generously, but there is a need for more contributions. There is also an urgent need to see the generous pledges made at the 30 January 2013 Kuwait High-Level Pledging Conference turn into concrete contributions.

While the needs of the population are increasing by the day, several agencies are running the risk of having to seriously reduce priority programmes if resources are not replenished. For example, WFP food distribution operations within Syria require \$111.4 million until June – the equivalent of \$9.3 million every week. Of this, nearly half – 53.5 million remain unfunded.

ERF to enhance capacity of local NGOs

The Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) is being used inside Syria to support a strategy to enhance the capacity of local NGOs to reach conflict areas and expand the humanitarian coverage. Furthermore ERF is working to support both the logistics working group and UNDSS to enable humanitarian delivery and enhance access to difficult areas. To date, the ERF has disbursed around \$14 million to 51 projects in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq reaching more than 1.3 million people. Five new projects have been finalized in the last two weeks: two projects in Syria (Homs and Rural Damascus); two in Jordan and one in Lebanon.

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OCHA humanitarian bulletins are available at www.unocha.org/crisis/syria | www.reliefweb.int