

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE



Lebanon is the neighbouring country hardest hit by the Syria crisis, hosting more than 1.1 million Syrian refugees. With other refugee communities also living there, Lebanon has the world's largest number of refugees per capita.

Access to Lebanon by those fleeing the conflict in Syria has become close to impossible since the beginning of 2015 with the enforcement of strict regulations by the Government of Lebanon.

The European Commission commends the government and people of Lebanon for its generosity but it is increasingly concerned about the deteriorating protection space and living conditions of the most vulnerable refugees. An increasing number of refugees are being forced to become undocumented, which raises concerns over their ability to move and access services and exposes them to abuse and harassment.

The European Commission is committed to continuing its support to Lebanon and the humanitarian community in providing assistance to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese. For 2016, €87 million have been allocated for humanitarian assistance in Lebanon.

Lebanon, a country of 4.4 million inhabitants, is hosting around 1.1 million Syrian refugees (including non-registered), 42 000 Palestinian refugees from Syria, 6,000 Iraqi refugees and nearly 450 000 refugees from Palestine. This makes it the highest per-capita concentration of refugees worldwide, where one person out of four is a refugee.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, hundreds of thousands of refugees have crossed into Lebanon seeking safety and shelter, more than 75% of which are children and women. This influx has added strain on the country's economy and infrastructure. The pressure is felt in all sectors including education, health, housing, water and electricity supply. As time goes by, competition for jobs and resources is also fuelling tensions in certain areas between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees.

Security along the border areas, particularly in Akkar and the northern Bekaa Valley, make humanitarian access and the delivery of assistance very challenging. The fighting in Arsal in August 2014 was a turning point. It led to a much more restrictive policy and crystallised tensions between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, including increased evictions and police raids, mistreatment and restrictions of movement.

Lebanon has voiced its intention to reduce the numbers of Syrian refugees living on its territory in order to ensure security as well as to ease the burden on its people and economy. On January 13, 2015, the Government of Lebanon announced a new and amended policy regulating entry of Syrian refugees: all Syrian refugees wishing to enter Lebanon have to justify the purpose of their visit. As a result, access to territory has significantly decreased with the border 'de-facto' closed for people fleeing violence. Palestinian refugees from Syria also face increased challenges in accessing the territory since May 2013.

The high fees (approx. €200 per adult/year) and complicated administrative procedures for refugees to renew their legal residence have been pushing an increasing number of refugees into becoming undocumented. This raises concerns over their ability to move and access services and exposes them to abuse and harassment.

There are no formal refugee camps because of the "no camp" policy, adopted by the Government of Lebanon. Syrian refugees are scattered in more than 1700 localities across the country where they live in apartments, collective shelters, tented settlements, unfinished houses, garages, warehouses or worksites. Refugees in Lebanon have to pay for food, rent, clothes, medicine etc. Almost 9 out of 10 refugees live in 251 locations, which are some of the poorest and most vulnerable neighbourhoods in Lebanon.

The Lebanese healthcare system was already stretched before the influx of Syrians and relied heavily on the private sector. Syrian refugees face several obstacles when accessing healthcare including the expensive cost of services, geographical challenges, and restricted coverage criteria. Refugees who suffer from long lasting and costly chronic diseases (cancer, renal failure, etc.) are not covered.

According to UNHCR, close to 417,000 Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are aged between three and 14 years old. While exact numbers are not available, it is estimated that nearly half of Syrian refugee children do not have access to any form of education, exposing them to physical and/or psychological violence, child labour and exploitation, early marriage, and recruitment by armed groups. The Ministry of Education has committed to increasing the capacity of schools to welcome up to 200,000 Syrian children - but this would only account for half of all school-aged Syrian children.