Syria Refugee Crisis – Response Plan

# Overview

The Syria conflict has caused one of the biggest displacement of people in half a century. Over 4 million people have left Syria, while over 7.5 million people are displaced within the country itself. The majority of the refugees are in the neighboring countries, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Although the crisis has been ongoing for almost five years, it was not until over 250,000 refugees started arriving in Europe that the broad international community took notice.

Based on input from NetHope members the following ICT related issues were identified as potential areas of collaboration:

1. Cyber Security Guidance and Support
2. Information Portal for refugees and displaced peoples both in established refugee camps near Syria and those who are arriving in European nations
3. Provision of connectivity access and smartphone charging stations along routes of migration
4. Provision of additional connectivity and charging capabilities in refugee camps in neighboring countries
5. Provision of eLearning opportunities to children and youth in refugee camps

Each of these will be described in more detail below.

# CYber Security Guidance and Support

There is already documented proof that there are cyber-attacks against humanitarian organizations operating in and around Syria. All sides of the conflict are using the full arsenal of cyber tools to get intelligence and humanitarian actors are key sources. Information leaks place refugees in even greater danger, while information leaks about humanitarian operations can add to the already risky humanitarian response.

It is crucial for response organizations whose operational activities aim to support those affected by this crisis; “do no harm” as they share essential information through digital channels. There is a great need to step up their cyber defenses in agile, efficient and targeted ways, to mitigate risks as operations continue and scale up in many regions. At the same time support is needed to put in place stricter information security and privacy policies within and between organizations, empowering humanitarian to implement these guidelines into daily practice. While some non-profits have addressed parts of the problem, there is no comprehensive guidance available towards the humanitarian response community.

NetHope will leverage its network, both within the humanitarian sector, where a number of technical specialists already have extensive long experience in working in conflict areas, and within the private sector, to mobilize a group of cyber security and information privacy experts to quickly put together actionable guidance and policy suggestions that non-profits can start following right away.

Some of the guidance may include suggestions to leverage specific software or hardware components that can enable more secure and protected communication. NetHope will leverage its economies of scale to help obtain these components at low or no cost to its members. But technology is not enough to solve these information security issues, because a number of issues need to be addressed by providing people with guidance on how to operate differently when cyber security threats are high.

This work will no doubt pay dividends in the current crisis but also form as a building block for future data security policy and procedures in the international development sector.

## Approach

An initial group of experts has been identified and through them an extended group of experts will be brought in on a no-cost basis to provide expertise and guidance. The work of this group will be led by David Goodman, CIO in residence at NetHope. He will be supported by a program facilitator either funded or seconded by private sector partners. They will be supported by a technical writer and NetHope’s communication team that will focus on delivering the guidance and policy drafts to NetHope’s members.

## Deliverables

The following set of deliverables are associated with this part of the response:

* Cyber Security rapid assessment for the crisis response
* Cyber Security guidance for devices used in the field
* Cyber Security guidance for communication channels used in the field
* Cyber Security guidance for use of social media in the field
* Information Security and Privacy guidance for those collecting beneficiary data
* Information Security and Privacy guidance for sharing information about humanitarian operations

# Information Portal for Refugees

One of the most important things refugees, both those in camps in neighboring countries, as well as those who are on the move, trying to get to a new country, seek is information. Information about:

* Routes from their current location to their country of destination
* Information about locations providing support to refugees along their route
	+ Locations to seek medical assistance
	+ Locations to seek shelter
	+ Locations to recharge phones
	+ Locations to get further information
* Information about acceptance of refugees into the country they are planning to go to
* Information about their loved ones
* Information about the situation back in their former place of residence

Today, this kind of information either does not exist, is scattered all over the Internet, or is in a language that the refugees do not speak well.

## Approach

NetHope, being a consortium of non-profit member organizations, with a footprint across all of the countries affected, both in the Middle East and in Europe, is uniquely positioned to facilitate the creation of an information portal targeted at the refugees. Through its partnerships across the humanitarian and private sectors, it can bring together those actors that are required to get valuable information sharing up and running in short time.

NetHope would mobilize its private sector partners including content and context specific information security and privacy experts, to help establish the information infrastructure required to host such a portal that provides information to beneficiaries in secure ways. Volunteers from private sector partners would be mobilized to build and manage the technical infrastructure required to deal with the load and the security issues of running such a portal and provide the necessary agile management for potential information security and privacy breeches if they arise. Leveraging expertise from our private sector partners, the mobile data usage for refugees seeking information can be substantially reduced, saving them large amounts of money they currently pay for overprized mobile data on the black market.

NetHope would mobilize its member organizations to create an information model for the portal, ensuring the standardization of information provision across multiple countries.

