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UNHCR News

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## **Three years and counting: Syria tops world list for forcibly displaced**

Three years on from the start of the conflict in Syria, the country has become the world's leading country of forced displacement, with over nine million of its people uprooted from their homes.

As of today more than two-and-a-half million Syrians (2,563,434) have registered as refugees in neighbouring countries or are awaiting registration. With displacement inside Syria having reached over 6.5 million, the total number of people in flight internally and externally now exceeds 40% of Syria's pre-conflict population. At least half of the displaced are children.

"It is unconscionable that a humanitarian catastrophe of this scale is unfolding before our eyes with no meaningful progress to stop the bloodshed," said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. "No effort should be spared to forge peace. And no effort spared to ease the suffering of the innocent people caught up in the conflict and forced from their homes, communities, jobs and schools."

In the absence of visible progress towards a political solution, UNHCR predicts the refugee population in the surrounding region will grow to become the largest refugee population in the world.

In Lebanon alone, the number of registered refugees from Syria is approaching one million and could grow to 1.6 million at the end of 2014 if current trends continue. Lebanon already has the highest per-capita concentration of refugees of any country in recent history, with nearly 230 registered Syrian refugees for every 1,000 Lebanese. That is over 70 times as many refugees per inhabitants as in France, and 280 times as many as in the United States. The number of registered Syrian refugees currently hosted in Lebanon would be equivalent to nearly 19 million refugees in Germany and over 73 million in the United States.

Jordan is also reeling under the refugee presence, estimating the related cost at over 1.7 billion USD so far. In this resource-poor country, the Government is paying hundreds of millions worth of additional subsidies to ensure refugees have access to affordable water, bread, gas and electricity. The surge in demand for

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health care has led to a shortage of medicines, and especially in northern Jordan there is less drinking water available for Jordanians and refugees.

“Imagine the crushing social and economic consequences of this crisis on Lebanon and other countries in the region,” Guterres said. “They need much stronger international support than they have received so far, both financially and in terms of commitments to receive and protect Syrian refugees in other parts of the world, beyond the immediate neighbouring region.”

Mr. Guterres also noted that Syrians are becoming a global refugee population as they are arriving in increasing numbers in other parts of the world. In Europe, 56,000 asylum applications have been submitted by Syrians since March 2011 when the conflict began. Most applications have been in two countries: Sweden and Germany. So far, less than 4% of Syrians who have fled the conflict have sought safety in Europe. This does not include Turkey, which has registered over 625,000 Syrian refugees.

But the trend is rising, with Syrians contributing to growing numbers of irregular arrivals by boat in countries of the southern Mediterranean, and by land into Eastern Europe.

More and more Syrians are putting their lives at the mercy of human smugglers, often with tragic results. In 2013, 700 people died while trying to cross the Mediterranean – among them some 250 Syrians. They are also facing instances of closed borders and push backs to neighboring countries.

“What kind of a world is this where Syrians fleeing this violent conflict have to risk their lives to reach safety, and when they finally make it, they are not welcomed or even turned away at borders?” Mr. Guterres said.

UNHCR is calling on countries to ensure access to territory for all Syrians seeking protection and a moratorium on returns to neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, Syrians are also seeking safety in the Americas and Australasia, arriving by both regular and irregular means. Brazil, for example, with its large community of Syrian ancestry, in 2013 introduced expedited visas for Syrians helping many to find refuge there. Meanwhile Syrians are being seen among the hundreds of asylum seekers arriving every month in both North and South America.

UNHCR’s response to the Syria crisis is focused principally on the immediate surrounding region, where displacement pressures are most acute. However it has also appealed to resettlement countries in Europe, North America, and the Asia-Pacific to make available 30,000 resettlement places in 2014 and 100,000 in 2015 and 2016. UNHCR is also calling on countries to consider other forms of admission schemes, including family reunification or extension of student and work visas.

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Photos, videos and other media materials can be downloaded from <http://unhcr.org/3years/>

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<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e6e9c42e.html>

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