



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 31 May 2013

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NOTE

from:	Presidency
to:	Permanent Representatives Committee / Council (Justice and Home Affairs)
Subject:	Syria: Protection of Refugees - latest developments

Since March 2011 the crisis in Syria has developed into an increasingly tragic situation marked by unprecedented use of force by the regime, indiscriminate violence, inadequate protection of civilians, dire humanitarian conditions in parts of the country and spill-over effects in neighbouring countries.

Latest information from Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (24 May 2013) shows that there are over 1.5 million Syrians registered (1,337,000) or awaiting registration (223,000) as refugees in neighbouring countries and North Africa. The UNHCR reports that 76% of these refugees are women and children. The population of persons of concern (registered and awaiting registration) in each country is as follows:

Jordan	486,000
Lebanon	488,000
Turkey	350,000
Iraq	151,000
Egypt	71,000
North Africa	11,000

Previously it has been estimated that 1.2 million people are also displaced within Syria and that as many as 3 million Syrians are affected by the conflict. Syria is also the location of 100,000 Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR and 500,000 registered Palestinian refugees.

UNHCR and other UN agencies and organisations launched the Syria Regional Response Plan in March 2012. This plan has subsequently been revised, most recently in December 2012, and US\$1 billion is being requested based on estimates of up to 1 million Syrian refugees needing help during the first half of 2013. The refugee population estimate has already been exceeded and UNHCR reports that 73% of the funding requirement has been received.

According to Eurostat figures, in the period from April 2011 to March 2013, approximately 37,600 Syrian nationals have applied for asylum in the EU and 24,250 of these applications have been lodged in Germany and Sweden. At a meeting of the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) on 23 May 2013 the European Asylum Support Office reported that while the recent monthly trend in the number of applications is declining the number of pending cases in the Member States remains stable overall. Frontex believes that Germany and Sweden will continue to be the main countries of destination within the Union for persons seeking to leave Syria.

The European Commission has noted that the EU as a whole is one of the leading international humanitarian response actors in the crisis. Member States and the Commission have mobilised humanitarian funding of approximately €800 million. These funds are allocated for use both within Syria and to assist those fleeing the violence.

The Commission has further indicated that the continuation of humanitarian assistance in 2013 will be accompanied by mid-term actions aimed at building a bridge between humanitarian aid on the one hand, and development assistance to the countries and communities in the region affected by the current refugee flow, on the other hand. In the medium to longer-term (2013-2016) the Commission, in close liaison with the relevant international partners, is preparing a comprehensive programme on refugees and development in the Middle East. This is in line with the EU Global Approach to Migration and Mobility. A Regional Protection Programme (RPP) would be an integral and prominent part of this programme.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Mr Antonio Guterres attended the Informal Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial meeting in Dublin on 17 January 2013 where he provided information and analysis to Ministers on the unfolding situation. He pointed to the need for Europe to consider a contingency plan in the event that there was a chaotic end to the conflict in Syria and EU Member States experienced a massive influx of Syrian refugees as a result. He also asked that Member States grant protection to those in need, and that no asylum seeker who has been refused protection be sent back to Syria while the conflict is ongoing. The High Commissioner remarked that while it is premature to look at a large resettlement programme for Syrians, UNHCR has called for resettlement in a number of targeted cases and separately UNHCR has sought resettlement places for refugees from other countries out of the region, including many who have been staying in Syria. In this connection, it is noted that Germany has recently announced that 5,000 especially vulnerable Syrian refugees will be taken into Germany before the end of this year and that Germany also wishes to encourage other Member States to join in that effort.
