

RAPID-ASSESSMENT REPORT
MISSION CONDUCTED IN THE BEKAA REGION
ABOUT SYRIAN DISPLACEMENT
ON THE 17TH-18TH OF OCTOBER 2011

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Displacement pattern

- Around 150 Syrian families, fleeing the conflict in Syria, are estimated living throughout the Bekaa region, mainly concentrated in:
 - Irsal (North-East),
 - Baalbeck (North),
 - And Chtoura area (middle-Bekaa).
- Displaced are directly assisted by hosting communities and religious organisations,
- Major needs (by order of importance) are:
 1. Protection (including SGBV),
 2. Winter NFIs (clothes, blankets, mattresses, fuel, diapers, hygienic kits...),
 3. Education (kits and remedial classes),
 4. Medication
 5. Shelter and food items
- Profile of displaced: both families and single males,
- Origin of displacement: mainly from unsafe central Syria (Homs, Hama) or fearing conflict,
- Displacement root: from Syria through the main legal border of Masnaa and illegal borders crossing the mountains in the case of Irsal,
- Displacement duration: from start of conflict, or during summer or only during week-ends.

Context

- Region politically heterogeneous, organized according to sectarian division, mostly dominated by Hesbollah,
- Lack of trust from response providers and displaced towards any new actors,
- Vast agricultural area where Syrian workers use to migrate,
- Cold and rainy in winter (facing floods and snowy days),
- The Lebanese government does not respond yet to the displacement needs.

Suggested response

- In-depth assessment accompanied by first distribution of mattresses/blankets for instance to build trust,
- Advocacy towards the HRC for officially intervening in the Bekaa,
- Capacity building of active local stakeholders (NGOs, SDCs, municipalities...) already assisting/ready to,
- Low profile humanitarian intervention addressing needs and upgrading preparedness.

2. BACKGROUND:

Syria is confronted to an unprecedented civil unrest since mid-March 2011 which has caused death of more than 3,000 civilians and other 1,100 security forces. The conflict, locally armed, has prompted the displacement of Syrians in and outside the country, mainly in Turkey and Lebanon.

At least 3,000 Syrian displaced are currently residing in the Northern Lebanon region of Akkar (mostly located in Wadi Khaled and Berri) fleeing the Syrian Homs region seriously affected by the conflict.

A first joint assessment (UNHCR, UNICEF and UNRC team) was conducted in the Bekaa valley in mid-May 2011 and didn't report any significant displacement.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE ASSESSMENT:

UNHCR, coordinating the operations in the North along side with the HRC (High Relief Commission) and DRC as its main implementing partner, requested from DRC to conduct a first rapid assessment in the Bekaa with the following objectives:

- a) To identify existing areas of displacement in the Bekaa, where displaced Syrians might have fled since the beginning of the crisis,
- b) To assess the capacities of these areas (or others) to host additional displaced Syrians, in the hypothesis of a larger influx. (Kindly refer to [Annex 01](#) – DRC Survey's TORs email)

4. LOCATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS:

DRC mobilized in mid-October 2011 a team of 3 field officers and a team leader who conducted a two-day visit (17th and 18th of October) in the Bekaa valley with a focus on the borders in Northern, Middle and West Bekaa where visits were paid to:

- Major stakeholders like municipalities, social development centres (SDC), international and local NGOs, Red-Crosses, religious and social organisations/activists.
- Displaced families/individuals: 3 home visits in Irsal interviewing around 25 displaced persons (15 of them are displaced single men) + 3 displaced families and a host family in Baalbeck + distribution exercise of the "Irham" campaign.
- The following locations:
 - o Middle-Bekaa and West Bekaa: Zahle, Kfarzabad, Kousaya, Ein kfar Zabad, Saadnayel, Anjar, Majdel Anjar, Rachaya and Hasbaya
 - o North Bekaa: Irsal, Baalbeck, Wavel camp.

The [Annex 02](#) maps the following:

- o SDCs contacts & locations in Bekaa area,
- o NGOs working in West Bekaa,
- o Local services providers in Rachaya area,
- o List of Contact persons in both Middle and West Bekaa.

