



UNHCR's Comments to Beirut Institute, "Ethics and Politics: Response to the Plight of Refugees"

UNHCR appreciates the efforts of the Beirut Institute and in particular its April 3 roundtable on 'Ethics and Politics: Response to the Plight of Refugees'. The roundtable brought together a group of distinguished stakeholders committed to discussing and finding ways to address the humanitarian needs of refugees and mitigating the negative impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. It was an interesting discussion, and one to inspire greater engagement by all facets of society represented at the event.

The Beirut Institute paper arising from the workshop highlights many pertinent issues and recommendations concerning the management of the Syrian refugee response in Lebanon. The comments below seek to complement the recommendations by providing further clarification and updates on the issues raised:

Lebanon's reception of Syrian refugees: Lebanon's hospitality is indeed unprecedented. Its open-door policy and its respect of the institution of asylum have literally saved hundreds of thousands of lives. It is clear that humanitarian assistance cannot be a substitute for political action, and the Syrian conflict is one that requires a political solution. In the meantime, with the conflict in Syria showing no signs of conclusion, Syrians will continue to need to find safety outside the country's borders. For this reason, UNHCR continues to appeal to all countries, not only those neighbouring Syria, to allow all refugees to access safety.

Funding: The fifth Regional Response Plan (RRP5) was launched in Geneva on June 7th 2013 and sets out a comprehensive response to displacement from Syria until 31 December 2013 (See Annex 1, summary factsheet). Requirements for Lebanon amount to some USD 1.7 billion to respond to the needs of persons affected by the Syria crisis in Lebanon, with population projections for end 2013 at:

- 1 million Syrian refugees;
- 80,000 Palestinian Syrian refugees;
- 49,000 Lebanese returnees; and,
- 1.2 million affected Lebanese persons, given that Syrian refugees are residing in over 1,400 localities across the country – which is severely straining local capacities.

At end-June 2013, RRP5 requirements for Lebanon were 15% funded, with contributions from a broad range of donors (see Annex 2, inter-agency funding update 16 May 2013) including the United States of America, Kuwait, the European Union and EU Member States, as well as the Russian Federation and Japan. The efforts of the international community to mobilize funding have significantly accelerated in 2013¹, with some Governments pledging humanitarian support for the first time and other donors exploring how development-oriented funding sources could be allocated

¹ In the first six months of 2013, the level of income recorded by partners in Lebanon has more than quadrupled the total recorded at the end of 2012 (from some USD80 million to some USD 384 million)

to Lebanon². However, more needs to be done to build on the momentum gained at the Kuwait Conference of February 2013 to ensure that donors make good on their existing pledges, and to engage non-traditional donors and supplementary sources of funding.

Support to host communities: At present, there is not a single Lebanese town or village that has not been affected by the arrival of Syrian refugees. In recognition of this heavy impact, UNHCR and partners have initiated 55 projects benefiting host communities, 22 of which have already been completed. Furthermore, a task force on host communities was created and is co-led by the Prime Minister's Office, UNDP and UNHCR. This task force aims to coordinate strategic planning and fundraising to better address the needs of host communities.

While these are initial steps towards addressing the needs of host communities, the Lebanon chapter of the RRP5 takes a holistic planning approach. More precisely, the appeal includes funding to meet the needs of host communities and the need for support to national infrastructure. Examples of projects in the RRP that seek to address the above-mentioned needs include:

- Government projects aimed at strengthening national capacities and essential public services and assisting refugees, totalling some USD 450 million. These projects will, if funded, support the Ministries of Public Health, Education, Social Affairs, Water Establishment authorities and the High Relief Committee in providing public services to both refugees and affected Lebanese communities;
- Projects specifically targeting host communities worth some USD 30 million, organised under a new social cohesion sector;
- Mainstreamed support to vulnerable members of host communities as part of sectoral workplans, estimated at USD 236 million.

As the socio-economic consequences of displacement reach into 2014 and beyond, longer-term mechanisms for funding will be necessary to allow for structured and sustainable support to host communities. It is essential that development agencies and international financial institutions become more engaged with the host countries, including Lebanon, and provide the necessary link between humanitarian relief and longer-term development.

Needs assessment and prioritization: At 01 July 2013, some 575,000 Syrian refugees had registered with UNHCR or were waiting to be registered. Given the scale of population projections and current funding shortfalls, UNHCR and humanitarian partners have placed a strong emphasis on arriving at a common understanding of needs and priorities that can inform the allocation of funding to the most critical areas of response. The outcomes of needs assessments have been widely shared and form the basis of sectoral workplans in the RRP5 (See Annex 3, inter-agency inventory of needs assessments). Sectoral workplans also establish priority activities for donors and partners alike, as well as highlighting needs that cannot be covered with existing capacities

² New donors to Lebanon include Estonia, Iceland and the Russian Federation, while donors that have massively up-scaled contributions, including by mobilizing supplementary funding sources include the European Union, Kuwait, Germany and the United States.

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Coordination, monitoring and evaluation: As the UN agency mandated to protect and assist refugees, UNHCR is assisting the Government of Lebanon in coordinating the overall humanitarian response with the support of the UN Humanitarian Country Team. UNRWA coordinates relief for Palestine Refugees from Syria. A clear sectoral coordination structure has been established at the Beirut level, as well as through UNHCR field offices in Zahle, Tripoli, Qobayat, Mount Lebanon and Tyre (see Annex 4A & B, coordination structure and who what where dashboard). WFP, UNICEF and WHO participate actively in co-leading the response, while the Ministry for Social Affairs works through an inter-ministerial committee to co-ordinate Government actors. Almost 1,000 municipalities and over 80 NGOs, are participating actively in the humanitarian effort, however more can be done to bring faith-based and local organizations more squarely within existing coordination mechanisms.

Sectoral workplans provide a basis for regular review and monitoring of the inter-agency response. Regular sectoral coordination meetings (i.e. protection, health, education, food and non-food items, shelter) are held both in Beirut and in the regions to exchange information on progress and agree upon common procedures and standards for response³.

Currently UNHCR and UN, international and national partners are further expanding and strengthening field presence – working closely with central and municipal government partners. Field based coordination is similarly being enhanced.

Burden sharing: UNHCR and partners continue to advocate for more international financial support, and more burden-sharing initiatives to provide protection, to help mitigate the crushing impact on Syria's immediate neighbours. Advocacy is being conducted with UNHCR's more traditional donors, but increasingly with the GCC states. Efforts are underway for UNHCR to host a Ministerial meeting between refugee hosting states to examine further ways to support refugees and affected host communities. Additionally, in regard to the possible relocation of refugees from Lebanon to other countries, Germany has recently announced a humanitarian admissions programme and set aside 5,000 places for Lebanon. UNHCR is working with the German authorities and the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs to expedite this programme. Resettlement countries have also expressed an interest in enhanced resettlement and efforts are already underway to meet increased pledges this year. Contingency planning for possible mass evacuation are also being explored by UNHCR and by the Government of Lebanon, although to date there has not been significant interest from possible receiving states.

Strategy: The response of the Lebanese state to the influx of Syrian refugees in its territory over the last two years has been commendable, as has been the engagement of the international community. Building on these, a clear strategy which balances the need to preserve the institution of asylum, the need to support the immediate and longer-term requirements of host communities, and security concerns, would facilitate a more robust and organized approach. In line with this thinking, UNHCR is advocating for an administrative structure that would be devoted to managing issues related to refugees.

³ A schedule of coordination meetings is regularly updated and made public on the following portal (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees>).