

Beat: News

More than 1 million refugees have fled Syria, UN says

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USPA News - The number of Syrians who have fled the country since the conflict began two years ago has surpassed one million, the United Nations (UN) refugee agency said Wednesday, warning that the war-torn country is spiraling towards a "full-scale disaster." It was previously estimated that 1.1 million Syrian refugees would have arrived in neighboring countries by the end of June, but the agency said Wednesday it has already registered more than 1 million people who have either registered as a refugee or are being assisted as such.

"With a million people in flight, millions more displaced internally, and thousands of people continuing to cross the border every day, Syria is spiraling towards full-scale disaster," said António Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Guterres said humanitarian workers need additional funds to help the refugees and support the countries hosting them, as a political solution in Syria is still absent. "We are doing everything we can to help, but the international humanitarian response capacity is dangerously stretched. This tragedy has to be stopped," he said. The UN refugee agency said the agency's Regional Response Plan for Syrian Refugees, which was originally launched in March 2012 and revised in December 2012 to \$1 billion for an expected 1.1 million refugees, is only 25 percent funded. "At a minimum, humanitarian actors should receive the funds needed to save lives and ease suffering," Guterres said. The number of refugees has increased dramatically since the start of the year, with more than 400,000 people fleeing Syria to neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt, and increasingly to North Africa and Europe, according to figures reported by UNHCR. Guterres added that the figures translate into one million people who are dependent on the generosity of host countries, the response of humanitarian agencies, and the financial support of governments and individuals. The Geneva-based agency said most of the refugees arrive traumatized, without possessions and having lost members of their families. Half of the refugees are children, the majority under the age of 11. In Lebanon, the population has increased by as much as 10 percent. Jordan's energy, water, health and education services are being strained to the limit. Turkey has spent over \$600 million setting up 17 refugee camps, with more under construction. Iraq, already stressed by a population of one million internally displaced persons (IDPs), received over 100,000 Syrian refugees in the past year. "These countries should not only be recognized for their unstinting commitment to keeping their borders open for Syrian refugees, they should be massively supported as well," Guterres noted. According to the UN, up to 70,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed since the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad began in March 2011. In addition, more than two million have been internally displaced and over four million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.

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