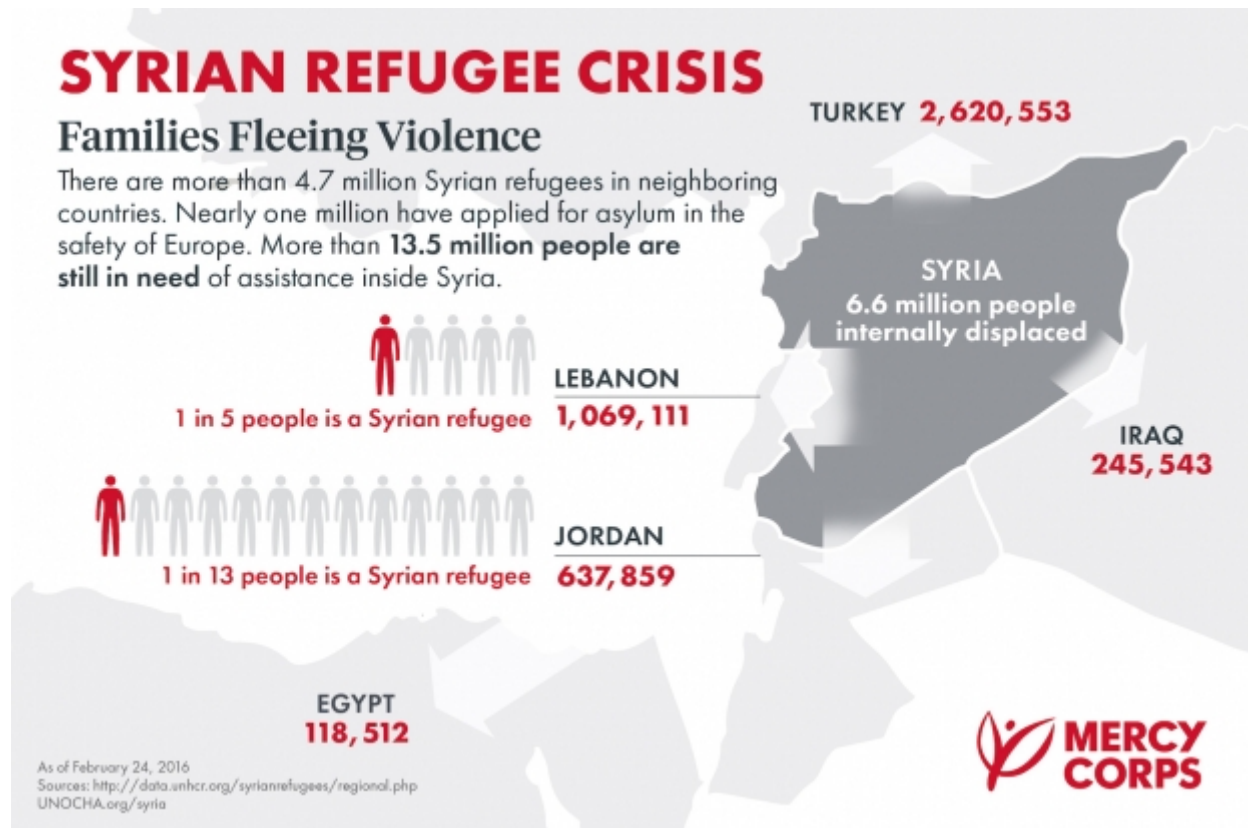


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## Quick facts: What you need to know about the Syria crisis

**Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey**, June 16, 2016

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*Editor's note: This article was originally published August 13, 2013; it was updated August 18, 2016 to reflect the latest information.*

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Syria's civil war is the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Half the country's pre-war population — more than 11 million people — have been killed or forced to flee their homes.

Families are struggling to survive inside Syria, or make a new home in neighboring countries. Others are risking their lives on the way to Europe, hoping to find acceptance and opportunity. And harsh winters and hot summers make life as a refugee even more difficult. At times, the effects of the conflict can seem overwhelming.

But one fact is simple: millions of Syrians need our help. According to the U.N., it will take \$7.7 billion to meet the urgent needs of the most vulnerable Syrians in 2016.

You can help. The more you know about the crisis, the more we can do together to help those in need. The lifesaving work we do, helping people survive conflict and build brighter futures, is only possible with your knowledge and support.

