



***Establishing and Strengthening International Assistance to Syrian Refugees***

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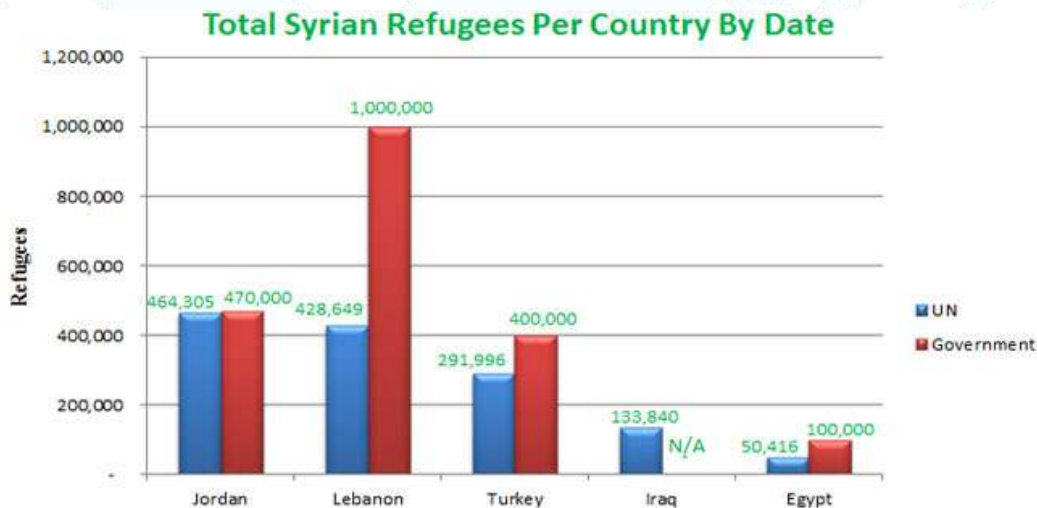
**Introduction**

The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the most pressing issues facing the United Nations today and it is the worst refugee crisis the world has seen in over twenty years. "Helping Syria's neighbours deal with the human fallout of this terrible conflict is crucial for preserving the stability of the entire region" says High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres.

The extraordinary humanitarian problems of over 2 million Syrian refugees and some 4 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) leads to major debates over who will supervise aid delivery; the United Nations and its affiliated agencies, independent agencies like the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs like Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders), or the aid agencies of donor governments. The choice has enormous implications for international involvement and responsibility for the Syrian conflict. Governments often prefer to work through their own agencies, but many also recognize the expertise and speed of NGOs, while many prefer the coordination and greater legitimacy of UN affiliated agencies.

Aid delivery also has major implications for the Syrian government and rebel groups fighting against it. Any international military intercession also will affect humanitarian assistance, possibly leading the Syrian government to stop aid shipments to civilians. The member states of the UN must tread carefully as they try to do the right thing without endangering other goals and possibly the very people they strive to assist.

**Figure 1. Syrian refugees, April 2013**



*\*As of April 21, 2013*

*\*Based on UN Total Persons of Concern*

## **Background**

On 18 December 2010, Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire to protest police harassment, sparking a wave of protests now known as the Arab Spring. After overturning governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and Yemen, in March of 2011 these protests had spread to Syria. The Syrian government under Bashar al Assad responded quickly, using military force to suppress the uprising. The situation quickly devolved into a civil war, now in its third year.

