House of Commons
International Development Committee

UK Support for Humanitarian Relief in the Middle East: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2014–15

Third Special Report of Session 2014–15

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The International Development Committee

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The current staff of the Committee are Dr David Harrison (Clerk), Chloe Challenger (Senior Committee Specialist), Louise Whitley (Committee Specialist), Richard Ratcliffe (Committee Specialist), Zac Mead (Senior Committee Assistant), Paul Hampson (Committee Support Assistant) and Hannah Pearce (Media Officer).

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Third Special Report

On 2 July 2014 the International Development Committee published its First Report of Session 2014–15, UK Support for Humanitarian Relief in the Middle East, HC 248. On 12 September the Committee received a memorandum from the Secretary of State for International Development which contains a response to the Report. The memorandum is published as an appendix to this Report.

Government response

Introduction

The Department for International Development (DFID) welcomes the report by the International Development Select Committee published on 25th June 2014, which examines UK Support for Humanitarian Relief in the Middle East. The Government response to the report’s conclusions and recommendations are set out below. Any figures or statistics set out below are based on information available as of August 1st 2014.

The UK has been at the forefront of the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis. The UK has committed over £600 million for humanitarian assistance in response to the Syria crisis making it the second largest bilateral donor. The UK is committed to continuing its work to mitigate the impact of the crisis on ordinary civilians both inside Syria and neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon and Jordan.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria has reached catastrophic proportions. The UN estimates that 10.8 million people are in dire need of humanitarian aid within Syria. 6.4 million people in Syria have been forced to flee their homes to other areas of the country and there are now over 2.9 million refugees in the region. The number of people in hard-to-reach areas now stands at 4.7 million – an increase of 1.2 million since February 2014. 241,000 people continue to live under siege conditions.¹

UK aid has reached hundreds of thousands of people across all 14 governorates of Syria, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. In 2013, UK aid supported 5.2 million monthly food rations (3.9 million in Syria and 1.3 million in the region). Since the beginning of our response up to the end of 2013, UK aid has provided water for up to 1.5 million people and has supported over 600,000 medical consultations.

Since the adoption and implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2139 in February 2014, the situation on the ground has continued to deteriorate. The UN’s fifth report to the Security Council on 23 July 2014 stated that violence and attacks on civilians by all parties to the conflict and human rights abuses continued unabated, with devastating consequences for those affected. It is deeply concerning that the Syrian

regime and extremist groups have failed to respect UNSCR 2139, leaving so many 
Syrians cut off from the assistance they need. That is why the UK co-sponsored and 
lobbied hard for a new apolitical UNSC Resolution, which was unanimously adopted on 
14 July. UNSCR 2165 authorises the UN to use four specific border crossings to deliver 
aid inside Syria, without the consent of the Syrian regime. The UN estimates this could 
enable access to up to 2.9 million people in hard to reach areas. We are supporting the 
UN to swiftly scale up its operations so more aid can reach those in need.

Syria’s neighbours, Jordan and Lebanon in particular, continue to be affected by the 
influx of refugees. Jordan now hosts over 609,000 refugees and Lebanon now in excess 
of 1.15 million – over 25% of its pre-war population. DFID has responded by 
broadening our support to host communities and engaging with the Jordanian and 
Lebanese governments, for example by supporting local municipal service provision in 
Jordan and Lebanon. In both countries, DFID’s programme continues to be geared to 
responding to the humanitarian needs of refugees from Syria and bolstering broader 
social cohesion and stability. DFID has also provided support to Syrian refugees in 
Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

**DFID Response to the Conclusions and Recommendations**

**1. Recommendation 1: Humanitarian situation in Syria**
The scale of humanitarian need in Syria is vast. A wide range of organisations—UN 
organisations and others—are working in Syria in extremely dangerous circumstances. 
Organisations such as WFP, which is able to deliver food assistance for around 65p per 
person per day, are providing exceptional value for money. We commend the brave 
men and women working on the ground in Syria to provide humanitarian assistance. 
We were interested to hear that DFID was considering delivering more of its assistance 
through NGOs. (Paragraph 18)

**Noted.**

In May 2014, the International Development Secretary announced a shift towards 
delivering up to half the UK’s aid in Syria across the borders of neighbouring countries 
to focus on reaching those most in need.

