



Rania, a refugee in Lebanon, is awaiting registration. She lives in one room with five of her children, all boys; two daughters are in Jordan, and one in Syria. Photo: Luca Sola/Oxfam

OVERTAKEN BY NEED

The world's failure to meet Syria's escalating humanitarian crisis

The human cost of Syria's conflict has risen beyond all expectations. In January, the UN predicted 1.1 million refugees by June. This April, there are already 1.3 million. Inside Syria itself, 6.8 million people struggle in urgent need of assistance.

As the numbers grow, however, the money to help some of those refugees and displaced people is running out. UN appeals have received only half of what they sought – to help far fewer people than they now need to assist.

The world has failed to find common purpose to end Syria's brutal conflict. Shamefully, it has also failed to provide enough aid to help the conflict's most vulnerable victims. Without a massive increase in aid now, millions of Syrians will miss out on the food, water, shelter and medical care that they desperately need. Donor governments – both in the region and the OECD – must urgently give more aid now, and be ready to give more as needs increase further and, tragically, Syria's humanitarian crisis continues for some time.

INTRODUCTION

Few humanitarian crises are as avoidable and tragic as Syria's. The wilful actions and inactions of many have turned an apparently stable country into a humanitarian disaster in two years.

It will not be over until the great powers of the region, and of the world, unite to press all sides for peace. The world's failure to do so over two bloody years is now shockingly compounded by the failure to provide sufficient funding soon enough for the humanitarian response.

Money is never enough. Ending the violence is more urgent than ever before. And overcoming the obstacles to get aid to those cut off through obstruction and violence is fundamentally vital, by facilitating unimpeded access for aid organizations to affected people inside Syria and the provision of greater humanitarian assistance across borders.

But the absolute minimum the world must do urgently now is simply to fund the humanitarian aid needed by millions of Syrians, caught between war and want, in their homeland and in neighbouring countries. That is the passionate call that Oxfam hears from the refugees it is working with in host communities, camps and gatherings across Lebanon and Jordan.

In January 2013, the UN asked the world's governments to fund the combined refugee and Syria appeals for \$1.5bn (now updated to \$1.6bn) at a Pledging Conference in Kuwait. According to UN figures, the combined Syria and Refugee appeals are no more than 52 percent funded, even after Kuwait and others made substantial new donations in mid-April – new donations that provided a 'breathing space' only, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.²

The UN's twin Syria appeals – to cover humanitarian needs inside Syria and to support Syrian refugees in the region – are still woefully underfunded. Although some governments are giving large amounts outside the appeals, the lack of transparent information means that it is very difficult to know who is getting assistance, where aid is being duplicated, and how to channel aid to reach those most desperately in need of food, water, sanitation and shelter, regardless of ethnicity, faith or political affiliation.

All the while, more Syrians flee their country, and their need for vital assistance increases. Lebanon, which, along with Jordan, hosts most of the refugees, has, in a remarkably short period of time, received numbers of refugees equivalent in proportion to its population to 50 million Syrians arriving in the EU or 30 million in the US. Without far greater international assistance, that is neither just nor sustainable.

Today, the aid effort is shamefully inadequate. Soon, without a massive increase in support, it may be overwhelmed by rising need.

There are promises and promises, but we get nothing. My family is living on bread and oil.

Fatima,¹ a refugee in Lebanon, April 2013

In April 2013, members of the UN Security Council urged all parties to ensure safe and unimpeded access for aid organizations in all areas of Syria, called for the urgent removal of bureaucratic and other obstacles; and underlined the need to facilitate humanitarian assistance in the most effective ways including when appropriate across borders in accordance with guiding principles of humanitarian assistance.

UNSC press elements on Syria, 18 April 2013

The needs are growing while our capacity to do more is diminishing, due to security and other practical limitations within Syria as well as funding constraints. We are precariously close, perhaps within weeks, to suspending some humanitarian support.