[Sign a petition: Tell Congress to support aid for refugees](#) ▶

So take a few minutes to understand the magnitude of this crisis. Read below to learn the facts behind the figures — and find out [how you can help](#).

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### **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 five years after it began, the full-blown civil war has killed over 250,000 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 6.6 million people are internally displaced. When you also consider refugees, well over 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.



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In October 2015, Russia began launching airstrikes at ISIS targets in Syria. The bombings have continued, so far killing at least 2,000 civilians and forcing even more Syrians to flee for safety.

In early February 2016, fighting around Aleppo city intensified and the main route for humanitarian aid was cut off. This has severely limited access, and Mercy Corps' operations in northern Syria have been effectively sliced in half due to the fighting.

The ability to provide lifesaving aid throughout the region is severely jeopardized as Mercy Corps balances the urgent need to both protect valuable supplies for unforeseen emergencies and ramp up distributions to those in need. We are stocking up supplies in areas where civilians may be cut off and strategically repositioning our staff.

**Test your knowledge about the Syrian refugee crisis ▶**

**Where are they fleeing to?**

Many 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 1 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.



[READ: A report from our staff in Greece ▶](#)

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, services are minimal and much of the route into western Europe has been closed.

[Learn how we're supporting Syrian refugees throughout the region ▶](#)

