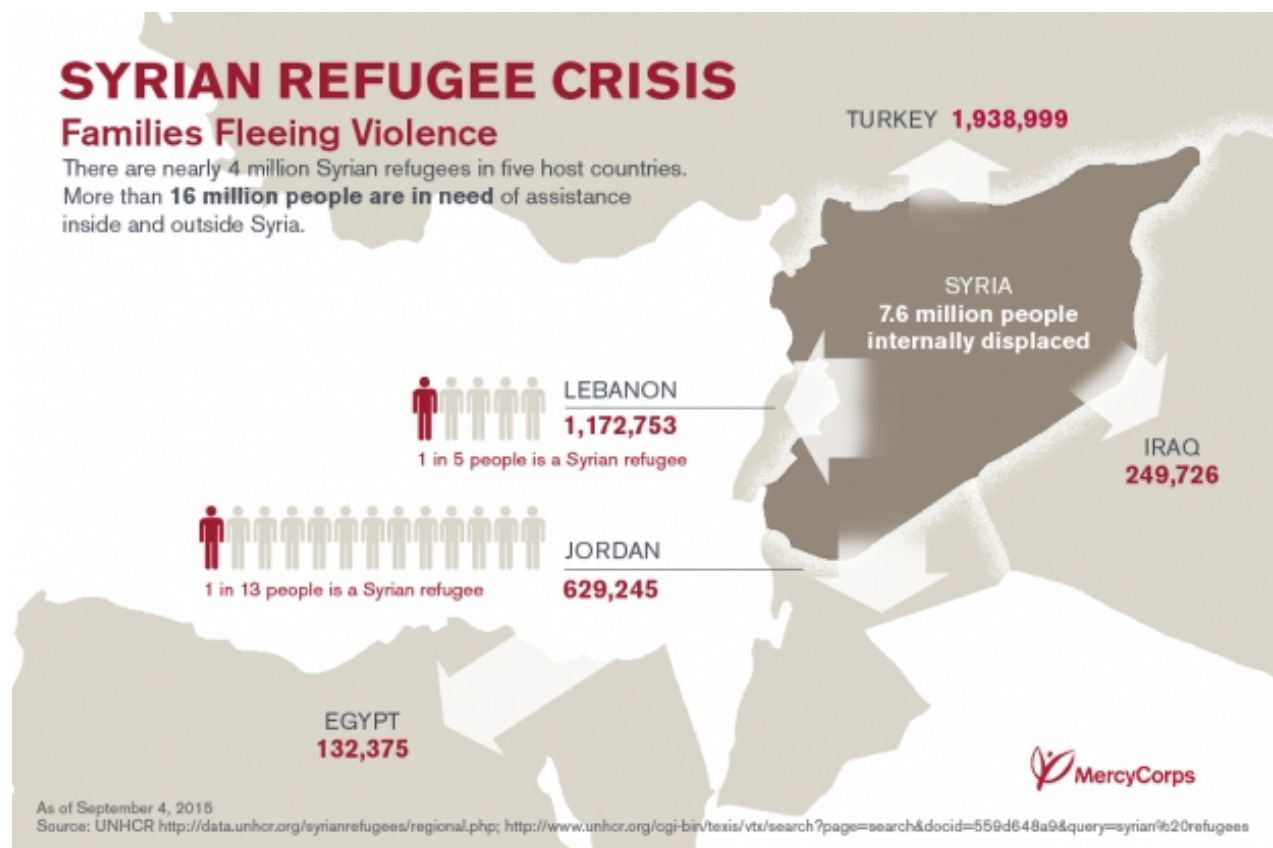


Quick facts: What you need to know about the Syria crisis

 www.mercycorps.org/articles/turkey-iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis



Syria's civil war is the worst humanitarian disaster of our time. The number of innocent civilians suffering — more than 11 million people are displaced, thus far — and the increasingly dire impact on neighboring countries can seem too overwhelming to understand.