Delivering directly from neighbouring countries allows agencies to overcome regime 
restrictions which have prevented aid from getting to those in hard to reach areas. 
During her visit to the Syria-Turkey border in July, the International Development 
Secretary announced additional assistance of £46 million for NGO cross-border 
operations to reach those most in need.

**Recommendation 2: Humanitarian situation in Syria**
We warmly welcome the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2139 (2014). In 
view of the manifest failure of last October’s UN Security Council Presidential 
Statement, a Resolution was the only option. We are nevertheless concerned that certain 
parties may not abide by the resolution: groups such as al-Nusra and ISIS do not 
recognise the UN. We are also concerned about the bureaucratic restrictions which
prevent NGOs from delivering humanitarian assistance in Syria. Where NGOs are ready, willing and able to provide much-needed humanitarian assistance, the Government should use every means possible to help them to obtain permission to operate in Syria, and to help their staff to obtain visas. (Paragraph 19)

**Partially agree.**

We share the Committee’s view on the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2139, which demanded that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, promptly allowed rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners.

We are also concerned about support for implementation by some groups, especially extremist groups such as those mentioned by the Committee. The UK has supported UN efforts to ensure support for implementation from armed groups. Over 20 armed opposition groups have now signed a Declaration of Commitment affirming their responsibilities under international humanitarian law to facilitate the delivery of cross-border aid and implement the requirements of UNSCR 2139.

However, it was clear that the Assad regime continued to ignore the Resolution’s demands, especially through its arbitrary denial of humanitarian aid to those in areas most in need. Bureaucratic restrictions are but one of many ways that the regime has undermined the implementation of UNSCR 2139. This is why we lobbied hard for and co-sponsored a new resolution, UNSCR 2165, adopted unanimously on 14 July, gives UN humanitarian agencies authority to deliver cross-border humanitarian assistance to those most in need, without the prior approval of the Syrian regime. The first UN cross-border convoy was launched on 25 July.

Following the closure of the British Embassy in Damascus, there are limitations on our ability to directly influence the Syrian Government regarding bureaucratic hurdles and visas for UN and NGO staff operating out of Damascus. Nevertheless, we will continue to work with the UN and lobby those with influence over the regime to allow full humanitarian access throughout Syria. We will also continue providing humanitarian agencies with timely and appropriate financial support.

**Recommendation 3: Humanitarian situation in neighbouring countries**

The countries bordering Syria have taken in an extraordinary number of refugees. In countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, organisations working to provide assistance face a very challenging situation. We fully support the efforts of such organisations. (Paragraph 22)

**Noted.**

The UK welcomes the generosity of Syria’s neighbours, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, in providing refuge to so many people fleeing the violence in Syria. DFID recognises that organisations working to provide assistance in Jordan and Lebanon face many different challenges.
These challenges continue to change and evolve as the crisis unfolds. DFID recognises that delivering aid within Syria presents huge complications for our partners. Agencies within Syria face particular challenges in having to adapt to the changing needs of the displaced Syrian population, the dangers faced by individuals in delivering aid, and the difficulty in monitoring this support.

The enormous challenges faced by the countries that border Syria should also be recognised. For host countries the influx of refugees has had a significant impact on their political, social and economic fabric. As set out in our original memorandum to the Committee, a recent World Bank study estimated the fiscal impact on Lebanon as a result of reduced revenue collection and increased demands on public services at $2.6 billion. In Jordan, there is little doubt that the influx of Syrian refugees has also placed a considerable financial burden on its government, with conservative estimates put at $700 million.

