

A.8 Syria conflict – 2011 onwards - Overview

Overview

Summary of emergency:

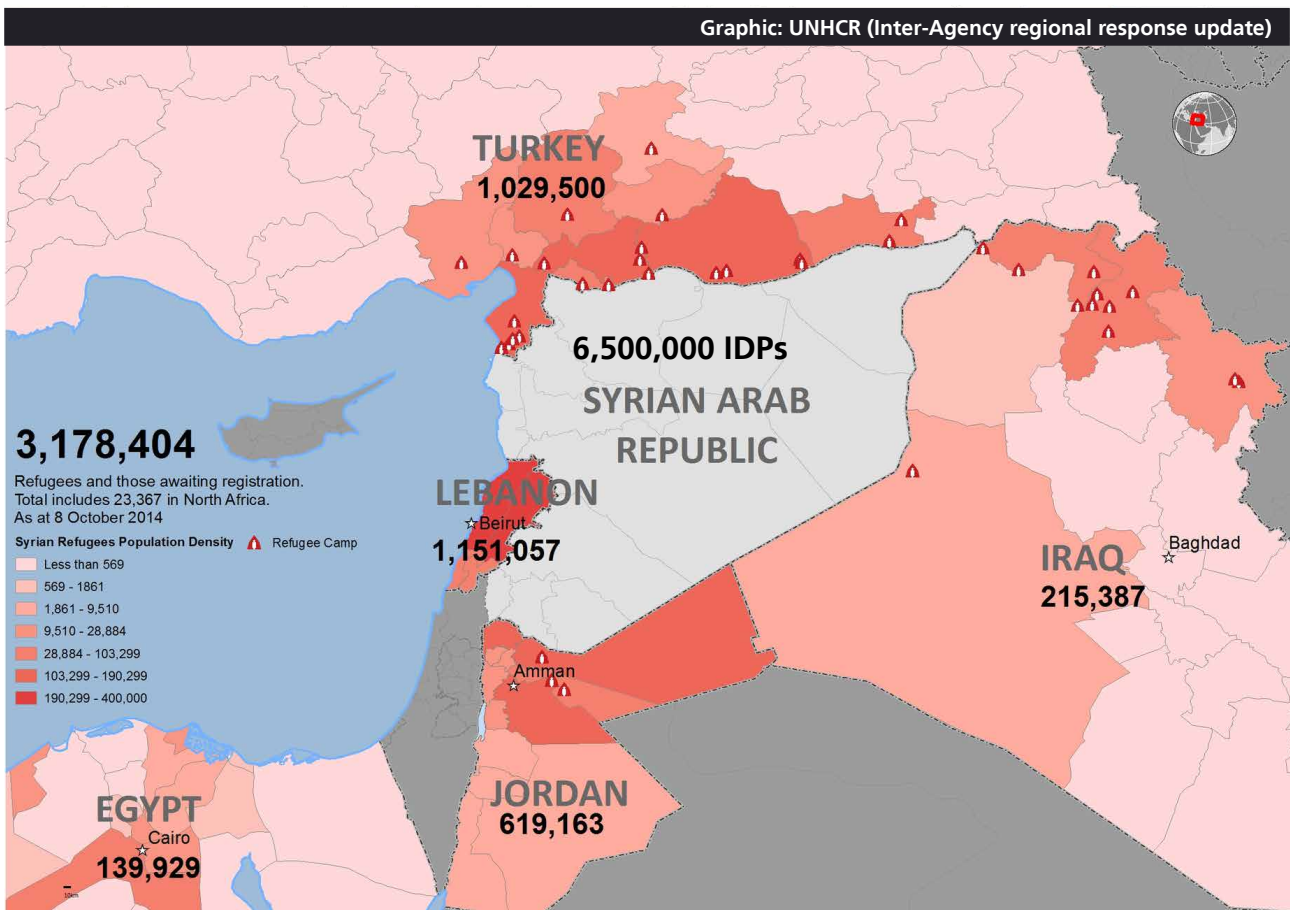
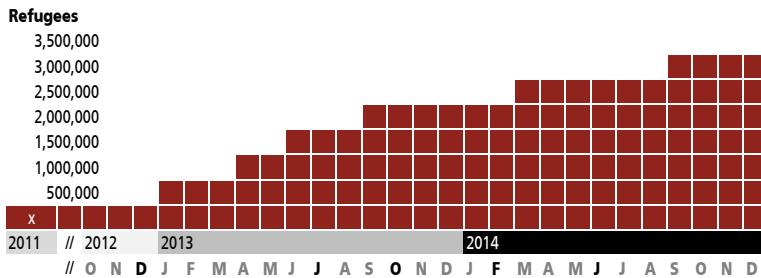
Ongoing conflict in Syria since March 2011, and in Iraq since June 2014, has led to rising displacement of Syrians and Iraqis. Many people have been displaced more than once as the pattern of conflict has changed. Currently there are 6.5 million people displaced internally in Syria, 1.8 million people displaced internally in Iraq, and 3 million refugees spread primarily across Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey with smaller numbers in North Africa, the Gulf states and Europe (figures as of October 2014).