But one fact is simple: millions of Syrians need our help. And the more aware people are of the situation, the more we can build a global response to reach them. Our lifesaving work — to connect people to the resources they need to survive and help their communities thrive — is only possible with your knowledge and support.

When did the crisis start?

Anti-government demonstrations began in March of 2011, part of the Arab Spring. But the peaceful

protests quickly escalated after the government's violent crackdown, and rebels began fighting back against the regime.

By July, army defectors had loosely organized the Free Syrian Army and many civilian Syrians took up arms to join the opposition. Divisions between secular and Islamist fighters, and between ethnic groups, continue to complicate the politics of the conflict.

What is happening to Syrians caught in the war?

More than four years after it began, the full-blown civil war has killed over 220,000 people, half of whom are believed to be civilians. Bombings are destroying crowded cities and horrific human rights violations are widespread. Basic necessities like food and medical care are sparse.

The U.N. estimates that 7.6 million people are internally displaced. When you also consider refugees, more than half of the country's pre-war population of 23 million is in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, whether they still remain in the country or have escaped across the borders.

Where are they fleeing to?

The majority of Syrian refugees are living in Jordan and Lebanon, where Mercy Corps has been addressing their needs since 2012. In the region's two smallest countries, weak infrastructure and limited resources are nearing a breaking point under the strain.

In August 2013, more Syrians escaped into northern Iraq at a newly opened border crossing. Now they are trapped by that country's own insurgent conflict, and Iraq is struggling to meet the needs of Syrian refugees on top of more than one million internally displaced Iraqis — efforts that we are working to support.

An increasing number of Syrian refugees are fleeing across the border into Turkey, overwhelming urban host communities and creating new cultural tensions. Mercy Corps is working in these areas as well to help families meet their basic needs and find work.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees are also attempting the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Greece, hoping to find a better future in Europe. Not all of them make it across alive. Those who do make it to Greece still face steep challenges — resources are strained by the influx and services are minimal.

How are people escaping?

Thousands of Syrians flee their country every day. They often decide to finally escape after seeing their neighborhoods bombed or family members killed.

The risks on the journey to the border can be as high as staying: Families walk for miles through the night to avoid being shot at by snipers or being caught by soldiers who will kidnap young men to fight for the regime.

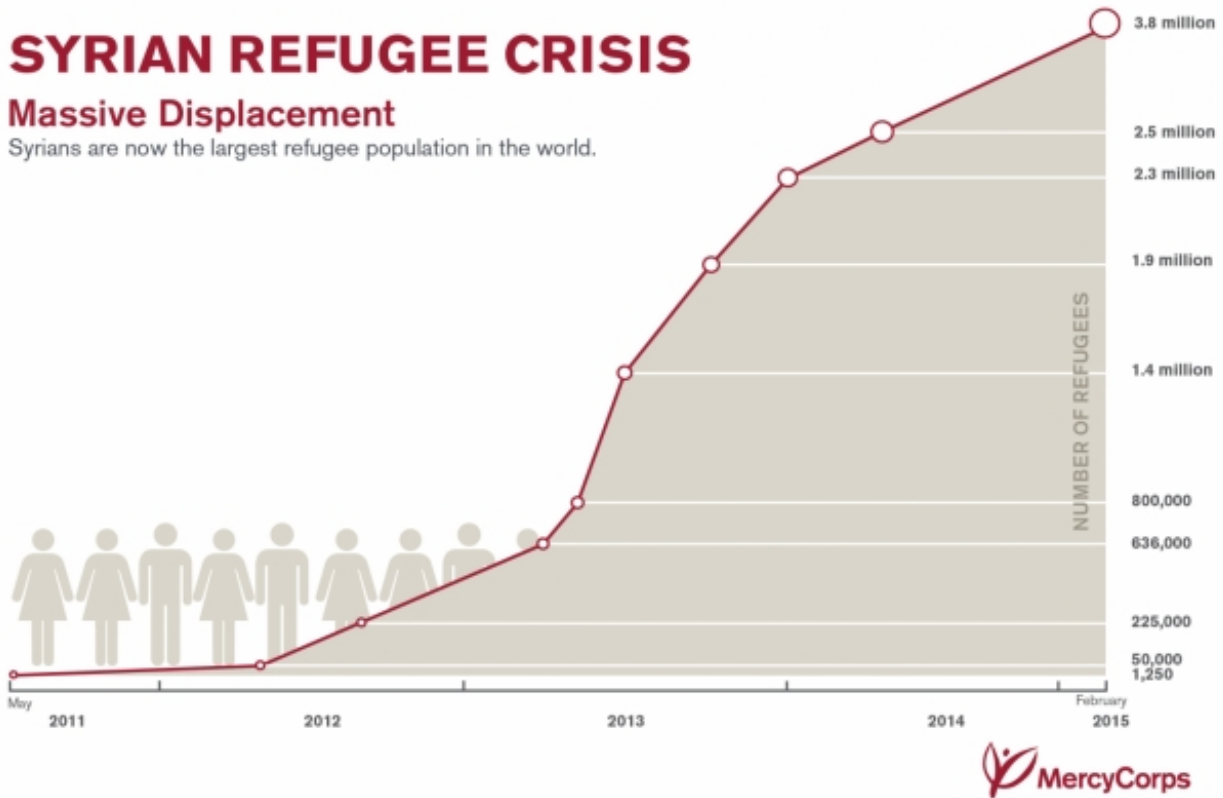
How many refugees are there?