Valerie Amos, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and the heads of UN humanitarian agencies, 15 April 2013

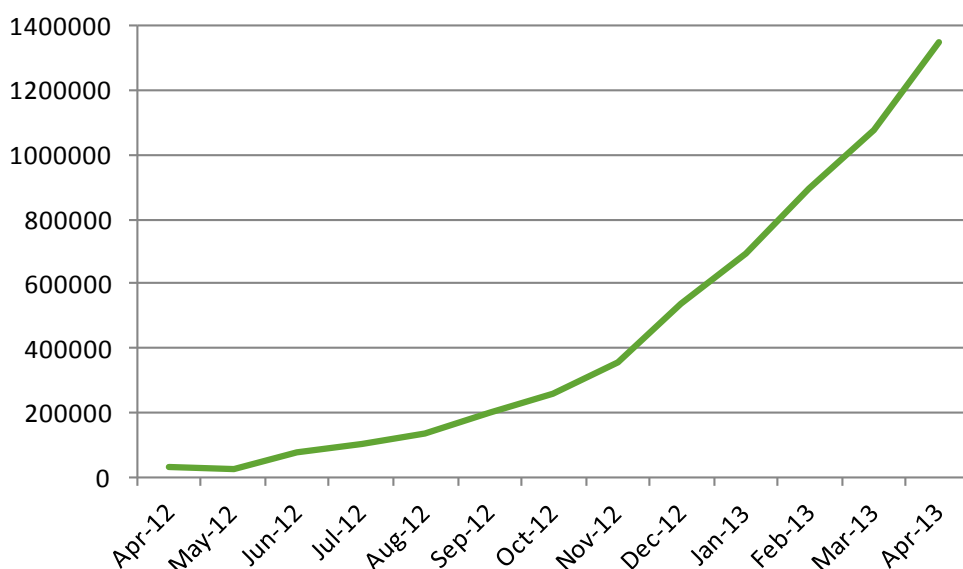
RISING NUMBERS AND SPIRALLING NEED

In the first three months of 2013, the number of Syrian refugees more than doubled. In January, there were around 500,000. By April, there were more than 1.3 million in neighbouring countries including Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt, 50 per cent of whom were children.³ In March alone, at least 250,000 people fled Syria.⁴ According to some predictions, by the end of 2013, Lebanon could have 1.2 million refugees.⁵

My house completely vanished. They destroyed the whole area. There is no house to return to, and no shop to work in.

Jamal, aged 41, a refugee arrived in Jordan, April 2013.

Figure 1: Number of refugees from April 2012 to April 2013⁶



Source: UNHCR

At the same time, more than 4 million men, women and children are displaced within Syria itself, among the total of 6.8 million in urgent need.⁷ They too have fled the conflict and human rights violations by both government and opposition forces that Amnesty International has recorded.⁸ The numbers fleeing are increasing as the violence continues. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 2013 was the 'deadliest' month of the conflict so far.⁹

We used to hear the bombs and the firing, the tanks, grenades and the rockets. I feared for my daughter. We only had one choice, and that was to leave Syria.

Samira, a refugee in Lebanon, April 2013

Those refugees and displaced people may have escaped death, but they face worsening shortages of basic necessities. Every day, UNHCR registers 7,000 new refugees, many of them with nothing but the clothes they are wearing.¹⁰ Two-thirds of registered refugees live within local communities.¹¹ Despite their generous support, the refugees are struggling to live with too little water, high housing costs, and little money for medical treatment for chronic illnesses. Up to 20 refugees share two or three rooms.¹²

A house but not a home

Ibrahim, 40, a refugee from Syria, lives in a run-down house in Mafrqa, Jordan, with his wife, five sons between 6 and 12 years old and 13-month-old daughter

'Before the war, I used to have a market. I earned money for myself and my children. A missile destroyed my house. The house got burned and I took my children out of the country. Living here needs cash and I don't have any. I'm unemployed and unable to work. I have a baby that needs nappies. I'm looking for a house but all cost 150 JDs (\$211).'