5. DETAILED FINDINGS PER AREA:

5.1 Middle Bekaa

- At first, interviewed municipality members, local NGOs and contact persons denied the presence of displaced Syrians in Middle Bekaa,
- They acknowledged/claimed the presence of several Syrian families established in Lebanon long before the beginning of the unrest in Syria,
- Al Najdeh Association (one of DRC's implementing partner) proved to be an excellent source of information. The long trusted relationship between the two organizations was decisive in this part,
- The displacement in the Bekaa region, as a whole, seems to obey to a religious agenda. The Sunni parties and religious groups are the ones coordinating the assistance,
- The people in charge of the assistance would not reveal their list of beneficiaries; the team only managed to get the list of displaced families in Baalbek but was promised to get the rest later on (*annex 03 to be kept confidential and not to be circulated*),
- The major cities hosting displaced in the Middle Bekaa are Taalbaya and Saadnayel (around 70 families),
- The "Irham" campaign (i.e. Mercy campaign) is a local initiative led by imams / sheikhs from the area to collect money, food, clothes and other items. It is going on in both Middle and North Bekaa and has its own network of volunteers spread all over the region. It basically relies on private donations and Saudi and gulf funds and is related to Dar-el-Iftaa,
- The Irham campaign's responsible initially assessed and identified 200 displaced Syrian families in the Bekaa region. After screening them, around 130 families were found to be families of Syrian workers settled in Lebanon,
- The team visited their warehouse (the mosque hall) and pictures (*annex 04*) were taken of the items distributed. To date, 6 rounds of distribution of FIs and NFIs have been made (food, winter clothes, pillow, mattresses, blankets, etc...)
- There is no emergency response committee or coordination between all different stakeholders on the ground.
- Some of the villages assessed had no displaced yet but are expecting a wave in the coming days (Kousaya) because of the illegal cross points and the tensions reported in Al Zabadani in Syria. It is worth mentioning the presence of a Palestinian encampment in kousaya where weapons are heavily smuggled.

Conclusions: around 70 Syrian displaced families are residing in the Middle Bekaa. Local NGOs/religious communities are providing good care to them. Assistance is fairly well organised locally. Displaced persons do keep a very profile fearing for their protection.

Recommendation 1: any intervention should be designed with the support of/through local actors involved,

Recommendation 2: Trust needs to be built with displaced and current service providers; a concrete supportive action should be decided,

Recommendation 3: Protection being the first point of concern of many displaced, a UNHCR Protection intervention will only be efficient if officially covered by the GoL (HRC),

Recommendation 4: fears of displaced to be denounced, arrested and/or deported back to Syria are such that the involvement of HRC in Protection monitoring and ICM (if needed)

should be carefully thought and properly balanced.

5.2 West Bekaa

- The region and cities are mostly populated by Druzes from both sides of the border. Both groups have strong family ties and in case of any major influx of displaced, the Lebanese families will host their Syrian relatives.
- Everyone, met in the Rachaya and Hasbaya areas, confirmed that there is no influx of displacement to their region and that they doubt that any will happen. Their only concern was an Israeli war.
- Based on the July war experience, the region is well prepared for emergency situations. There are a lot of vacant schools and many local NGOs ready to step in case of emergency.
- SDCs in Rachaya cannot operate without MoSa directives, but it has 5 satellite SDCs located in strategic places (2 next to the borders, in the middle of the Rachaya region and further inside),
- The activities provided by the local NGOs vary from basic assistance to psychological support, entertainment activities, medical services, etc...
- An emergency response plan was drafted after the July 2006 war and will be applied in case of a major influx,
- People from Rachaya go periodically to Syria and they reported that the situation there is calm and safe,
- The team established the limit where the influx of displaced would stop, as Syrians refugees would not be able to go beyond the Litani river without a special permit from the Lebanese army.
- There are 6 families in Jeb Jannine,

Conclusion: No Syrian displacement reported in the West Bekaa. Local communities and families are ready and capable to accommodate Syrian displaced in case of influx.

Recommendation 5: Absorption capacity and emergency preparedness exist but should be better evaluated via an in-depth assessment.