Four million Syrians have registered or are awaiting registration with the United Nations High Commission of Refugees, who is leading the regional emergency response.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Massive Displacement

Syrians are now the largest refugee population in the world.



 MercyCorps

Every year of the conflict has seen an exponential growth in refugees. In 2012, there were 100,000 refugees. By April 2013, there were 800,000. That doubled to 1.6 million in less than four months. There are now four million Syrians scattered throughout the region, making them the world's largest refugee population under the United Nations' mandate.

At this rate, the U.N. predicts there could be 4.27 million Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 — the worst exodus since the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago.

The fact is, the majority of refugees live outside camps.

What conditions are refugees facing outside camps?

Some Syrians know people in neighboring countries who they can stay with. But many host families were already struggling on meager incomes and do not have the room or finances to help as the crisis drags on.

Refugees find shelter wherever they can. Our teams have seen families living in rooms with no heat or running water, in abandoned chicken coops and storage sheds.

Most refugees must find a way to pay rent, even for derelict structures. Without any legal way to work in Jordan and Lebanon, they struggle to find odd jobs and accept low wages that often don't cover their most basic needs. The situation is slightly better in the Kurdish Autonomous region of northern Iraq, where Syrian Kurds can legally work, but opportunities are now limited because of the conflict there. And language is still a barrier.

The lack of clean water and sanitation in crowded, makeshift settlements is an urgent concern. Diseases like cholera and polio can easily spread — even more life-threatening without enough medical services. In some areas with the largest refugee populations, water shortages have reached emergency levels; the supply is as low as 30 liters per person per day — one-tenth of what the average American uses.

The youngest refugees face an uncertain future. Some schools have been able to divide the school day

into two shifts and make room for more Syrian students. But there is simply not enough space for all the children, and many families cannot afford the transportation to get their kids to school.

According to the U.N., more than half of all Syrian refugees are under the age of 18. Most have been out of school for months, if not years.

Is there enough assistance to reach everyone?

In December 2014, the U.N. issued its largest ever appeal for a single crisis — according to their estimates, \$8.4 billion is necessary to meet the needs of all those affected by the crisis, both inside and outside Syria, an increase from last year's \$6.5 billion. Yet that previous appeal was only funded less than 50 percent.

Many humanitarian organizations, including Mercy Corps, are partnering with the U.N., using both private contributions and funding from the international community to actively address the needs of Syrians caught in this terrible disaster. But so much more must be done.