For those living in refugee camps, conditions are also difficult. Every day, more than 2,000 new refugees reach Zaatari camp in Jordan, which already has more than 100,000 people. It is overcrowded, and while the facilities are all expanding – with the help of recent funding – the rapid increase in refugees is putting pressure on services. While the current situation is serious, it could soon get worse. The humanitarian community is operating on minimum funding. Recent funding has been welcome to ensure that immediate needs are met – such as food aid in Lebanon. However, as the numbers of people affected increase, so do the needs. In Jordan, for example, cash programmes for refugees in host communities provide much-needed assistance, but even so, refugee families are falling into debt.

At the same time, Oxfam struggles, with insufficient funds, to help as much as it aims to. The generosity of its supporters, donations from the public and institutions alike, enable it to provide vital aid to thousands. But the gap between what Oxfam can currently do and what it must is one of the greatest Oxfam has faced. For example, it cannot provide enough latrines for the number of refugees in its operational areas in Zaatari camp and without more funds, Oxfam will not be able to retain the temporary latrines it has installed.

Palestinians fleeing Syria face challenges of their own. Many are in overcrowded camps for Palestinians in Lebanon, in makeshift houses with poor access to basic services.¹³ According to a recent assessment by UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, half of the households surveyed had insufficient food, and only 7 per cent of refugees were working.¹⁴

Within Syria, the numbers of people in need are even larger, and growing. An estimated 6.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance (more than 4 million of whom are internally displaced), and access to them has reduced since February.¹⁵ Basic services such as schools, hospitals, and water and sanitation systems are collapsing.¹⁶ Essential medicines are in short supply.¹⁷ Outbreaks of disease such as Hepatitis A and leishmaniasis are increasing.¹⁸ Children are facing yet another year without school. Although the ICRC works extensively with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, there are few other international organizations inside Syria, due to severe restrictions on access by the government, bureaucratic impediments, and insecurity. Groups of Syrians and local organizations are working to distribute aid in both government and opposition-held areas, but capacity is weak (including within the Assistance Coordination Unit of the Syria National Coalition) and accessing and absorbing financial assistance is difficult. These challenges have prompted the UN Security Council to call for cross-border assistance to be provided where appropriate.¹⁹

UNRWA says they can't give more assistance because there isn't enough money. There should be more money. I never asked UNRWA for assistance until now.

Zeinab, a Palestinian refugee from Syria in Shatila camp, Lebanon, April 2013.

UNMET NEEDS – AND AN UNFAIR BURDEN

More than 440,000 Syrians have fled to Lebanon.²⁰ Syrian refugees now make up more than 10 per cent of its population.²¹ If a similar proportion had reached Europe, there would be 50 million Syrian refugees in the European Union, more than the population of Spain.²² If they had reached the United States, there would be 30 million in the US, significantly more than the population of Texas.²³ In March, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, warned of ‘a real threat to regional peace’ from the burden that the refugee crisis imposes.²⁴

With Jordan and Turkey, Lebanon has generously hosted most of the refugees fleeing Syria. The strain on all countries is understandably showing. Jordan is poised to declare its northern Governorates (home to most refugees) a ‘disaster zone’, and Lebanon has called on other Arab countries to ‘share the burden’.²⁶

Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have in fact provided substantial funding, though the nature and extent of much of the aid is unclear – as little information is available on where and how the aid is being delivered. Both the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the League of Arab States have very limited information on the committed pledges of the Arab and Gulf countries or the mechanisms through which aid is being channelled. In the absence of this information, coordination of aid among different aid and relief agencies is hindered.

In Zaatari camp, for example, there were initially different forms of accommodation being provided by donors, ranging from various types of tents to pre-fabricated ‘caravans’, which caused much confusion and anxiety among refugees. This is now being addressed by plans to streamline the accommodation provided.

