

AI Index: PRE01/199/2013
25 April 2013

Over 1.3 million refugees from Syria in dire need of increased international support

It is vital that the international community does more to help the increasing number of refugees pouring across borders as they flee the violence in Syria, said Amnesty International in a briefing published today.

To escape the ongoing bloodshed and violence at home, those fleeing have sought safety in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. Many live in extremely difficult conditions.

“The responsibility to protect and assist refugees from Syria needs to be shouldered by both the international community and neighbouring countries,” said Charlotte Phillips, refugee researcher at Amnesty International.

All these countries say that the long-term hosting of refugees is putting a strain on resources, as increasing numbers of Syrians and others try to reach the relative safety of refugee camps and elsewhere in neighbouring countries.

“In the face of this mounting crisis, the international community must act now to provide badly needed financial and technical assistance in order to support the efforts made by Syria’s neighbouring countries,” said Phillips.

In February 2013 Amnesty International visited three provinces in Turkey bordering Syria and conducted interviews with refugees, the Turkish authorities, and a number of national and international organizations.

“While Turkey hosts and assists almost 200,000 refugees in government-run refugee camps, steps need to be taken to ensure that refugees living outside camps have access to essential services,” said Phillips.

Despite Turkey’s stated “open door policy”, many refugees attempting to cross into the country have been stopped, leaving people stranded inside Syria in terrible conditions. Credible reports have emerged of other refugees being forced to return to Syria.

“Neighbouring countries must keep their borders open to all refugees fleeing Syria, without discrimination. Under no circumstances should people be forcibly returned to Syria, where there continues to be violence, bloodshed and human rights abuses on a massive scale,” said Phillips.

The briefing makes a number of recommendations to the international community, Turkey and other neighbouring countries.

Background

Turkey – According to UNHCR on 17 April 2013, some 291,996 individuals from Syria were hosted in Turkey – an increase of almost a third since the start of 2013. However, the Turkish authorities estimate the number of Syrians who have fled Turkey to be as high as 400,000, of whom approximately 190,000 are accommodated in 17 government-run refugee camps in eight provinces

Jordan – According to UNHCR, on 21 April 2013, there were 437,205 Syrian refugees registered or waiting to be registered. Amnesty International has raised concerns over reports of the return of some individuals seeking refuge in Jordan and denial of entry to the country to others. Violent protests have been reported as refugees demonstrate against poor conditions in refugee camps

Lebanon – As of 18 April 2013, 428,649 Syrians were registered or were awaiting registration as refugees in Lebanon. On 20 April a Lebanese minister stated that the country had “exceeded its ability to absorb them”. Palestinian refugees fleeing Syria face discriminatory entry requirements imposed by the Lebanese authorities, namely the obligation to pay for a \$17 entry permit.

Iraq - According to the UNHCR, as of 20 April 2013, 133,840 refugees were registered in Iraq, with the majority being hosted in the Kurdish region. Domiz refugee camp, located in the Dohuk governorate of the Kurdish Region, is said to be “critically congested” with cases of 15 or more refugees having to share one tent.