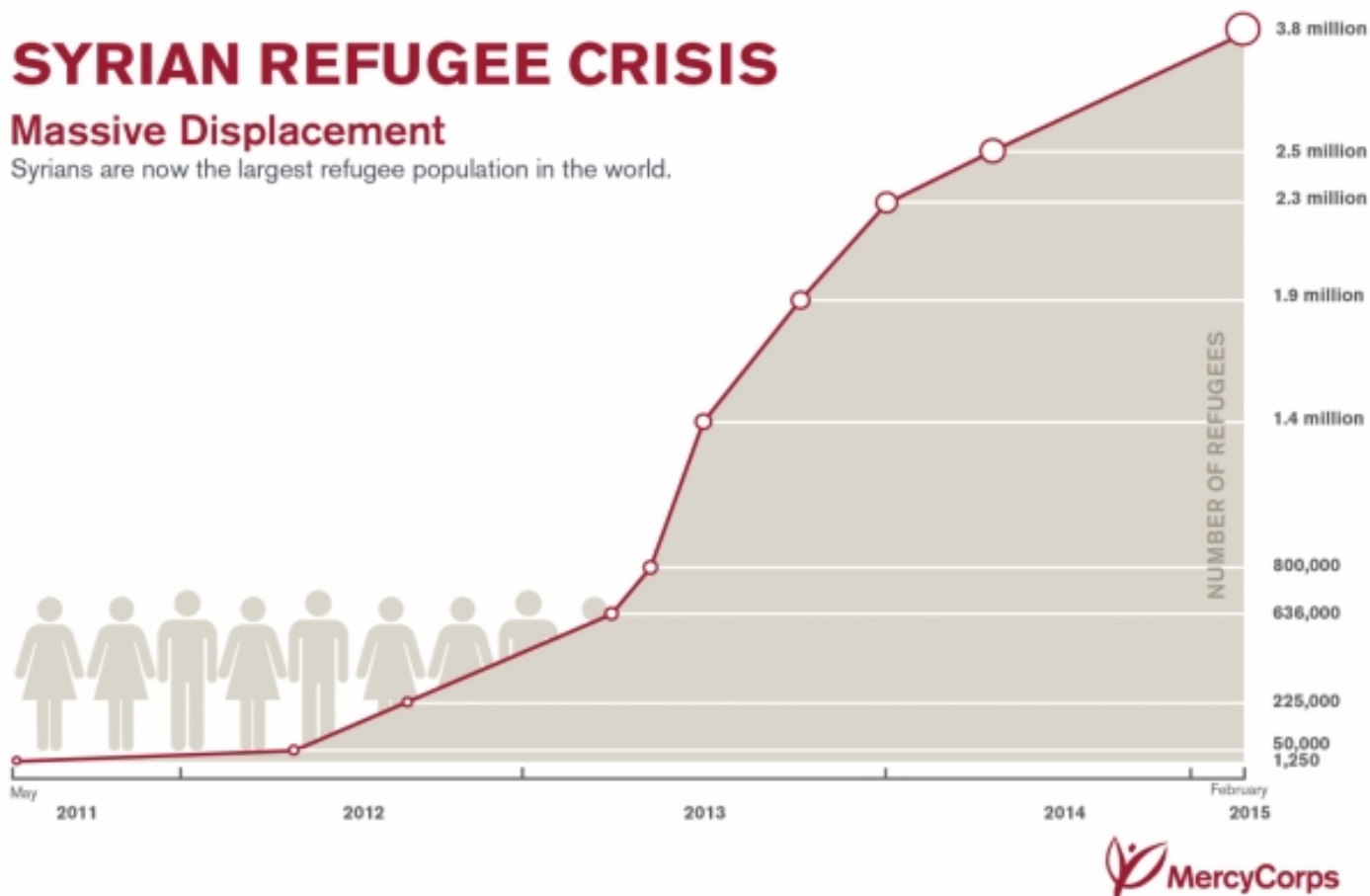
### **How are people escaping?**

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?**

Almost 5 million Syrians have registered or are awaiting registration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is leading the regional emergency response.



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 4.8 million Syrians scattered throughout the region, making them the world's largest refugee population under the United Nations' mandate. It's the worst exodus since the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago.

### Do all refugees live in camps?

The short answer: no.

Jordan's Za'atari, the first official refugee camp that opened in July 2012, gets the most news coverage because it is the destination for newly-arrived refugees. It is also the most concentrated settlement of refugees: Approximately 79,000 Syrians live in Za'atari, making it one of the country's largest cities.

The formerly barren desert is crowded with acres of white tents, makeshift shops line a "main street" and sports fields and schools are available for children.

A new camp, Azraq, opened in April 2014, carefully designed to provide a sense of community and security, with steel caravans instead of tents, a camp supermarket, and organized "streets" and "villages."

### See what refugees brought with them from home ▶

Because Jordan's camps are run by the government and the U.N. — with many partner organizations like Mercy Corps coordinating services — they offer more structure and support. But many families feel trapped, crowded, and even farther from any sense of home, so they seek shelter in nearby towns.





**READ: One family's story in crowded Lebanon** ▶

Iraq has set up a few camps to house the influx of refugees who arrived in 2013, but the majority of families are living in urban areas. And in Lebanon, the government has no official camps for refugees, so families establish makeshift camps or find shelter in derelict, abandoned buildings. In Turkey, the majority of refugees are trying to survive and find work, despite the language barrier, in urban communities.

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 in storage sheds.

**See photos: 8 important things Syrians have lost to war** ▶

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.

[Read our report about the water shortage in Jordan: Tapped Out ▶](#)

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.

### How many refugees are children?

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.

## SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

### Children Caught in War



More than 50% of Syrian refugees are children who've lost everything.



The youngest are confused and scared by their experiences, lacking the sense of safety and home they need. The older children are forced to grow up too fast, finding work and taking care of their family in desperate circumstances.

[See their art and photos: What it's like to grow up as a refugee ▶](#)

[Watch videos they made: Leaving home behind ▶](#)

### 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 was necessary in 2015 to meet the needs of all those affected by the crisis, both inside and outside Syria, an increase from the previous year's \$6.5 billion. Both appeals were only around 50 percent funded.

This year, the U.N. predicts \$7.7 billion is required to provide emergency support and stabilization to families throughout the region.

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.

### What can we do to help?

Mercy Corps is currently addressing the urgent needs of nearly 7.7 million people both inside Syria and in neighboring countries. We have the second-largest operation inside Syria, next to the U.N., reaching an estimated 677,000 people every month.

We are delivering food and clean water, improving shelters and providing families with clothing, mattresses and other household essentials. We are helping children cope with trauma and leading constructive activities to nurture their healthy development. And we are focused on helping host communities and refugees work together to mitigate tensions and find solutions to limited resources.

We've worked in the region for 20 years and are committed to helping Syrians and the countries hosting them for as long as it takes.

But as the number of those in need keeps increasing, your support will allow us do even more. Here's how you can make a difference for Syrian refugees:

- **Donate today.** Every single contribution helps us provide even more food, water, shelter and support to Syrian families and families in crisis around the world.
- **Tell your friends.** Share this story or [go to our Facebook page](#) to post the infographic and spread the word about the millions who need us.
- **Start a campaign.** You can turn knowledge into action by [setting up a personal fundraising page](#) and asking your friends and family to contribute to our efforts to help Syrians fleeing the war.
- **Sign a petition.** Tell congress that we must continue to support Syrian refugees. [Add your name to the list](#) to stand in support with refugees.

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