In both countries agencies and partner organisations have had to shift from an initial crisis response to a longer term protracted outlook. Coping with an ever increasing refugee population, variation in refugee needs (specifically between refugee camps and urban settlements), and minimising costs without compromising the delivery of aid, are just some of the key challenges these organisations have faced.

DFID joins the Committee in commending the courage and dedication of our partners and staff working in these difficult circumstances.

Recommendation 4: Humanitarian situation in neighbouring countries
As the Minister of State rightly highlighted, maintaining the stability of Jordan is critical. DFID should launch a development programme in Jordan for the medium-term, in addition to its existing humanitarian work and support to municipalities. We look at how to implement this programme below. (Paragraph 24)

Partially Agree.

As set out to the Committee in our original memorandum, DFID has already significantly scaled up its approach and support for Jordan and Lebanon since the end of 2013 in recognition of the impact the Syria Crisis has had on both countries’ stability.

In addition to a significant uplift in human capacity in both London and at Embassies, £17 million of DFID support has also been allocated to Jordanian and Lebanese Municipalities which are struggling to cope with the provision of basic local services including waste collection, road repair, and the upkeep of municipal parks. This work will also help to prevent escalating tensions between local people and the growing numbers of Syrian refugees. The work on longer term economic and political reform also continues through the Arab Partnership Programme.

In addition, the UK provided Conflict Pool support of £4 million in Jordan and £18 million in Lebanon in 2013/14. This is strengthening border and internal security, as well as supporting community cohesion and assistance to communities susceptible to conflict and violence.
We share the Committee’s view that maintaining the stability of Jordan is critical. The stability of Lebanon is also critical; Lebanon hosts more refugees than Jordan in both absolute and relative, per capita terms. Threats to its stability are arguably more acute than they are in Jordan given its fractured politics and history of conflict. Instability in either country would threaten a broad range of UK humanitarian, security, economic and political interests.

Given their upper middle income status, it would not be appropriate for DFID to set up traditional, bilateral development programmes in Jordan or Lebanon that targeted poverty reduction or delivery of the Millennium Development Goals. However, Jordan and Lebanon are countries where DFID’s engagement is justified by the clear humanitarian imperative arising from the Syria crisis and broader cross-HMG priorities as set out by the National Security Council (NSC). The maintenance of Jordan and Lebanon’s relative stability enables DFID to mitigate the worst humanitarian impacts of the Syria crisis both within Jordan and Lebanon and across the border in Syria. In both countries we have a clear interest in building resilience, in upstream conflict and humanitarian crisis prevention: we are ‘investing to save’, in line with the Building Stability Overseas Strategy2 and the recommendations of the Humanitarian Emergency Response Review3.

In both countries, DFID will therefore continue to play a leading role:

1. In meeting the humanitarian needs of the poorest and most vulnerable refugees from Syria, exemplifying best practice and laying the groundwork for more sustainable ways of managing the protracted refugee presence, and,

2. As part of cross-HMG efforts to support increased stability and social cohesion; mitigating impacts on host communities, reducing tensions between refugees and host communities, risks of violent conflict and threats to broader UK interests.

We continue to scope programming options beyond the existing humanitarian programme, Conflict Pool and support to municipalities that will support delivery of these objectives, including increased support to the education sector. DFID Ministers will make decisions on these options in due course.

Recommendation 5: Humanitarian situation in neighbouring countries

In countries bordering Syria, it would be a mistake for donors to provide assistance to refugees without also providing assistance to host communities. Doing so would almost inevitably lead to an increase in tensions between the two groups: if their own needs were neglected, poor families in host communities would understandably feel resentful towards refugees receiving international assistance. In Lebanon and Jordan, DFID should ensure that its humanitarian assistance benefits needy host communities as well as refugees. (Paragraph 26)

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DFID agrees that tensions could escalate between host communities and Syrian refugees. As a result, we are making considerable efforts to ensure that our support benefits host communities as well as refugees.

A significant proportion of our humanitarian assistance is already benefitting those most in need within host communities and our longer-term work, focused on social cohesion and stability, is also focused on the needs of the most vulnerable Jordanians and Lebanese as well as those of refugees.