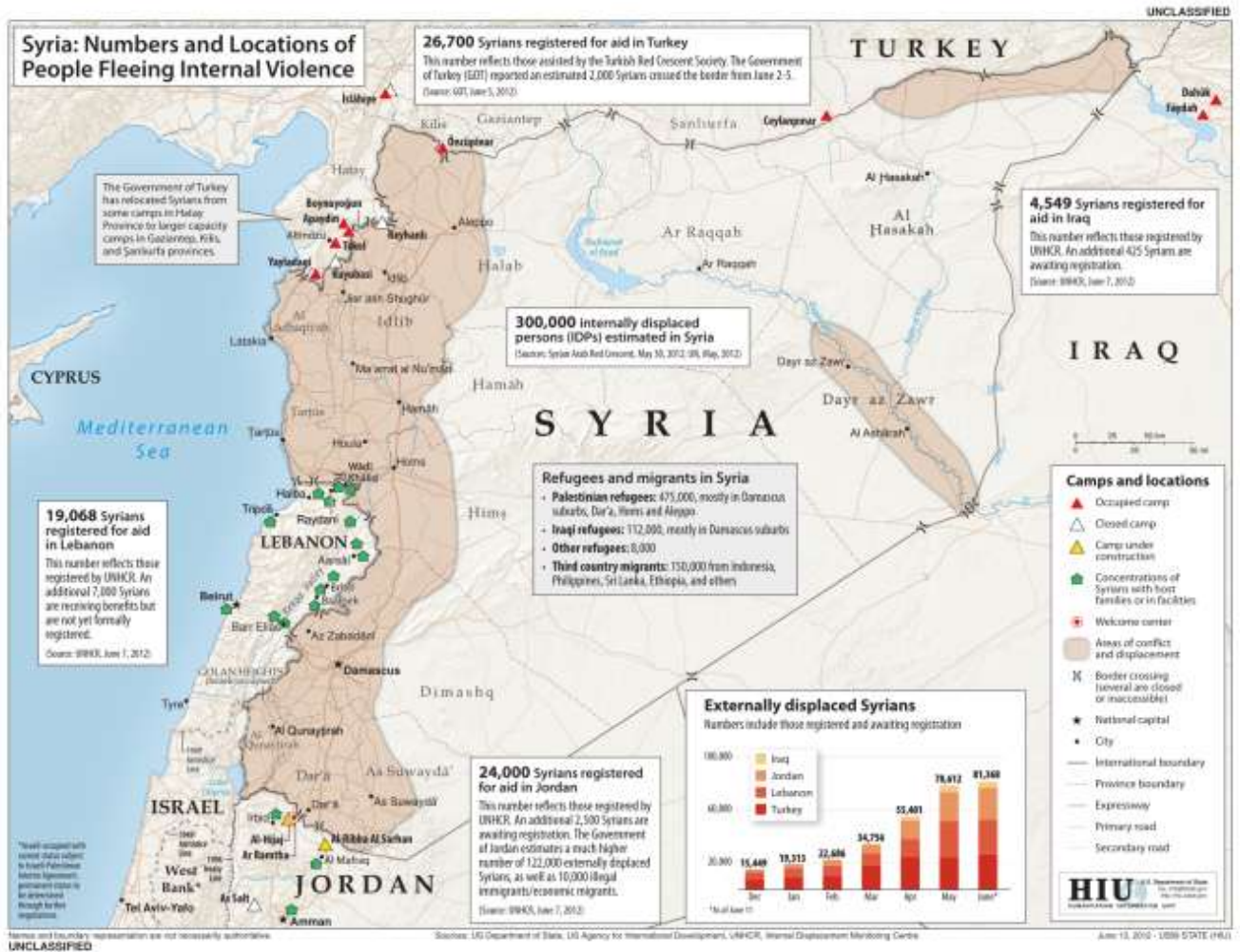
The war is dominated by sectarian division between the Alawaite minority (roughly 10 percent of the population) and other minorities including Christians and Shi'ites, who generally support the Assad government, and the Sunni majority (some 70 percent of the population) that forms the core of rebel forces. While the government controls the capitol of Damascus and most of the countries north-south strip, with most of the population, rebels control most of the eastern part of the country. Despite major Arab League and UN sponsored peace efforts, the conflict remains stalemated and unlikely to be resolved militarily.

Total fatalities as of June 2013 were estimated at 100,000. The war also has generated a massive refugee crisis. The first eighteen months of the conflict saw 250,000 international refugees from Syria, most now living in camps in bordering Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as lesser numbers in Egypt and elsewhere. By March of 2013 their numbers reached 1 million and over 2 million as 3 September 2013. At the current rate, the number of refugees is expected to reach 3.5 million by the end of the 2013, not including the over 4.2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In all, some 6.8 million Syrians are in need of assistance.

Refugees and IDPs usually have lost everything; their property, their source of income, savings, often family members (especially men) have been killed or maimed. Many have no homes to return to, others fear for their lives if they go back. As refugees, they are destitute, vulnerable to severe mistreatment and suffering, children have ceased to get education and families lack all normal means of support and social services. Refugees are vulnerable to rebel recruiting and often turn to crime in desperation.