5.3 North Bekaa

- The displaced persons are staying in Sunni areas of Baalback and in Sunni cities (Irsal and Fakiha),
- The people met raised again the security concern and portrayed the situation as Sunni-Shia conflict,
- There are few non-profit organizations in the region and in case of emergency the Red Cross is on the ground,
- The SDC centre in Baalbek received directives from MoSA to map the displaced in the region but found out that the majority of them are Syrian workers with families. Therefore, they stopped the mapping but remain available to assist with their means. In this regard, they have already helped a displaced family in getting 2 hearing aid for their children,

- Most of the men who are in the region have crossed the unofficial borders, while their wives and kids came through the official borders therefore they benefit from a freedom of movement. Nevertheless, they are keeping a very low profile,
- There are several Lebanese displaced families who were living in Syria and fled because of the unrest,
- The parties offering assistance are worried that if they divulge the names of the displaced and their whereabouts this information will be immediately shared with the Lebanese and Syrian authorities by other parties.
- The displaced currently present in Baalback, Irsal and Fakiha are either from Homs or Hama with few families from other relatively calm cities but who turned out to be families of Syrian workers.
- Most of the displaced live with host families, some have rented old houses or apartments while others live in a very poor condition as it is mostly the case in Irsal,
- The displaced men in Irsal are restoring old houses to bring their families,
- There are several work opportunities for the Syrian displaced in quarries or as casual workers,
- The medical services provided to the displaced are the basic essentials otherwise they have to pay for the service.
- There are 4 families in al Fakiha,
- Knowing that the Lebanese community in assessment areas (economically) relies on the Syrian services (health, livelihood, education, etc...) their livelihood income has been negatively affected for more than 2 months and they will be unable to sustain, adding on the burden of having relatives to support.

Conclusions: Syrian displaced are located in Baalbeck and Irsal's Sunni areas, accommodated by hosting families. They fear other communities' reactions and keep a low profile. SDCs are active.

6. PRORITY NEEDS

- **Protection**
 - Please see above – fears of persecution from neighbouring communities and/or GoL, threats of kidnapping, abduction, killing, deportation...
 - Wounded men - who have medical emergency needs - are afraid to go to hospitals or dispensaries, the medical service is provided by local trusted doctors,
 - SGBV: Interviewees reported that women are raped and tortured as a mean to force the men to surrender in Syria. During interviews with displaced families, the team identified one family member who may have been victim of sexual abuse,
 - Child protection: the children met had a violent behaviour as a result of witnessing a lot of atrocities as reported by one of the mothers met.
- **Winter items:** Hygiene kits (including diapers), winter clothes, fuel, mattresses and blankets + food items (including Milk) + medicines,
- **Shelter**

- Some of the families are renting flats, others are staying in hotels over the weekend then would go back home (they would leave Syria on Thursday and return on Saturday thus avoiding the mass demonstrations after the Friday prayer) and the most vulnerable families are living in tents.
- In total, the region has many schools (public, abandoned, city halls, etc...) that could be used as collective shelters but they all need to be equipped for winter should protection could be ensured,
- **Education**
 - The children of the displaced families are already enrolled in public schools but are in great need of stationary/supplies,

Recommendation 6: despite a well structured provided assistance, an in-depth assessment is needed to map with more accuracy pockets of displaced, their needs, capacities of local stakeholders and to identify potential gaps to be addressed.

Recommendation 7: if an intervention is to start, the most urgent need in distribution to be considered is winterization, school kits, tuition fees and school grants.

7. SUGGESTED ACTION PLAN

- 1) Short-term: Meet the HRC and share the rapid assessment report's findings,
- 2) Short-term: Plan for fast-small size emergency intervention building the trust of Syrian displaced and local stakeholders (like mattresses/NFIs/school kits distribution),
- 3) Mid-term: Identify and select capable local partners (SDCs, LNGOs, municipalities...) assisting/willing to assist Syrian displaced,
- 4) Mid-term: Conduct an in-depth assessment through local actors and initiate protection monitoring and referral, and build capacity of potential local partners
- 5) Longer-term: design and implement a comprehensive humanitarian response to displaced in the Bekaa,
- 6) Longer-term: enhance local coordination and upgrade the local emergency response capacity.