We have prioritised support at the municipal level because this is where tensions are most acute as local service providers struggle to meet increasing demands. The support given to Municipalities, for example, does not differentiate between refugees and host communities. The positive benefits of waste collection, the construction and maintenance of markets, road repair, the upkeep of municipal parks, and provision of other services will benefit all residents, refugees and host communities.

UKAID is also providing textbooks for all pupils in the public education system in Lebanon. This benefits 80,000 Syrian refugee children and over 220,000 Lebanese school children between 6 and 15 years.

Recommendation 6: Humanitarian situation in neighbouring countries
We are concerned that refugees in host communities receive disproportionately little international assistance by comparison with those in refugee camps, possibly because aid in refugee camps is easier to provide. In countries bordering Syria, DFID must ensure that an appropriate share of its humanitarian aid reaches refugees in host communities, who make up 85% of the total Syrian refugee population. DFID should also monitor levels of child marriage and domestic violence in these communities. (Paragraph 29)

Most DFID aid to Jordan and Lebanon already reaches refugees in host communities. In Lebanon there are no formal refugee camps and the entire refugee population lives within or alongside host communities, with large numbers in informal tented settlements.

In Jordan, formal refugee camps provide a home to roughly 15% of the refugee population. Almost 85% are therefore far harder to reach, living as they do in host communities. In order to ensure the needs of these people are adequately met, we are now spending approximately 75% of our overall humanitarian assistance on vulnerable refugees living in these communities.

Women and girls are among the most vulnerable groups as a result of the crisis in Syria. UK support is providing sexual and reproductive healthcare; cash assistance to women-headed households; and expert clinical care and counselling for survivors of sexual and gender based violence. We put great importance on supporting gender based violence
(GBV) services for Syrian refugees in Jordan including girls and women who have experienced child, early and/or forced marriage. Over £4.3 million has been allocated to International Rescue Committee alone to not only address GBV but women’s protection and empowerment. This is delivered through a combination of cash support and provision of psychosocial support, safe spaces and referrals to more specialised support and services.

A number of other humanitarian programmes in Jordan and Lebanon also target the prevention of early and forced marriage, as well as other types of gender based violence, by providing relevant services, safe spaces and access to legal and social expertise.

DFID will continue to monitor these issues through our implementation of these programmes and engagement with our implementing partners.

Recommendation 7: Humanitarian situation in neighbouring countries

The astonishingly high number of Syrian children who are out of school is cause for grave concern. If an entire generation of children is unable to complete its education, the long-term implications for the stability of Syria and the wider region will be very serious indeed. Ensuring that Syrian refugee children receive an adequate education should remain a top priority for DFID. DFID should allocate additional funds to support the operation of “double shifts” in schools. To support children who are unable to enrol in school, DFID should scale up its support for informal learning mechanisms such as “family-friendly spaces.” DFID should also allocate additional funds for the provision of psychosocial support, to enable traumatised children to re-engage with education. (Paragraph 34)

Agree.

Preventing a lost generation of children inside Syria and within the refugee communities in Jordan and Lebanon is a high priority for DFID. The Secretary of State launched the ‘No Lost Generation Initiative’ (NLGI) jointly with UNICEF in September last year. Since then she has chaired a high level meeting on the Initiative at the World Bank Spring Meetings in April. Senior officials from DFID and the FCO organised and chaired a Syria Regional Education meeting in Amman in June. We will continue to use our political and diplomatic resources to bring high level focus to bear on the needs of children affected by the Syria crisis.

We are also increasing our own support to protection, psychosocial support and education for children affected by the crisis. In particular, UKAid is supporting the establishment and running costs of a large number of child, adolescent and family friendly spaces in both Jordan and Lebanon through our support to UNICEF, and has been doing so since 2012. In Lebanon specifically, we also fund UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council to establish child friendly spaces.

