

Yazidis stream into Syria from Mount Sinjar, UNHCR steps up aid

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In Syria, and as part of its response to the Yazidi situation in neighbouring Iraq, UNHCR has begun transporting newly arriving refugees from the border area to the Newroz camp near Al Qamishli, some 60 kilometres to the west.

Tens of thousands of mainly Yazidi people have now crossed the Semalka/Peshkabour border crossing, after transiting through Syria, into the Dohuk governorate of northern Iraq over the last 10 days. An increasing number of Yazidis (currently estimated at 15,000) are seeking refuge inside Syria where UNHCR is working with local NGOs and UN partners to provide aid.

The refugees arrive exhausted and deeply traumatized, their feet covered in blisters, having spent days on Mt Sinjar in searing temperatures without food, water or shelter after fleeing for their lives, then walking many hours - in some cases days - to find safety. They are extremely weak, thirsty, and hungry, especially the women and children, and many have untreated wounds.

“The Yazidi situation remains a very dynamic and challenging one, and it’s of life-saving importance that people receive help and protection,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. “We are doing all we can in very difficult circumstances to meet the urgent needs.”

UNHCR has rushed tents, plastic sheets, blankets, hygiene kits and other household items to the Newroz camp from its stockpiles in Al Hassakeh province, where it has had a field presence since 2010 helping various waves of displaced people. More aid is on the way, including an airlift of 2000 tents and 5000 mattresses in the coming days to alleviate crowded conditions.

UNHCR began ferrying the newly arrived refugees the 60 kilometre journey from the border to the camp on Tuesday (12 August) at the request of the local camp managers and refugees themselves.

The Newroz camp currently hosts about 15,000 Yazidis from Iraq; hundreds more are staying in nearby villages and towns around Al Qahtaniyyeh and Ras Al Ain. After a few days at the camp, many refugees head back to Iraq to reunite with families in the Dohuk area of northern Kurdistan, but still thousands continue to come.

Many refugee families have been separated, scattered between Sinjar, Syria and the Kurdistan region of Iraq; children have been torn from their parents — killed, kidnapped or disappeared in the chaos. The majority of children are now with their grandparents, cousins or more distant relatives. Many refugees report they had to leave behind their elderly whom they could not carry, anxious to know if they were still alive. Others who

made it safely to the camp gave reports of young girls and women forced to stay behind and being sold. Families say that their young men were killed.

The local communities in Syria have warmly welcomed the refugees, providing transport, cooking hot meals at home and delivering them to the camp, and donating clothes. UNHCR is coordinating the UN response to the Yazidi refugees in Syria which is rapidly scaling up. A joint UN mission was carried out on 12 August, bringing shelter and household items, ready to eat food, high energy biscuits, children's summer clothes and soap, provided by UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF.

For further information, please contact:

- In Damascus, Imane Sednaoui on mobile +1 647 515 2770 / +963 988 004075
- In Geneva, Adrian Edwards on mobile +41 79 557 9120
- In Geneva, Ariane Rummery on mobile +41 79 200 7617

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