

A million refugee children mark shameful milestone in Syria crisis

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UNHCR/UNICEF Joint Press Release

With Syria's war well into its third year, the number of Syrian children forced to flee their homeland as refugees will reach one million today.

"This one millionth child refugee is not just another number," said UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake. "This is a real child ripped from home, maybe even from a family, facing horrors we can only begin to comprehend."

"We must all share the shame," said Lake, "because while we work to alleviate the suffering of those affected by this crisis, the global community has failed in its responsibility to this child. We should stop and ask ourselves how, in all conscience, we can continue to fail the children of Syria."

"What is at stake is nothing less than the survival and wellbeing of a generation of innocents," said UNHCR High Commissioner António Guterres. "The youth of Syria are losing their homes, their family members and their futures. Even after they have crossed a border to safety, they are traumatized, depressed and in need of a reason for hope."

Children make up half of all refugees from the Syria conflict, according to the two agencies. Most have arrived in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. Increasingly, Syrians are fleeing to North Africa and Europe.

Latest figures show that some 740,000 Syrian child refugees are under the age of 11.

Inside Syria, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, some 7,000 children have been killed during the conflict. UNHCR and UNICEF estimate that more than 2 million children have been internally displaced within Syria.

The physical upheaval, fear, stress and trauma experienced by so many children account for just part of the human crisis. Both agencies also highlight the threats to refugee children from child labour, early marriage and the potential for sexual exploitation and trafficking. More than 3,500 children in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq have crossed Syria's borders either unaccompanied or separated from their families.

The largest humanitarian operation in history has seen UNHCR and UNICEF mobilizing support to millions of affected families and children.

For example, more than 1.3 million children in refugee and host communities in neighbouring countries have been vaccinated against measles this year with the support of UNICEF and its partners. Nearly 167,000 refugee children have received psychosocial assistance; more than 118,000 children have been able to maintain their education inside and out of formal schools.

UNHCR has registered all 1 million children, giving them an identity. The agency helps babies born in exile get birth certificates, preventing them from becoming stateless. UNHCR also ensures that all refugee families and children live in some form of safe shelter.

But more remains to be done say the two agencies. The Syria Regional Refugee Response plan, which calls for US\$3 billion dollars to address the acute needs of refugees until December of this year is currently only 38 per cent funded.

More than US\$5 billion has been called for to address the Syria crisis, with critical needs in education, health care and other services for children and child members of host communities. More resources need to be devoted to developing strong networks to identify refugee children at risk and to provide them, and their host communities, with support.

But more funds are only part of the response needed to address children's needs.

While intensified efforts are needed to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria, parties to the conflict must stop targeting civilians and cease recruitment of children. Children and their families must be safe to leave Syria and borders must remain open so they can cross to safety.

Those who fail to meet these obligations under international humanitarian law should be held fully accountable for their actions, say the two agencies.

Accompanying embargoed video, photos, and infographics materials are available for download at <http://unhcr.org/1m/>.

About UNICEF:

UNICEF works in more than 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit <http://www.unicef.org>.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also known as the UN refugee agency, was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. It is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary

purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people. In more than six decades, the agency has helped tens of millions of people restart their lives.

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