The complete breakdown of everyday services, the economy, lack of basic healthcare, and any semblance of a normal life because of the war, continues to push people to seek asylum elsewhere. With no end in sight to this conflict and increasing evidence of chemical weapons use by the government, the refugee crisis will continue to worsen. To date, all attempts at ending this war at the negotiating table have failed. Neither the Syrian government, nor the rebel coalition represented by the Syrian National Council has shown interest in a negotiated settlement. The latter is especially weak, leading to claims there is not a strong enough unified rebel leadership to negotiate with.

**Figure 2. Syrian refugees in July 2012**



## Current Situation

Four countries are primarily bearing the burden of the 3 million refugees: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The main issue facing the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) along with the host nations is a shortfall in money needed to sustain the basic necessities for living. Food, water, sanitation facilities, housing, blankets and a host of other things are lacking. In order to provide for the Syrian refugees and those in need within Syria, for 2013 alone, the UNHCR has asked for 5 billion USD; it has received only 1.2 billion USD.

Reports from the UN World Food Program (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) estimate over 4 million people are unable to meet basic food needs in Syria. As unemployment continues to rise, the currency continues to devalue, and the infrastructure of the country continues to be destroyed, the number of both IDP's and refugees will continue to increase. It is important to distinguish between an IDP and a refugee. An IDP is someone who has fled violence but has not left their country, while a refugee has sought asylum

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outside their nation's borders. This difference makes the work of the UN extremely difficult; in an environment where aid workers have difficulty reaching them with much needed supplies.

#### **IDPs**

Refugees are people who have crossed an international border. This makes them eligible for protection and support under the Geneva Conventions. Internally displaced people (IDPs) fled their homes but remain in Syria. As a result they are not eligible for most protection under international law, although their conditions and suffering often are identical—sometimes worse—than that faced by refugees. Their numbers are slightly less, but still very large, at an estimated 4 million. Some have joined relatives elsewhere in the country; most live in camps under the Syrian government, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, or rebel control.

The IDP's in Syria struggle to find food, water, and medical care; eventually many end up fleeing the country, however, it is not uncommon for families to move to multiple areas within Syria before leaving. One of the most pressing issues facing the IDP's is that aid workers are often unable to reach them. In the cities of Old Homs and Aleppo people are trapped, unable to escape because of the heavy fighting and aid workers are continually denied access to these areas. IDP's are also faced with the daily threat of attacks by the regime or simply getting caught in the battles that ensue between rebels groups and Assad's forces. The conflict in Syria has also created a safe haven for extremists. They too present a growing threat to the population. Upon the recent opening of Iraq's border, the nation was inundated with some 40,000, mostly ethnically Kurdish, refugees reporting ethnic cleansing attempts by the Al-Nusra Front. The Al-Qaeda affiliated group has been embattled with both Syrian forces and Kurdish forces trying to hold their territory. There have also been recent reports of chemical weapons attacks on civilians.

#### **Inside The camps**

Other than shortages in basic necessities needed for living, refugee camps are faced with other pressing issues including the spread of communicable disease and crime. The WHO has warned that an outbreak of diseases such as typhoid, cholera, dysentery, and hepatitis are only a matter of time. These potential outbreaks are directly connected to the lack of clean water and poor sanitation both refugees and IDP's are faced with. IDP's living in unsanitary conditions and without basic medical services continue to flee into neighboring countries; they potentially bring with them disease that will spread into camps and host communities. There has already been a measles outbreak this year and reports of refugees with typhoid, tuberculosis, and hepatitis have been reported.

The Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan is the world's second largest refugee camp and Jordan's fourth largest "city," hosting some 144,000 refugees. The security issues within this camp are dire. There are regular protests which guards break up with tear gas, water tankers are overwhelmed by refugees when they arrive, aid workers are attacked and robbed, looting has become a regular activity, and there is constant disorder when it comes to food distribution. It is not uncommon to see armed refugees in the camp, highlighting how the conflict spills over into the surrounding nations. Single men move back over the Syrian border daily to join the fight; refugee camps have become a place for the Free Syrian Army to recruit new fighters. The Zaatari camp manager has been quoted as saying "this makes Mogadishu look like a holiday."

## **Outside the Camps**

These struggles will continue to push refugees from camps into the surrounding populations. Jordan and Lebanon have been the most affected by refugees. Both countries have limited resources and have been struggling with political issues of their own. While initially being extremely welcoming to refugees, the pressure of these populations has begun to take its toll on the host communities.

