

World Vision Syria Crisis Response

“A region under growing pressure”

Four Year Mark Policy Briefing – March 2015

As the crisis in Syria enters its fifth year, the deteriorating trend of death, destruction and suffering shows little sign of abating. In 2014, huge increases were seen in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance. In the twelve months from December 2013 to December 2014, the number of children in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria rose from 4.3 million to 5.6 million, a 31 per cent increase overall.¹ Outside of Syria itself, the number of refugees is projected to rise from 3.2 million at the end of 2014 to over 4.2 million by the end of 2015.² Children’s education is profoundly suffering, with millions unable to attend school due to the ongoing fighting, including deliberate targeting of school buildings and their use by armed groups. The total number of children estimated to be out of school now reaches 1.6 million, 500,000 more than in 2013.³

But despite what looks like a hopeless situation, World Vision sees hope in the lives of children every day through its work in northern Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. We believe more can and must be done to support their dreams of a better future. World Vision will continue to work with limited resources in a region under growing pressure to deliver humanitarian and resilience programmes to these affected children and their families. With the arrival of the four year mark of the conflict, World Vision highlights two key areas that we believe can make a real difference with the assistance of other implementation agencies and donors:

- **Better support to refugees and host communities**

We must all prioritize multi-year and sustainable funding for longer-term interventions across all sectors, acknowledging the protracted nature of this crisis and increasing strain on neighboring host governments

- **More investment in ensuring children have access to quality education**

We must all prioritize implementing programs that work with existing structures in the region (governments, schools, education specialists and community groups) to find genuine and quality solutions to schooling barriers in consultation with the affected children and communities

¹According to UNICEF, Syria Crisis Dashboard, 12 December 2014, p1 there are 12.2 million people in need inside Syria, including 5.6 million children, plus 3.3 million refugees, including 1.67 million children.

² These projections are taken from the Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2015-2016 in Response to the Syria Crisis.

³ In 2014 1,100,000 children were not attending school, and in 2015 1,600,000 children were not attending school (a 500,000 increase). This information was compiled from a variety of sources including UN, *SHARP* (15 December 2013); and OCHA (2014), *Humanitarian Needs Overview* (November 2014), UN; and, OCHA, *2015 Syria Response Plan*, published 17 December 2014, UN: Geneva.

Better support to refugees and host communities

Since the beginning of the crisis, needs have not been confined to Syria alone. In addition to creating vast suffering within Syria where an estimated 12.2 million affected women, children and men are at risk of, or suffering from being displaced, besieged, food insecure, threatened or experiencing varying degrees of violence, torture or worse,⁴ the scale of the conflict and violence has also prompted a broader refugee crisis on an unprecedented scale. Communities in countries neighbouring Syria are sharing their services and resources with up to an additional 3.8 million vulnerable people.⁵

Lebanon hosts 1.2 million Syrian refugees, which is 25 per cent of its pre-crisis population and the highest per capita host of refugees in the world. All of these refugees are living in, and to some extent, relying on Lebanese communities and services. *Jordan* currently hosts 600,000 refugees, which is 10 per cent of its pre-crisis population. 85 per cent of these refugees are living in and relying on Jordanian communities and services. *Turkey* currently hosts 1.2 million refugees, *Iraq* currently hosts 242,000. Half of all these figures comprise children, and they are expected to rise before the end of the year.

Proportionally, the equivalent in the United States would be two-thirds of the population of Mexico arriving over a four year period – this is Lebanon’s experience. Or the population of Canada taking refuge in the United States – the current situation in Jordan. It is likely this kind of population shift would cripple the social services of the US and exhaust US communities’ patience. Understandably, the sheer volume of numbers of refugees is putting neighbouring countries under great strain to meet their international legal obligations.⁶ These obligations include protecting and providing basic services such as education, medical and humanitarian assistance to host families, refugee children and their parents, who are all entitled to the same services.

Providing protection to an additional 10 to 25 per cent of a state’s population is a heavy burden to be met solely by Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey or Iraq. The refugee crisis is exacerbating an already existing problem of “unsustainable urbanization,”⁷ in both Lebanon and Jordan, where the populations (both host community and refugee) exceed the capacity of civil and public health infrastructure to provide essential services.⁸ In these countries, the livelihoods of the poorest local communities are adversely affected in areas like housing, labor markets, public education and public health systems. Access to quality and affordable housing is restricted for local communities, as rents have increased by as much as 400 percent. Some laborers are losing work as the influx of Syrian workers undercut the competition,

⁴ OCHA, Syria Crisis, Key Figures as of 16 February 2015 at <http://syria.unocha.org/> and situations reports of various clusters at UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, accessed 16 February 2015, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#doc_3

⁵ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, accessed 16 February 2015, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php#doc_3

⁶ Obligations include, but are not limited to: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and both International Conventions on Civil and Political and Economic and Social Rights. Iraq ratified the CRC in 1994, Jordan in 1991 and Lebanon in 1991. Iraq ratified the ICCPR in 1971, Jordan in 1975 and Lebanon in 1972. Iraq ratified the ICESCR in 1971, Jordan in 1975 and Lebanon in 1972 see: <http://indicators.ohchr.org/> accessed 16 February 2015.

⁷ Ronak Patel et al, “Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis” *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* Vol. 27, No. 2 (May 2012); and Tim Midgley and Johan Eldebo in “Under Pressure: the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on host communities in Lebanon,” (World Vision: July 2014).

