

Syria: Scaled-up assistance, 'sustained access' needed to 140,000 made homeless, says UNHCR

Following a Government-led assault on Syria's opposition-held areas, an estimated 140,000 people in the country's south-west remain homeless and in need of help, the United Nation Refugee Agency ([UNCHR](#)) said on Friday, calling for sustained access to displaced communities.

"A new scaling-up of assistance is needed and UNHCR continues to advocate for [sustained access](#) for humanitarian actors," UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic told reporters at the regular press briefing in Geneva, explaining that the UN and other partners have reached tens of thousands.

During the first six months of this year, amid continued fighting and new displacements, nearly 13,000 refugees from neighbouring countries and another 750,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) are estimated to have returned to Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Rural Damascus, Damascus, south-west and north-eastern Syria.

Mr. Mahecic pointed out that the UN's has continued to enhance its humanitarian response for IDPs, returnees and other crisis-affected communities.

"In anticipation and recognition of this dynamic, UNHCR ramped up its capacity inside Syria already in 2017 to support refugees and internally displaced people who return spontaneously," he stated.

In recognition of Wednesday's announcement of a joint Syrian-Russian initiative to set up a refugee centre in Syria to help those wishing to return home, UNHCR said that while it has not yet seen any details of the plan, it is ready to engage in discussions with both Governments and prepared to work with them towards finding solutions that meet international refugee and human rights standards.

"Refugees always have a right to return," underscored Mr. Mahecic, adding that they should not be pressured, rushed or prematurely pushed into leaving the countries where they have found shelter.

"UNHCR stresses that any plan that aims to enable refugees to exercise this right must be aligned with international standards – meaning that returns must be voluntary, they need to take place in safe and dignified conditions, and need to be sustainable," he spelled out.

Into its eighth year, the Syrian conflict continues to exact a [terrible toll](#) on the country's civilians. Over half of the population has been forced from their homes, and many have been displaced multiple times.

UN agency warns conditions around Yemen's key port city of Hudaydah still 'very bad', as staff rush to deliver aid

United Nations migration agency staff in Yemen say the key port city of Hudaydah remains "a difficult environment" for the delivery of aid to thousands of people displaced by heavy fighting this week.

"The situation is [very bad](#) and we're doing our best to provide them with temporary shelter and support for the time being," said Stefano Pes, [IOM](#) Yemen's Officer in Charge, noting that agency staff and partners are working in a difficult environment to deliver food, and non-food items, shelter kits and good quality tents.

Hudaydah – the primary gateway for food and humanitarian aid for a population on the verge of starvation – has been racked by fighting between Houthi rebels, who control the port, and government forces backed by a Saudi-led military coalition.

Civilian casualties and mass displacements continue to mount amidst intense fighting that began on 12 June.

It has caused further damage to public services which are stretched to the limit, affecting water supplies, forcing shops to close and resulting in shortages in essential commodities. This has complicated the delivery of humanitarian assistance and resulted in the closure of a temporary feeding centre in Zabid.

The fortunate few who are able to leave, are traveling to the relative safety of Sana'a, Aden and Thamar but the majority of the population have already exhausted their reserves, forcing them to seek protection wherever they can, said the agency.

About 50 IOM staff are working in various locations to assist migrants and an estimated 50,000 newly displaced Yemenis in Hudaydah. IOM has also provided 7,830 meals to children in three Hudaydah schools.

The crisis in Yemen has its genesis in the 2011 Arab Spring uprising, which swept across the country amid ongoing rebel insurgency. Although anti-Government protests led to the ouster of the then President, the transfer of power to Mr. Hadi, his deputy, led to further instability and conflict.

Close to 7,000 evacuated from Syrian towns after enduring nearly 3-year siege

After close to three years of siege, 6,900 women, children and men were finally able to leave the Syrian towns of Foah and Kafraya over the past few days, following a local agreement between parties to the conflict.

The two largely Shia pro-Government towns, in the mostly rebel-held Idlib Governorate, had been besieged by non-state armed groups since October 2015, and people trapped there have been in dire need of life-saving assistance, including food and medical care. The United Nations has not been able to deliver humanitarian assistance to the towns since September 2017.

The civilians were escorted out by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to the Al-Eiss crossing in southern rural Aleppo Governorate. In addition, 17 persons in need of urgent medical care, were brought to hospitals in Aleppo city, accompanied by 21 family members.