In Jordan, 80% of the refugee population has moved into urban centers. The population has caused an increase in food prices, a lowering of wages, rent has drastically increased, and there is an ever increasing cost in healthcare; Jordan's economy is being devastated by the sheer size of the refugee population. While King Abdullah has stated his commitment to keep the Jordanian border open, a recent poll shows some 70% of citizens want the border closed. There is increasing hostility towards refugees.

Lebanon's struggles may be even greater than Jordan's. While the Palestinian refugee population in Jordan has mostly been assimilated into the population, the 400,000 in Lebanon remain mostly in camps; with a large population of people already in camps, Lebanon has been much less able to adapt to the new influx of refugees. The large refugee population has been a source of contention in Lebanon for years, and now there are conflicts arising between Syrian and Palestinian refugees. This is directly related to the fact that there are no refugee camps in Lebanon that have been set up for Syrians, only the ones that have been hosting Palestinians for years and the Palestinians don't want to share. Abandoned buildings and empty lots have become the homes of these refugees. The Lebanese government is also much weaker than neighboring Jordan and is unable to control the situation. Lebanon also suffers from increasing sectarian violence as a mostly Sunni population has had to move into mostly Shia neighborhoods.

## **NGOs**

UN agencies along with other NGOs operating within Syria face security issues as well as an inability to reach those most in need within Syria. The UN has recently decreased its staff operating in Syria as the security situation has continued to deteriorate; they have lost 8 aid workers to date. There are 14 international NGOs operating in Syria and 69 national NGO's working with the UN. Two of these NGOs are Médecins Sans Frontières and the Red Crescent. The majority of NGOs working in Syria remain silent about their work and as anonymous as possible in an attempt to keep their workers safe. UN agencies operating in Syria include the UNHCR, UNICEF, and the WFP.

## **Role of the United Nations**

The United Nations has put forth great effort to alleviate the issues that the Syrian Civil War has generated. A recent report from the Under-Secretary General and Emergency Relief Coordinator to the Security Council indicates that in May of 2013 the WFP was able to provide food assistance to some 2.5 million Syrians and drinking water to 2.4 million. In response to the growing disease outbreaks the WHO and UNICEF launched a vaccination campaign that has allowed for 1 million children to be vaccinated. Over the course of this year some 9.3 million refugees have been supplied with clean water.

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UN's two main appeals for humanitarian aid are the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (Sharp), which targets needs within Syria (for IDPs), and the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), which focuses on refugees from Syria in neighboring countries. As of July 2013, the two together received less than USD 1.6 billion, leaving a shortfall of USD 2.8 billion.

Though there have been great successes, there continues to be shortfalls in resources for refugees and IDP's and struggles to distribute resources to IDP's within Syria. The current and continuing role of the United Nations is both large and multifaceted. First the issue of shortfalls in monetary resources needed to provide aid, which includes food, water, sanitation, housing, and medical supplies, must be addressed. Second, the barriers put into place by the regime and opposition groups, which prevent the distribution of aid in areas of heavy fighting, must be lifted; these barriers are in direct violation of International Humanitarian Law. Thirdly, the great economic pressures put on the host communities by the massive refugee population must be addressed; this continued pressure has the potential to result in instability in these surrounding nations along with a backlash against the refugees.

It is also the role of the United Nations to continue the probe into the claims that chemical weapons have been used against the Syrians; a blind eye must not be turned to the Geneva Convention. Perhaps the most important role of the United Nations is to end the conflict. Without a ceasefire, Syria will continue to be a safe haven for insurgents and all other humanitarian issues will persist.

#### **Landmark Resolutions**

On April 14, 2012, the Security Council passed UNSC resolution 2042 and on 25 April 2012, UNSC resolution 2043. Both urge a peace settlement as quickly as possible. UNSC 2042 authorized an advanced team to monitor the ceasefire in Syria urging the implementation of Kofi Anan's six-point plan and suggesting the use of 300 observers. UNSC resolution 2043 establishes the UN supervision mission in Syria, with 300 observers to monitor the ceasefire and the implementation of Special Envoy, Kofi Anan's plan.

#### **Country Positions**

For many countries, humanitarian assistance is a separate issue from questions of military intervention to overthrow the Assad government or punish it for chemical weapons use. But these issues are hard to separate in practice, since helping refugees usually helps the rebels, making it easier for people to flee government rule and strengthening communities of opposition to government authority.

This leads to major debates over who will supervise aid delivery: the United Nations and its affiliated agencies, independent agencies like the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs like Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders), or the aid agencies of donor governments. The choice has enormous implications for international involvement and responsibility for the Syrian conflict. Governments often prefer to work through their own agencies, but many also recognize the expertise and speed of NGOs, while many prefer the coordination and greater legitimacy of UN-affiliated agencies.

