



The Middle East & Humanitarian Programs

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Syrian Refugee Status Report 2023



Syrian refugees cross the border into Turkey, 2014, Photo: Time/Ivor Prickett

Sophie Gilpin

The America-Eurasia Center

www.EurasiaCenter.org

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Aerial photo shows the damage done by the February earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, Photo: CNN

While the experiences of Syrian refugees are diverse and varied, the hardship of refugee status has not subsided for the hundreds of thousands of Syrians still displaced outside of their home nation. In recent years, humanitarian funding and resources have been reallocated due to the war in Ukraine, leaving many Syrians without the support they previously received from various governments and organizations. This hardship was then further exacerbated by the earthquakes that hit both Türkiye and Syria in early 2023, leaving a death toll of over 55,000 and thousands more injured or missing.¹ In addition to increasing unemployment and economic unrest across the Levantine and North African regions of the Middle East, Syrian refugees are not the only group struggling to find employment opportunities.² Despite the surge of resources allocated to meet the needs of those affected by the earthquake, this combination of factors has left a sizeable population of Syrian refugees without enough income to meet their most basic needs.³

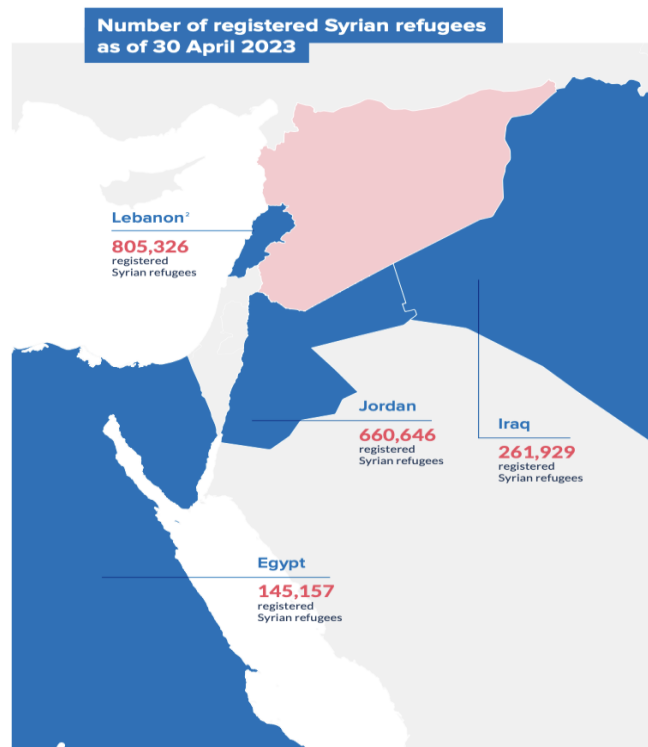
To understand the gravity of the Syrian situation, one must first evaluate the economies in which many of these refugees exist. Lebanon, home to the highest number of Syrian refugees in the

¹ "2023 Turkey and Syria earthquake: Facts, FAQs, how to help," World Vision, August 9, 2023, <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2023-turkey-and-syria-earthquake-faqs#fast-facts>.

² "Amid Record Youth Unemployment, Over Half of Arab Youth in the Levant and North Africa want to Emigrate for Better Opportunities: 15th Annual ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey," *U.S. Newswire*, August 9, 2023, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2847613316?pq-origsite=primo>.

³ "Eighth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions & Intentions on Return to Syria," UNHCR, May 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-eighth-regional-survey-syrian-refugees'-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria>.

Levant, ranks among the world's worst economic crises.⁴ Jordan faces high unemployment and an increasing strain on its natural resources.⁵ Egypt has faced economic contraction due to the COVID-19 pandemic and although they have experienced some economic growth, they still face issues of unemployment and challenges to development.⁶ Finally, Iraq, home to over 260,000 Syrian refugees, also suffers from high rates of unemployment and economic instability. Given the extensive years of war in Iraq as well as its extreme oil dependency and the COVID-19 crisis, the situation is dire, and many Iraqis feel uncertain about the future.⁷ Each of the nations playing host to the largest numbers of Syrian refugees in the region have preexisting political or socioeconomic issues that are seemingly exacerbated by the refugee crisis. This can easily agitate the local population who may feel as though the influx of refugees are stealing their already scarce resources.



Latest figures on registered Syrian refugees in the Levant and Egypt, Source: UNHCR

⁴ "The World Bank in Lebanon Overview," The World Bank, November 2, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>.

⁵ "The World Bank in Jordan Overview," The World Bank, January 9, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview#1>.

⁶ "The World Bank in Egypt Overview," The World Bank, May 5, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/egypt/overview#1>.

⁷ "The World Bank in Iraq Overview," The World Bank, June 1, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/iraq/overview>.

