

UNHCR's Guterres: Syria refugees reach one million

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Data received from UNHCR's offices in the Syria region shows that the number of Syrians either registered as refugees or being assisted as such has now reached the one million mark.

“With a million people in flight, millions more displaced internally, and thousands of people continuing to cross the border every day, Syria is spiraling towards full-scale disaster,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. “We are doing everything we can to help, but the international humanitarian response capacity is dangerously stretched. This tragedy has to be stopped.”

The number of Syrian refugees fleeing their country has increased dramatically since the beginning of the year. Over 400,000 have become refugees since 1st January 2013. They arrive traumatized, without possessions and having lost members of their families. Around half of the refugees are children, the majority under the age of eleven. Most have fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. Increasingly, Syrians are also fleeing to North Africa and Europe.

“This number translates into one million people who are dependent on the generosity of host countries, the response of humanitarian agencies and the financial support of governments and individuals,” said Guterres.

Guterres noted that the impact of this large number of refugees arriving in neighbouring countries is severe. Lebanon's population has increased by as much as 10 per cent. Jordan's energy, water, health and education services are being strained to the limit. Turkey has spent over US\$600 million setting up 17 refugee camps, with more under construction. Iraq, juggling its own crisis with more than one million Iraqis internally displaced, has received over one hundred thousand Syrian refugees in the past year.

“These countries should not only be recognized for their unstinting commitment to keeping their borders open for Syrian refugees, they should be massively supported as well,” said Guterres.

In December, the UN's Regional Response Plan for Syrian Refugees estimated that 1.1 million Syrian refugees would arrive in neighbouring countries by the end of June 2013. UNHCR is in the process adjusting this plan accordingly in light of the new figures. Currently, the plan is only approximately 25 per cent funded.

Absent a political solution to the conflict, Guterres said, “at a minimum, humanitarian actors should receive the funds needed to save lives and ease suffering.”

The Syria crisis will be two years old next week. High Commissioner Guterres will be travelling to the region later this week to visit UNHCR operations in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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