The conflict is extremely complex, with a number of different armed groups involved and the emergence of Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) provoking an international military response.

The numbers of people affected make the IDP and refugee crisis the biggest in UNHCR's history and the pressure on neighbouring countries with relatively small populations is considerable.

Timeline:

- March 2011: Crisis begins after suppression of protests.
- May 2011: First camps for refugees open in Turkey.
- March 2012: Regional Refugee Coordinator for Syrian Refugees appointed by UNHCR.
- July 2012: Zaatari Refugee Camp opens in Jordan.
- Dec. 2012: 500,000 refugees. UNHCR and partners launch US\$ 1 billion Regional Response Plan.
- July 2013: UN estimates over 100,000 conflict deaths. Regional Response Plan updated to US\$ 4.4 billion.
- Aug. 2013: Spike in arrivals of Syrian Kurd refugees in northern Iraq.
- June 2014: Conflict spreads in northern Iraq as Islamic State seizes significant territory.



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Situation and response

A regional funding plan to respond to the crisis was first launched in December 2012 and later updated in July 2013 and December 2013. Shelter strategies have been developed at country levels in response to the very different contexts.

The majority of refugees and IDPs are living in non-camp situations, which include both formal renting and informal settlements.

The case studies in *Shelter Projects 2013-2014* explore a number of the different responses taken in different countries including:

- T-shelters in camps.
- Increasing housing supply outside of camps by support the completion of unfinished buildings.
- Vouchers for purchasing materials for shelter improvements.
- Shelter kit distributions.

Syria

Situation

Internal displacement in Syria has occurred mostly within cities and within governorates, with families moving from directly affected neighbourhoods to less affected neighbourhoods. Shelter assessments indicate that many neighbourhoods have doubled or even tripled their population, placing great strain on basic infrastructure and services in those areas and causing water shortages.

No detailed national shelter assessment has been made, but reports indicate that most displaced people are sheltering in private, multi-storey housing through host arrangements or rental contracts.

Many families have lost their livelihoods and have reduced incomes to meet the rising costs of living, with rental costs roughly doubling since 2011.

Extensive damage to buildings means that many of those who have

returned to, or remained in their homes also have shelter needs.

Unfinished buildings, providing for a significant percentage of the displaced population, are often available for free or at minimal cost, but require initial investment to make them habitable. Other forms of shelter include occupation of non-residential buildings, either as individual or as collective shelters.

Response

Due to extreme insecurity and difficulties in obtaining permission from the Syrian government, few international humanitarian organisations are operational within Syria in the Shelter sector. Those that are present are often reliant upon local partners to engage with beneficiaries and to carry out distributions of materials. Typical interventions include NFI distributions and providing sealing-off kits for unfinished or damaged buildings.

Lebanon

Situation

The large influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon (rising six-fold during 2013 and now reaching over a million, making up around 25% of Lebanon's population) has resulted in further pressure on the rental market, inflating prices. Prior to the conflict, Lebanon had a very limited stock of affordable housing.

Recent assessments by international organisations note that the lack of an adequate and safe supply of shelter has pushed many of the poorest Syrian and Lebanese families into sub-standard shelters, with the situation worsening. Whilst most refugees are living in apartments or houses, 25% are living in unfinished houses or non-residential buildings, 15% live in informal settlements of tents and makeshift shelters, and less than 3% live in collective centres.

Strategy and response

The Government of Lebanon has not sanctioned the development of refugee camps. Consequently, increasing the supply of rental accommodation remains a priority intervention in the absence of other solutions. This is achieved through the

rehabilitation of houses or completion of unfinished buildings and the establishment of collective shelters

Jordan

Situation

While more than 100,000 refugees are sheltered in camps, over 80% of families live in other forms of shelter. At least 30% of refugees are living in urban settings with host communities and are extremely vulnerable, inhabiting inadequate shelters or even in informal tented settlements.

Syrian families tend to pay higher rents than Jordanians, and contracts are typically insecure. High rents and limited employment opportunities often result in the sharing of already crowded shelter space, movement to other shelter locations and increasing debt. Movement potentially take people further away from access to basic services.

The general pressure on rental accommodation also means that Jordanian families are being affected by increases in the cost of renting.

Strategy and response

The humanitarian shelter response is coordinated through the Humanitarian Shelter Working Group, under the leadership of UNHCR, and guided by a shelter strategy which divides its work into two broad response objectives:

- Response to shelter needs in camp settings. This includes development and upgrading of camp settings, combined with emergency and transitional shelter support, basic service and infrastructure development, care and maintenance, integrated planning, and extension of shared community facilities such as sewage plants, feeder roads etc.
- Response to shelter needs in urban settings, increasing the number of adequate shelter solutions for most vulnerable families, including needs assessment, winterisation (shelter kit distributions), minor

upgrading of sub-standard shelters, completion of unfinished shelter structures, conditional cash support, legal advice on tenure rights, and coordination with government and donor agencies on solutions for mitigating the impact of refugees on the urban housing market.