In addition to the scarcity of resources and opportunity within host communities, there has been a dramatic decrease in funding. According to UNHCR, there are about 6.5 million Syrians registered as refugees.⁸ Despite an increase of about 0.2 million refugees in five years, funding has declined extensively. In 2022, UNHCR’s financial requirements were 45% met with an earmarked value of \$844,868,153 from various governments and private organizations.⁹ As of 2023, UNHCR’s financial requirements have only been 30% satisfied, with an earmarked amount of \$564,628,741, despite a lower financial requirement compared to the previous year.¹⁰



A pie chart overview of UNHCR’s financial requirements and the extent to which they were met, Source: UNHCR

The difficulty of the Syrian refugee crisis ultimately lies in its longevity. As the war stretches on and conditions in Syria remain tumultuous, refugees themselves begin to give up hope on returning any time soon¹¹ and as the charts suggest, international aid is reallocated to new crises such as the war in Ukraine or Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban. The world is a dynamic place with finite resources. As time progresses and new challenges spring up, resources are moved to new places. Although the plight of the Syrian people continues, international resources are put to new use. This is not necessarily a death sentence for humanitarian support, but the lack of funding can have adverse effects on local organizations implementing aid to Syrian refugee populations in the Levant and North Africa. There tends to be a divide between the Global North and Global South when it comes to the economic effects of large refugee populations. Generally, the more developed economies of the Global North (regions such as Europe or North America) face a much lower burden on their infrastructure and social services as opposed to the Global South.¹² The large population of refugees

⁸ “Refugee Data Finder,” UNHCR, 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=HF39gS>.

⁹ “Syria Situation Response Funding Update- 2022,” UNHCR, February 28, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-response-funding-2022>.

¹⁰ “Syria Situation Response Funding Update- 2023,” UNHCR, September 1, 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-response-funding-2023>.

¹¹ Ibid., 5, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-eighth-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria>.

¹² Uri Dadush and Mona Niebuhr, “The Economic Impact of Forced Migration,” OCP Policy Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 22, 2016, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/04/22/economic-impact-of-forced-migration-pub-63421>.

in the Levant and North Africa puts an even greater strain on welfare programs, resources, and employment sectors.

This is why local organizations and partners are essential to administering aid. The impact that one small organization can have in a single community can be great. When an office closes because of a loss of funds, it has a negative impact on the community it served. And when this happens time and time again in cities all over the region, it has an adverse effect on the entire refugee population. The key to improving the condition of humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees is to partner with local organizations working for the long-term welfare of the Syrian people, both in and outside of Syria. In a 2022 advocacy letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations and the President of the United Nations General Assembly, thirty-nine Syrian humanitarian and NGOs called for equitable partnerships between donors, INGOs, the United Nations, and Syrian NGOs; increased aid with the purpose of capacity building for local organizations; an across the board effort to include Syrian people and organizations in decision-making about aid and policy; and funding for recovery and resilience programs geared towards the long-term success of Syrian families including projects to improve water and sanitation, housing, education, and cash and vouchers for livelihoods.¹³

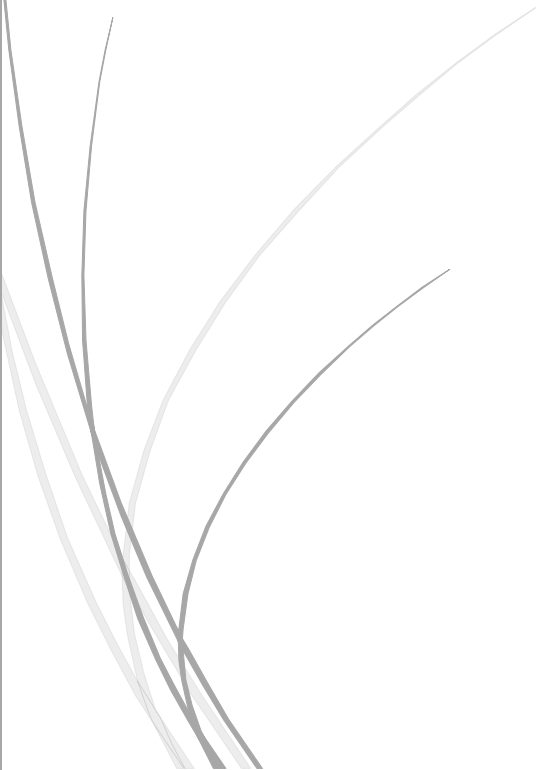


Syrian women serve as volunteers at a local NGO office in Mafraq, Jordan, Photo: Tearfund Germany

The overall consensus is that involving Syrian refugees as well as locals from the host community in the aid process is perhaps the greatest way to sustainably support both populations. The current condition of funding may seem bleak, but there are teams of people, local and otherwise, working together to better conditions for all people affected by the war. Although

¹³ “39 Humanitarian and Syrian NGOs Call for More Sustainable, Locally Driven Cross-border Aid Effort,” Refugees International, September 21, 2022, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/advocacy-letters/39-humanitarian-and-syrian-ngos-call-for-more-sustainable-locally-driven-cross-border-aid-effort/>.

resources are finite and support is limited, maximizing the effect of what does exist will guarantee the best possible outcome for the future of supporting Syrian refugee populations. Organizing aid efforts through local partners and involving Syrian people in the process is paramount to making the most of the funding that does exist, as well as fostering cooperation and understanding between both the refugee and host populations, ensuring a brighter future for the Levant and North Africa as well as the Syrian people.



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