On Monday, it was reported by the [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#) that another 430 conflict-affected Syrians were evacuated from Dara'a Governorate to northern Syria, also following an agreement by parties to the conflict. Humanitarian agencies on the ground are responding to the best of their capacities to the most urgent needs in the various reception areas.

“The United Nations was not party to the negotiated agreement or its implementation, but stands ready to provide all people in need with humanitarian assistance wherever they are,” said UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Haq during a press briefing at UN Headquarters on Thursday, as he stressed that “any evacuation of civilians should be safe, voluntary, well-informed and to a place of their own choosing” and that “all people displaced through such agreements must retain the right of return as soon as the situation allows”.

As needs assessments are ongoing in areas where control has recently changed, humanitarian organisations have started delivering basic help. This week, convoys brought life-saving aid to 19,500 people in dire need in and around Beit Jin (Rural Damascus governorate), to 15,000 people in Nassib and Um Elmayathen (Dara'a governorate), and to 89,000 people in the Al-Houla area (Homs governorate) and the Harbnafseh area (Hama governorate). For Beit Jin, this was the first time that aid reached the formerly besieged area since 2013.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria, now in its eighth year, continues to be

characterized by unparalleled suffering, destruction and disregard for human life. Some 13.1 million people require critical aid, including close to 3 million people trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Despite enormous challenges, the UN and its humanitarian partners continue to deliver life-saving assistance and support to millions of people across the country every month.

Multilateral trade challenged by 'increasingly unilateral trade measures,' UN forum hears

Despite the improved economic growth, risks to the economic outlook are rising, the United Nations economic and social affairs chief said on Thursday, warning against “increasingly unilateral trade measures” that are challenging the multilateral trading system.

“Efforts are needed to revitalize a global partnership for sustainable development to build a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system,” said Liu Zhenmin, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, during a high-level policy dialogue with international financial and trade institutions, held at the UN Headquarters.

“Stronger economic growth in itself is not sufficient to ensure that these gains are widely shared,” he added.

The dialogue was organized by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to exchange views and insights on trends in the global economy and international trade, in the context of sustainable development.

Representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank Group, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) offered their projections for economic growth, international trade and other trends and challenges.

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its 17 Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015 by UN Member States, require transformative changes across all of the economic, environmental, and social spheres.

“All in all, a mixed picture emerges from this frontier work on sustainable development scenarios. If we continue merely with incremental progress as in the past, lots of short-term progress might come at the expense of long-term deterioration in other areas,” Mr. Liu said.

The most recent forecast from the DESA's World Economic Situation and Prospects indicates that world economic output is expected to expand by 3.2 per cent in both 2018 and 2019.

"This improvement reflects a further uptick in the growth outlook for developed economies in 2018. It comes on the strength of accelerating wage growth, broadly favourable investment conditions, and the short-term impact of a fiscal stimulus package in the United States," he noted.

The generally positive macroeconomic conditions create the basis for policymakers to take measures that will help to make meaningful progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)— which aim to eradicate poverty and hunger and protect the environment – and offer an opportunity to raise living standards on a broad scale, especially in developing regions.

"However, in parallel with the improvement in economic growth, we have seen a rise in risks to the economic outlook," he said, warning that "increasingly unilateral trade measures are challenging the multilateral trading system."

Mr. Liu also said that the recent acceleration in economic growth also comes with an environmental cost, and at the current rate, efforts to combat climate change are insufficient to meet the objectives of the 2015 Paris Agreement, which commits countries to keep the rise in carbon emissions from the dawn of the industrial era, to below 2 degrees Celsius.

[UN chief welcomes new push by El Salvador's political parties to begin fresh dialogue](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the decision announced on Wednesday by El Salvador's political parties to set up a new "[negotiating framework](#)".

In a statement from his Spokesperson, the UN chief describes the framework as an effort "to reach medium and long-term agreements for the benefit of the country."

The statement released on Wednesday night added: "He congratulates the members of civil society, constituted in a UN-facilitated Group in Support of Political Dialogue, who have helped bring into being the commitment of political parties."

The statement added that Mr. Guterres hoped "the political parties will now join their efforts in translating their commitment into concrete agreements

that will benefit all Salvadorians.”

Acute political problems and virtually endemic gang violence in the country have led some families to seek refuge outside the country, with many choosing to head north into Mexico and on to the border with the United States.

In recent years a growing number of people across El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have fled violence at the hands of organized criminal groups – including murder, rape, abduction and forcible recruitment of children into gangs.

El Salvador is also one of the main countries from which asylum-seekers have been separated from their [children](#) along the southern border of the United States.