⁸ See Burkle et al, “Changing Face of Humanitarian Crisis” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* Vol. XX, Issue 11 (Spring/Summer 2014); and Patel et al, “Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis”.

raising poverty levels and lowering GDP. Healthcare and the quality of public education are eroding, as refugees increase health clinic caseloads and children overcrowd classrooms and exhaust national capacities. Basic services like waste removal, clean water, and electricity are becoming unsustainable. Crime rates are increasing and illicit forms of employment are beginning to take hold.

When refugees live in host communities and draw upon the same shared resources and public services, resource-driven competition fuels community tensions and affects relationships between the two groups. At the same time, humanitarian assistance can appear to exclude host populations and operate in parallel to public services rather than building on community resources and engaging host community actors. This can result in host communities feeling excluded from the relief effort and resentful of the assistance provided to refugees. The international community can and must do more to support these neighbouring governments and plan for long-term social cohesion.

More investment in ensuring children have access to quality education

Children in Syria are facing daily risk in attending school. Roughly a quarter of Syria's schools (over 4,000) have been damaged, destroyed or used by armed groups in violation of international law. It has been reported by NGOs that attacks on schools resulted in at least 37 deaths, including nine children during December 2015⁹, which followed UNICEF reports that 160 children were killed in attacks on schools in 2014¹⁰.

For those children who have fled to neighbouring countries, their chances of access to quality education are not much better. In Lebanon, 78 per cent of Syrian children were out of school in September 2014.¹¹ In Jordan, 48 per cent and in Iraq 65 per cent.¹² In Lebanon, the school enrolment rate for Syrian children is below that of sub-Saharan Africa.¹³ Formal recognition of schooling outside Syria remains a challenge, and space constraints still exist despite efforts taken to absorb the increased influx of students. There are not enough spaces in formal classrooms to allow access to education for all Syrian refugee children. Even when space exists, Syrian refugee children still face barriers to education including lack of money to pay for transportation and school supplies costs, and lack of qualified teachers.

The region's children must be educated and supported in Syria. Jordanian, Lebanese and Iraqi communities must be supported to ensure they can do the same with those Syrian children they are obliged to protect. There are urgent, unmet needs for psychosocial support, which is key to emotional

⁹ Anonymous (2015), 'NGO Access Report', 14 January 2015, Amman, p. 5, reported that during December 2014 there were, "9 attacks on or near hospitals, 3 attacks on schools, and 1 attack on civilian infrastructure, resulting in the deaths of at least 37 people, including at least 9 children."

¹⁰ ¹⁰ Human Rights Council (2015), 'Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic', UN, Twenty-seventh session, Agenda item 4, A/HRC/28/69, 5 February 2015, p.6.

¹¹ Watkins, Kevin, Zyck, Steven A, Overseas Development Institute Report, Living on hope, hoping for education: The Failed response to the Syrian refugee crisis, September 2014, available at: <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9169.pdf> accessed 16 February 2015, page 4.

¹² See above Watkins Report as page 4.

¹³ See above Watkins Report at page 1.

resilience in crisis situations. More programmes are required for pre-school children and to expand education activities.

Furthermore, with children in many cases facing long-term displacement, a more sustainable and widespread solution is required. Funding for education projects need to be extended to ensure that children have access to multi-year education or support programs that assist the governments of Jordan and Lebanon to cope with the strain of educating additional children under their protection. Together with UNICEF and other partners World Vision has been calling for this for the last two years as part of the No Lost Generation campaign with some success.

As part of the No Lost Generation campaign and its Syria Crisis Response, World Vision has focused on child-focused interventions addressing children's rights to protection, psychosocial well-being and education. Child protection, child friendly spaces, adolescent friendly spaces and community care initiatives have reached 24,000 people, about 22,000 of whom were children. Teachers have been trained on remedial and accelerated learning programmes to support basic literacy and numeracy skills, digital learning hubs have been established to provide enhanced learning and access to technology for children and cash transfers to the most vulnerable households are being provided to support monthly costs, including transportation and school supplies, to make sure children can maintain enrolment and attendance at schools. Life skills education and the formation of peer to peer groups to address increasing social cohesion issues and personal skills are also being undertaken.

But much more needs to be done. Where a whole generation of children are not educated the implications reach far beyond this crisis and into the future. The international community must support the region and its children in this regard.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The pressures faced by the region as a result of the Syria crisis are immense and continue today. This is an international crisis, and requires action from the international community. In accordance with the five priorities of World Vision's Syria Crisis Response, we ask for:

- 1) **Humanitarian access:** continued advocacy by the permanent and non-permanent members of the UN Security Council to hold parties to the conflict accountable for ensuring humanitarian access for all children and their families affected by the Syria crisis
- 2) **Durable solutions:** acknowledgment of the protracted nature of this crisis by the international community and donors by providing longer-term and more sustainable funding for longer-term interventions in livelihoods, food, household needs, water and sanitation
- 3) **Child protection:** the international community to prioritize and increase the provision of resources to fund and deliver child protection programming to reach further into affected communities
- 4) **Psychosocial support:** a greater emphasis on psychosocial skills and training from donors and implementing agencies, integrated across sectors by coordination mechanisms

- 5) **Education:** donors to fund and agencies to implement programs that work with existing structures in the region (governments, schools, education specialists and community groups) to find genuine and quality solutions to schooling barriers in consultation with the affected communities