In January, the UN asked for \$1.5bn (since updated to \$1.6bn) to fund its appeals. Three months on, just over half²⁷ of this money, 52 per cent, has actually been received. The UN’s Syrian Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) is only 61 per cent funded and the Regional Response Plan (RRP) is 47 per cent.²⁸

Some governments, of course, have given more than others, with the largest contributions recorded by the UN’s Financial Tracking System coming from Kuwait, the United States, European Commission, and the UK.²⁹ While some other countries have also given significant amounts (Japan, Canada and Germany), the overall speed and size of the world’s donations are a dire indictment on the international community as a whole. Every donor government should immediately commit all the funds that they have pledged. They must fully fund the UN humanitarian appeals – urgently now, but also when a new appeal is launched in the middle of 2013, which should reflect not only the rapidly rising numbers of people in need, but look ahead to continuing needs for more than six months at a time.

The UN, OECD, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and Gulf donors should also coordinate with each other so that everyone knows who is paying, who is receiving, and that the aid is as effective and impartial as it must be. For while UN

For Lebanon, the Syrian crisis has become an existential threat.

António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 21 March 2013.²⁵

appeals are not the only effective mechanisms for delivering aid, all aid must be delivered in a coordinated and transparent way, so that it reaches those in most need. This means sharing information on where and to whom funding is given, to avoid missing people or duplicating efforts, and it means harmonizing aid efforts to ensure assistance does not create conflict within camps or between refugees and host communities.

THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM

In April 2013, William Hague, the British Foreign Secretary, said that the crisis facing Syrian refugees, and those left inside the country, was heading to be ‘the worst humanitarian catastrophe of the 21st century so far’.³⁰

That may or may not prove to be the case. But it is difficult not to conclude that the world’s response to Syria’s conflict has been the most shameful combination of failure on both the diplomatic and humanitarian fronts.

Both the international community and the Middle East are tragically disunited on how to end the ever-worsening conflict. They must find common cause on that before yet more thousands of lives are lost.

That will require a diplomatic breakthrough – one urgently needed.

For the millions in need of enough aid, increasing the humanitarian response is equally urgent. That requires the generosity of governments to give what they have promised, and much more. It requires not only unimpeded access for aid organizations to affected people inside Syria, but also the provision of greater humanitarian assistance across borders. Those that have already given substantial funding should be applauded, but cannot sit back. The needs predicted a few months ago have already been exceeded. As the numbers of people affected by the conflict rise so rapidly, so must the response.

Some governments and humanitarian agencies have done all that they could. Many individuals have acted with enormous courage and commitment to get aid to Syrians in need.

But by and large the world has sat back and watched Syria’s conflict and humanitarian crisis escalate out of all proportion to what could have been expected two years ago.

Now is the time to escalate the humanitarian response.

My boy has 6 pieces of shrapnel in his head. He needs surgery! No-one is helping us.

Zeinah, a refugee in Lebanon, April 2013.

I do not have an answer for those Syrians I have spoken to who asked me why the world has abandoned them.

Valerie Amos, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, 18 April 2013³¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

International donors should

- Act immediately to ensure that pledges made are delivered as swiftly as possible, *and* provide additional funds to meet spiralling needs for both refugees and host communities and for those inside Syria in government and opposition-controlled areas alike. These funds should be channelled through a variety of funding mechanisms including UN, NGO and government.
- Take every possible step to encourage the Government of Syria and the Syrian National Coalition to remove bureaucratic impediments and other hurdles to UN and INGO access to affected and internally displaced people inside Syria, including across lines and cross-border from neighbouring countries, to ensure they receive all the humanitarian aid they need in an impartial and transparent manner.
- Coordinate assistance with the UN response plans and be transparent in the targeting of humanitarian funding. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation must play a role in facilitating coordination between the Gulf donors and the UN.
- The League of Arab States must urge all Arab countries that have pledged to the Syrian Crisis response to be transparent and to share information about their commitments and the mechanisms for fulfilling their pledges.
- Ensure that funding is impartially driven by needs, irrespective of who has them, or who controls the territory where they live. Donor governments must not prioritize one group over another.
- Ensure that funding does not focus exclusively on one refugee group; the needs of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, and Lebanese returnees must be met equitably, as well as those of people unregistered or waiting to register.
- Ensure that flexible, longer-term funding is available to enable aid agencies to plan and prepare effectively to meet the growing and changing needs of men, women and children affected by the crisis, including the need for sustainable livelihoods options.