At the end of 2013 the Secretary of State launched a scheme to ensure that every child aged between 6 and 15 who attends state school in Lebanon has a set of textbooks covering key academic subjects. As well as 80,000 refugee children who have fled the
fighting in Syria, this initiative includes Lebanese children from host communities. Over 300,000 packs of books are being distributed to ensure these children have access to adequate learning materials.

NLGI will continue to encompass all the countries affected by the civil war: Syria itself and all its neighbours – and incorporate the full range of sectors relevant to meeting the needs of children specifically in the areas of protection and education. We are working with the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon and other partners to take this approach forward, as part of our work to scope programming options that will help lay the groundwork for more sustainable ways of managing the protracted refugee presence and support increased stability and social cohesion. As stated above, DFID Ministers will make decisions on these options in due course.

**Recommendation 8: Humanitarian situation in neighbouring countries**

The Jordanian Government’s reluctance to allow Syrian refugees to work is entirely understandable, especially given the risk of rising unemployment amongst the native Jordanian population. However, allowing Syrian refugees to work would have many potential benefits, especially in the case of skilled professionals such as doctors and teachers. **Whilst recognising the inherent political sensitivities of the issue, we recommend that the UK encourage the Government of Jordan to allow Syrian refugees to work.** (Paragraph 37)

**Partially Agree.**

There are substantial potential advantages to both refugees and host communities of integrating Syrian refugees into the labour markets of host countries, enabling them to pursue livelihood opportunities, increasing their resilience and self-sufficiency and reducing their dependence on host communities or international aid. Many also have valuable skills that can make a real contribution to their host countries’ economies. However, as the Committee recognises this is a highly sensitive issue; many countries in the region already suffer from high, structural unemployment. The potential for Syrians, many of whom are highly skilled, to push existing workers out of work remains a primary concern for host country Governments.

Nevertheless we will continue our discussions with host Governments on this topic, working with them and other partners, such as the UN and the International Financial Institutions, to identify solutions that address hosting countries’ concerns and enable refugees to earn a livelihood and make an economic contribution.

**Recommendation 9: Humanitarian situation in neighbouring countries**

*DFID should use the National Resilience Plan and the Economic and Social Impact Assessment as the basis of its assistance to Jordan and Lebanon respectively. (Paragraph 40)*

**Agree.**
As we have shifted to a more comprehensive approach in Jordan and Lebanon we have used national plans as the basis of our assistance. For example, the Jordan Emergency Services and Social Resilience programme through which DFID funds local municipalities is included in the Jordanian Government’s Syria Crisis Response Plan.

We entirely agree with the Committee that the respective Government’s plans should remain the foundation for our assistance.

**Recommendation 10: Donor funding**

With its humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, the UK has led the world: we commend the Government for its exemplary contribution. The UK has been able to increase its annual spending because its Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget has been increasing; now that the 0.7% target has been reached, spending will not continue to increase at the same rate. As the Minister of State highlighted, there are difficult choices ahead: if DFID continues to prioritise humanitarian spending in the Middle East, this will have implications for DFID’s spending in other parts of the world. Whilst we accept that humanitarian crises are unpredictable, we recommend that DFID set a clear budget for its humanitarian spending. With the ODA budget capped at 0.7% of GNI transparency as to the apportionment of humanitarian and development spending is essential. DFID should tell us what the budget for humanitarian spending is in its response to this report. It should tell us how it sets about planning for humanitarian work; what contingencies it has; and at what point it would be unable to commit further resources to humanitarian work. Rather than simply telling us that it has a contingency, it should explicitly provide us with an annual figure as to what the contingency is.