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*The Arab League* is the bellwether regional organization on Syria. Syria is a member (suspended) and Arab countries have led on humanitarian assistance. Some—especially the smaller Gulf Arab sheikdoms, are leading military assistance to rebel factions.

*China* has been a continual no vote on military action in Syria—fearing a global precedent that would weaken national sovereignty—while being for select humanitarian assistance. It prefers that aid be distributed only by National aid agencies to strengthen the role of state sovereignty.

*France* supports most humanitarian action, and strongly supports limited military action against Syria to support the rebellion and overthrow the government of Assad.

*The European Union* and especially *Germany* have been at the forefront of humanitarian efforts and along with *India* and Japan finances humanitarian activity, through its national aid organization, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and through UN agencies like the United National Development Programme, and UN relief agencies like the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Food Program (WFP). All are unenthusiastic about military intervention.

*Iran* is strongly allied with the Assad government and supports limited humanitarian assistance, favoring Syria's Shi'ite minority, which remains largely pro-government. It offers military assistance to the government and opposes military intervention.

*The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)* is the UN's largest and most important voting bloc. It is divided on Syrian issues, highly supportive of humanitarian assistance, but anxious about precedents that would weaken state sovereignty.

*Russia* has been a major supporter of Assad, with important strategic relations (access to the port city of Tartus, where it has a small base), supplying military equipment, and caring for its own people who have settled there, some 40,000. Russia leads international opposition to cooperation with rebel groups and favors a settlement that leaves the authority of the Syrian government intact.

*Turkey* as a host of a large refugee population has been pushing for first a diplomatic, now a military solution to Syria. Turkey has been pushing for stronger military action than the US has recently proposed. Turkey hosts many members of the Syrian National Council in Istanbul.

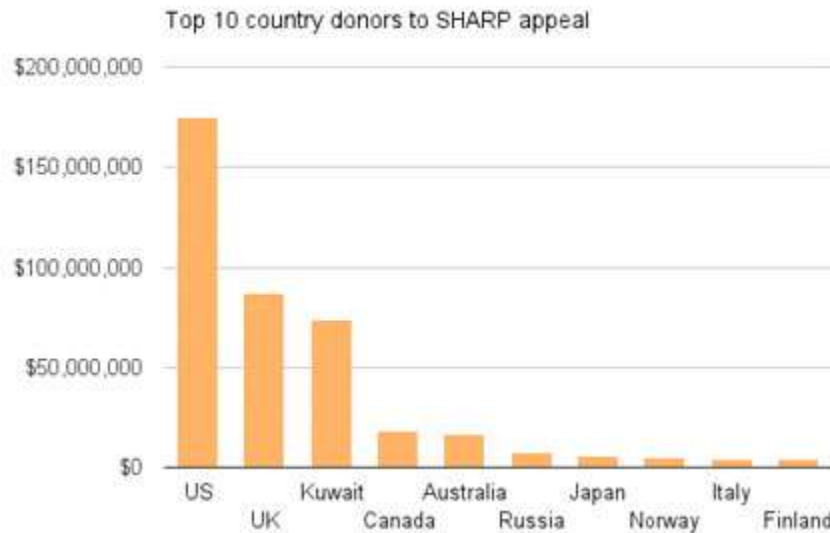
*United Kingdom* will not be joining any potential US military strikes after Parliament voted no on the issue. They have discussed arming rebel forces multiple times along with the rest of Europe.

*United States* views the Syrian war largely in strategic terms, as an opportunity to discomfort a traditional enemy of Israel. It is highly active in humanitarian affairs, but the American public remains deeply ambivalent, more interested in issues of military assistance to neighboring states, especially Iraq and Jordan, to a lesser extent to Egypt. It cooperates closely with Turkey. It does not oppose humanitarian action, but domestic opinion is critical of non-military foreign aid. The United States supports limited military assistance to Syrian rebels, which is approved in 2013,

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but fear of arming Islamists has made provision of military assistance difficult for the United States.

**Figure 3. Giving to the UN Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (SHARP, for Syrian IDPs)**



Source: "Aid funding for Syria's humanitarian crisis – get the data", *The Guardian*, 25 July 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/datablog/2013/jul/25/aid-funding-syria-humanitarian-crisis-data>

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