

United Nations Development Programme

Topic: Development Assistance for Syrian Refugees

I. Background

In March 2014, the Syrian conflict entered its third year. The conflict has evolved over time, and is now focused on a conflict between Bashar al-Assad's regime and supporters and various rebel fighters, including organizations such as al-Nusra, ISIL, and the Syrian National Council. The ongoing conflict in Syria has been highly detrimental to Syria's civilians as well as its society. Civilians have fled their towns in order to attempt to escape the instability, and find refuge in its neighboring countries. As of the UNHCR's most recent data (June 16th, 2014), there are currently 2,805,396 registered Syrian refugees, with an additional 65,100 awaiting registration. The massive influx of refugees fleeing the conflict has created several problems that threaten the stability of the countries in which refugees reside as well as for the refugees themselves.

Firstly, in fleeing Syria, refugees have left behind their lives, including shelter, employment, access to education, and healthcare; all of which are fundamental human rights. Schools, historical monuments, and infrastructure within Syria have been permanently damaged due to the violence. However, refugees are also finding it difficult to adjust to their new lifestyles. In a report released by the International Labor Organization, it was found that on average, thirty percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon were unemployed. Specifically for women, the unemployment rate in Lebanon was a staggering sixty-eight percent. Children have also been affected by the displacement, losing their access to education and nutrition. A United Nations report outlining the regional response plan for the crisis found that only twenty percent of Syrian children in Lebanon were able to attend school. Syrian refugees have not only fled to Lebanon,

but to other countries across the Middle East and further. Za'atari is a camp in Jordan that is upheld by the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization, in collaboration with UNHCR.

Several refugee camps have also been established by the governments of Iraq and Turkey.

The issues of unemployment, malnutrition, and lack of access to education also ultimately identify the second problem that refugees are facing. The shift of population in the host countries has caused problems of instability. Most notably, host countries are finding it difficult to accommodate the growing number of refugees. One of the examples of this is the language barrier that Syrian refugees have encountered in Lebanon. While most of the Syrian education system is in Arabic, in Lebanese schools, certain subjects are taught in French or English.⁴ In addition to this, high poverty rates among refugees has meant that families can also no longer afford to send their children to school, and therefore send their children to work low-wage jobs or beg in the streets. The crisis in Syria and the influx of refugees have also become costly to host countries, which negatively impacts their economies. In the example of Jordan, “the costs of the Syrian crisis are estimated to exceed 1.5 billion dollars”.

Non-governmental organizations have been fairly active in their attempts to assist refugees. Save the Children has been providing children with clean water and sanitation through several partnerships, and has been attempting to keep schools within Syria open. Save the Children has also implemented media campaigns in order to inform the public about the Syrian crisis. Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has worked with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to provide food and water, as well as medical care to those in areas most affected by the conflict. However, the ICRC has been instrumental in development assistance with displaced populations in Jordan, providing cash assistance that helps them afford rent and health care. The ICRC has also provided refugee camps with meals and water.

While it is difficult to access victims and refugees, it is fundamental that the United Nations reach the displaced populations and allow them to continue to have access to their most fundamental human rights and to help them continue to develop.

II. UN Involvement

Several bodies of the United Nations have been heavily invested in providing assistance to Syrian refugees. The High Commissioner for Refugees has been constantly collecting information regarding the demographics and population of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, and Egypt. Along with several other international agencies, the UNHCR has initiated the Regional Response Plan (RRP6), which outlines the plan of action between January 1st, 2014 and December 31st, 2014. The RRP6 attempts to address three demographics currently facing problems: refugees within fixed camps, refugees outside of settlements, and host communities. The RRP6 seeks to go beyond providing basic needs to refugees, acknowledging the need for refugees to have access to food, education, shelter, health and hygiene, and protection, which is its primary concern. This has been difficult, considering the internal strife within Syria and its spillover in neighboring countries. The Security Council voiced its concern with accessibility in S/RES/2139, which called for Syrian authorities to allow humanitarian assistance travel within Syria.

Health has also been a fundamental objective, as there have been widespread outbreaks of polio among children. In response to the outbreak in 2013, the World Health Organization launched a campaign of mass vaccination, hoping to target 22 million children under five years of age. In addition to aiding children, the United Nations is also attempting to protect women and girls from gender-based and sexual violence in refugee camps, and provide them with equitable

assistance and opportunities. At most camps, UNDP has established legal counseling services and psychosocial resources in order to help victims of gender-based violence cope. The UNDP has also aided women in refugee camps through edu-tainment, a series of theater pieces used to help raise awareness surrounding sexual violence towards women. Despite this, women have been reluctant to report incidents of gender-based violence, considering it to be of high risk, and worrying that reporting incidents would endanger their families.

Women have also been involved in efforts by the UNDP to support entrepreneurship among refugees. This has been orchestrated through the implementation of a program that teaches individuals the skills necessary for entrepreneurship and supplying them with initial funding. This has been successful in generating productivity among refugees, allowing them to provide adequately for their families. It has also been fundamental in allowing refugees to become integrated in their host communities and in relieving tensions between the two communities.

While there have been efforts by the United Nations to provide assistance to refugees, various challenges are faced that have resulted in overall failure. Most notably are challenges within the Security Council augmented by allegiances to opposing forces. As a permanent power, Russia has the ability to veto resolutions brought to the Security Council, which Russia has used in order to block most resolutions taking an adamant stance against Bashar al-Assad. Other conflicts include the distribution of aid. The United Nations recognizes sovereignty, and thus must obtain consent from the Syrian government to deliver food aid. Doing so while unauthorized could result in their expulsion from Syria, denying aid to refugees within Syrian borders.

III. Questions to Consider

1. Development assistance is heavily multi-faceted and can focus on various needs. What types of needs should be prioritized in programming development assistance?
2. Some of the host countries of refugees are facing threats of conflict spillover as well as domestic issues that may make it difficult for them to support refugees. What can countries do to ensure that the host countries can continue to support refugees?
3. Assistance to refugees has been provided by both international governmental and non-governmental organizations. What are the challenges each face in providing assistance and how can they work to their strengths?
4. There are often difficulties with tracking aid and ensuring it gets into the right hands. What measures can countries make to ensure that aid is delivered to those who need it most?

IV. Suggested Sites

<http://www.syriadeeply.org/> - Syrian Independent Journalism

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home> - United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees

<http://www.undg.org/?P=232> - United Nations Development Group

http://undg.org/content/programming_reference_guide_%28undaf

[%29/un_country_programming_principles](#) - United Nations Development Group Programing

Reference Guide

<http://www.hrw.org/> - United Nations Human Rights Watch