(Paragraph 46)

**Noted**

Given that humanitarian need is unpredictable, DFID does not set a budget for total humanitarian spend and we do not agree that it would be useful to do so. DFID manages total humanitarian spend in-year against humanitarian need and in view of available global resources from outside the UK. DFID’s contribution to humanitarian emergencies is largely in protracted and chronic crises and through our core contributions to the United Nations and Red Cross. Budgets for these are set through DFID’s internal resource allocation process, which takes place after the Spending Review settlement for DFID has been determined. DFID’s Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department (CHASE) holds a small annual contingency for use in rapid onset emergencies. This contingency has historically been fully spent in-year. Any underspend would be deployed on other activities. DFID also holds a central contingency that can be called upon for major rapid onset emergencies. As far as possible, resources are managed by DFID divisions during the year to accommodate emerging pressures. If central contingency is not required for humanitarian events it will be deployed on other, additional, activities. Ministers take stock throughout the year to ensure best value decisions are made on where to deploy the contingency.

As well as planning spend for humanitarian response through DFID’s internal resource allocation process, DFID’s CHASE manages a global humanitarian risk report which is
used by DFID Regional Directors to discuss pressure points during the year and to plan accordingly. DFID’s CHASE also monitors the world 24/7 to enable immediate decision making on funding for rapid onset emergencies against an agreed criteria (scale of disaster, government capability, vulnerability of population, UK interest).

DFID reports total bilateral humanitarian expenditure in its annual report; in 2013/2014 DFID spent £891 million bilaterally.

Recommendation 11: Donor funding
In this context, it is ever more crucial that other donors fulfil their responsibilities. The contributions made by many other donor countries fall far short of that made by the UK. The Government should use every means possible to put pressure on other donor countries and encourage them to match the UK’s commitment. (Paragraph 47)

Agree.

As of 1 August 2014, donor pledges for the 2014 UN appeals total $3.9 billion against a revised appeal of $6 billion⁴. 79 per cent of pledges have been disbursed to date, which leaves the 2014 UN appeals 39 per cent funded. The Government agrees that donors therefore need to not only pledge new money, but also disburse existing pledges to fill the funding gap. We will continue to press other donors to step up their funding and contribute their fair share to the response, reflecting the dire needs of those inside Syria and those that have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

The Government uses every opportunity to lobby key donors at the most senior levels on humanitarian and development funding for Syria and the region. The Prime Minister made this a priority for the UK-hosted G8 Summit and hosted a Syria Humanitarian event at the G20 Summit in 2013; the International Development Secretary co-hosted a high level event on Syria funding during 2013’s UN General Assembly Ministerial week; the UK played a leading role in encouraging the international community to make generous pledges at the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in Kuwait in January 2014 and emphasised the importance of humanitarian funding at the G7 summit in June 2017.

The UK is now working with international partners to organise a high-level Syria humanitarian event during the UN General Assembly (UNGA) Ministerial week in September 2014, which will include a pledging session. We will conduct a targeted lobbying campaign in the lead up to UNGA, during which we will proactively engage critical donors at Ministerial and senior official levels to leverage a significant amount of new humanitarian and development funding for Syria and the region.

Recommendation 12: Donor funding
We received strong representations that stressed the case for supporting Syrian refugees in the region, allowing them to remain close to their livelihoods with a possibility of

returning to Syria. Clearly there are some people with extreme needs whom the UK should accommodate. As at 13 May 24 had come, and we hope that the UK will continue this process in a constructive and compassionate way. (Paragraph 50)

Agree

The Government believes that providing aid to refugees in need and host communities is the best way to support the millions of people that have been displaced by the Syria crisis, compared with the comparatively small numbers that could be resettled. However, the Government recognises that there are some extremely vulnerable refugees who cannot be supported in the region. We therefore launched the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) scheme in January to offer sanctuary in the UK to displaced Syrians who are most at risk, particularly those with medical needs, women and children at risk and survivors of torture and violence.

Up to the end of June 2014, 50 people had been brought to the UK under the scheme. This included a number of adults and children with severe medical needs. We continue to work closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to identify those who need our help most. Groups are arriving in the UK on a regular basis, and we remain on track to deliver our commitment to relocate several hundred of the most vulnerable Syrians to the UK over the next three years. We are also working closely with UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and local authority partners to ensure that the support and accommodation beneficiaries of the scheme need are in place before each group of arrivals.