Turkey

Situation

In Turkey over 200,000 refugees live in 21 camps (29% of the total), provided and staffed by the Turkish government. 71% of Syrian refugees in Turkey live outside camps, concentrated in three provinces.

Strategy and response

Much of the support for refugees in Turkey is undertaken by the Turkish government and the Turkish Red Crescent Society. Some international organisations are active in Turkey, but a larger number have offices inside Turkey to facilitate cross-border programming within Syria.

Iraq

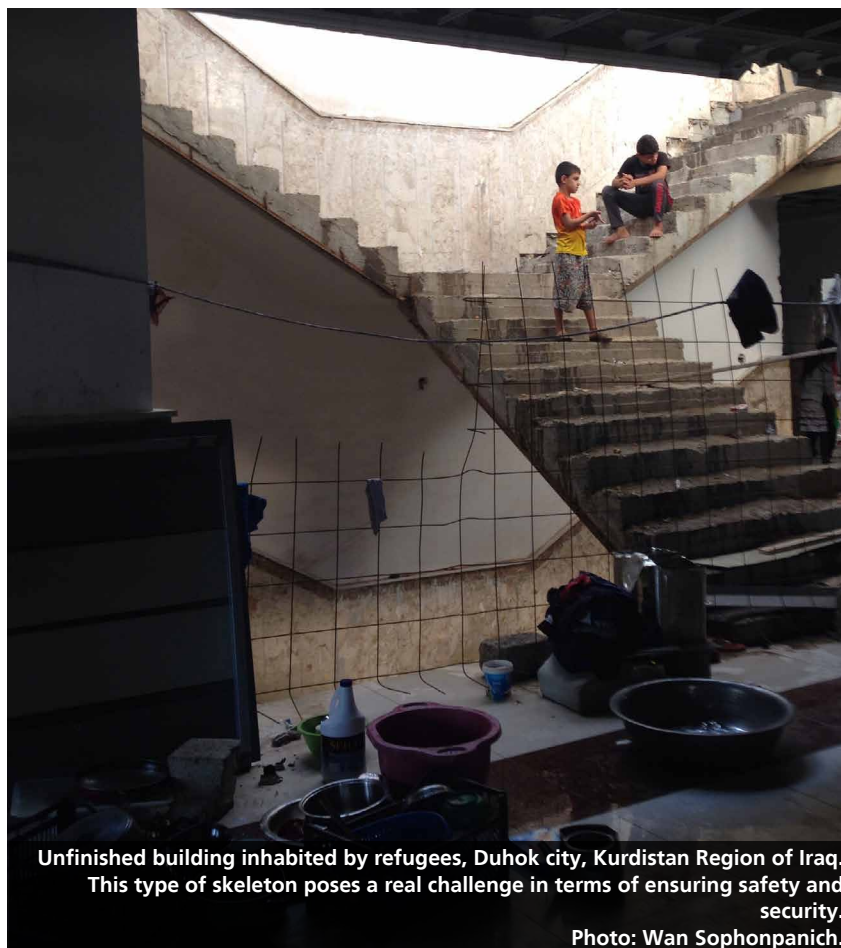
Situation

The highest number of refugees are in the Kurdistan region, and the majority of refugees live outside of camps. In a number of camps, tents are being replaced with more permanent structures. The newest camps, including those accommodating the 2014 internal displacement, are more appropriately designed as urban communities, as a result of the insistence by the local governorates.

Since the escalation of conflict in Iraq in 2014, a total of 1.8 million Iraqis have become displaced, with more than 850 000 people seeking sanctuary in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, adding to the total caseload.

Strategy and response

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the local authorities have established camps for the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs, whilst a coordinated approach is also emerging towards improving inadequate



Unfinished building inhabited by refugees, Duhok city, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This type of skeleton poses a real challenge in terms of ensuring safety and security.

Photo: Wan Sophonpanich.

shelter for refugees and IDPs living in rental accommodation or collective centres in urban or peri-urban areas.

Lessons learned

Strategic discourse is shifting from humanitarian assistance, characterised by direct action to support IDPs and refugees as outlined in the following case studies, to a resilience-based approach, supporting local and national capacities to absorb refugees and strengthen livelihoods of refugees and host communities.

Early examples of this approach include one UN agency's support of unions of municipalities in Lebanon to provide integrated WASH and Shelter support, and the initiative in Jordan to encourage private investors to build affordable rental housing for refugees and host populations on low incomes through enabling investment guarantees through private banks.

Future challenges

Responses in all countries face a shortage of resources for assisting those affected by the conflict. Host

families are running out of resources; displaced families are running out of money to pay rent or are already severely in debt; funding targets have not been met by donors, and regional instability is worsening the situation.

The complexity of the conflict itself is also driving donor money to northern Iraq, where displaced populations can be clearly identified and interventions more easily accounted for. Donors have been less willing or able to support the affected populations in Syria where the political situation is much less straight-forward.

With a large number of refugees in rented accommodation, attempts have been made to mitigate eviction threats through integrating tenure rights considerations into shelter support modalities.