NOTES

- 1 The names of refugees quoted in this paper have been changed to protect individuals.
- 2 <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/97877/Promised-aid-funding-for-Syria-reaches-half-way-point>
- 3 UNHCR estimates 1.3 million 'persons of concern' and 1 million refugees, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> and UNHCR, 'Inter-agency regional response for Syrian refugees', 14–20 March 2013.
- 4 Norwegian Refugee Council (2013), 'Syria Refugee Response', 9 April 2013: www.nrc.no/syriaresponse
- 5 <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Apr-19/214298-lebanon-projects-12m-syrian-refugees-in-country-by-end-of-year.ashx#axzz2RBEsw8iu>
- 6 UNHCR: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> as of 11 April 2013. These figures are estimates; they include registered and unregistered refugees.
- 7 <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/news/number-of-syrians-in-need-rises-to-68-million-un-aid-chief/>
- 8 Amnesty International, 'Syria: Government bombs rain on civilians', and 'Syria: Summary executions and other abuses by armed opposition groups,' 14 March 2013, both available at www.amnesty.org
- 9 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21995400>
- 10 UNHCR, 'Inter-agency regional response for Syrian refugees, 14-20 March 2013.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Oxfam, 'Integrated assessment in Host Communities: Emergency Food Security and Livelihoods; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; Protection,' March 2013.
- 13 UNRWA needs assessment, February 2013.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 OCHA, 'Security Council Briefing on Syria', 18 April 2013, <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/USG%20Amos%20Security%20Council%20on%20Syria%2018%20April%202013%20CAD.pdf>
- 16 OCHA, 'Humanitarian Bulletin, Syria', 5–18 March 2013.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 UNSC Elements to the Press, 18 April 2013.
- 20 Norwegian Refugee Council (2013), 'Syria Refugee Response', 9 April 2013: www.nrc.no/syriaresponse
- 21 Based on World Bank population data, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>. If unregistered refugees were included, a far higher % would be true.
- 22 <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&language=en&pcode=tps00001&tableSelection=1&footnotes=yes&labeling=labels&plugin=1>
- 23 http://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/dc10_thematic/2010_Profile/2010_Profile_Map_Texas.pdf
- 24 *Washington Post*, 22 March 2013, quoted in Norwegian Refugee Council (2013), 'Syria Refugee Response', 9 April 2013: www.nrc.no/syriaresponse
- 25 *Huffington Post*, 22 March 2013: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/22/antonio-guterres-syria-crisis-lebanon_n_2934857.html
- 26 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/lebanon-calls-for-help-in-dealing-with-massive-influx-of-syrian-refugees-8552211.html>
- 27 UN FTS, <http://fts.unocha.org> plus funding information yet to be announced and recorded on the FTS tracking.
- 28 <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/pub?key=0AusGu5uwbttdEp0eHRzcWdVd2hBQmpBVVwxUHRjcUE&single=true&gid=0&output=html>
- 29 <http://fts.unocha.org> as of 13 April 2012.
- 30 William Hague (2013), *Prospect Magazine* foreign affairs event, London, 15 April 2013, <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/blog/william-hague-prospect/>

31 OCHA, 'Security Council Briefing on Syria', 18 April 2013, *op. cit.*

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