NetHope would mobilize its member organization’s country offices in the countries affected by the refugee situation to create country level groups that would be responsible for collection and provision of information relating to that particular country. These local groups would work in close collaboration with government agencies in the countries, through their existing relationships with the government.

NetHope would mobilize its private sector partners and members to promote the refugee information portal to refugees both in neighboring countries as well as in Europe.

UNHCR and NetHope have identified the need for closer collaboration between UNHCR and NetHope members in the area of crisis informatics. UNHCR’s crisis informatics team is being spread thin trying to deal, not only with the Syrian Refugee crisis, but numerous other refugee situations worldwide.

To deal with this, NetHope will recruit and second six information management consultants, four of which will be deployed into neighboring countries and two which will be deployed to Geneva to support UNHCR at the headquarter level.

The information management consultants will serve a dual purpose. First they will provide additional geospatial and information management capacity into the UNHCR information management team in each location. Secondly they will act as the link between NetHope member organizations in each location and the UNHCR; enabling increased, yet secure, information sharing among the response organizations in each location.

The effort is managed by NetHope’s HQ crisis informatics team (Lauren Bateman as project manager), leveraging the two data analysts in the team to create operation wide analysis and visualization. The HQ team will in turn will leverage crisis informatics digital volunteer groups to scale up the crisis informatics efforts across the entire operation, similar to the work done during the Ebola response.

## Deliverables

The following set of deliverables are associated with this part of the response:

* Information Portal
	+ Scalable enough to handle millions of refugees
	+ Mobile enabled
* Country level curators that are responsible of keeping information up to date
* Global level situation information provided by reliable and credible sources
* Better information sharing among key response organizations, both internally and with the affected community

# Provision of connectivity access and smartphone charging stations along routes of migration

NetHope members operating in countries that are along the route of travel for the refugees reported that one of the key things refugees seek beyond food, shelter, and medical assistance is access to information and opportunities to recharge their smartphones, which are invaluable tools for them to plan their route and seek information about where help is being provided.

NetHope members raised the idea of NetHope providing a blueprint for how to provide simple safe locations and connection points for internet access and charging stations at the various facilities that NetHope member organizations and other response organizations have set up in these countries. Particular focus should be on how to provide these services in rural areas, where refugees are often traveling by foot.

## Approach

NetHope will establish a rapid working group that within 10 days will come up with a simple, replicable model/kit for providing internet access and smartphone charging in rural areas. This kit will be designed to leverage either existing ISP connectivity or 3G/4G connectivity. It will also have options for providing the charging through solar power and/or generators.

NetHope will work with its member organizations operating along the refugee route, in particular those helping refugees in rural areas, to identify the number of and location of positions where this kind of kit can be leveraged.

NetHope will seek support from private sector partners inside and outside the affected countries to either donate in-kind or funding for establishing the kits needed.

NetHope will seek support from its private sector partners, and their customer/partner networks in the countries where these kits will be set up, to help with the installation and setup of kits in the locations identified.

NetHope will work with its member organizations and will leverage its emergency response roster to coordinate the setup and installation of kits in countries where little private sector support can be achieved to set up kits.

## Deliverables

The following set of deliverables are associated with this part of the response:

* 50+ kits providing connectivity and charging across migration route in Europe
* Teams of volunteers and responders setting up these kits in refugee facilities across Europe
* Bandwidth and electricity provision for 6-9 months

# Provision of additional connectivity and charging capabilities in refugee camps in neighboring countries

The large concentration of refugees in some of the refugee camps in the neighboring countries are limiting the ability of humanitarian organizations and refugees to connect. Connectivity in turn provides better operational planning and response, better communication with the refugee community, while also enabling additional implementation mechanisms for sectors such as education that can then leverage eLearning (see next section for details on that).

## Approach

The problem at this stage is that the situation varies greatly between countries and camps. To address this, it is suggested that this part of the response starts with a field based assessment in the three key countries where refugees are (Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan). The results of this field assessment will be leveraged to create more detailed plans for how to address these issues.

An ICT assessment team, made up of experts from NetHope member organizations and private sector partners, will be deployed to the three countries, where they will meet with response organizations, government representatives, ISPs, and mobile operators to gain a clear overview of the situation. Each country will be visited for 7 days, with the entire assessment effort taking 3 weeks in the field and 1 week to complete all reporting and further response planning.

## Deliverables

The following set of deliverables are associated with this part of the response:

* Assessment report on the charging and connectivity situation in three key neighboring countries to Syria
* Detailed response plan of how to improve charging and connectivity situation

# Provision of eLearning opportunities to children and youth Refugees

Over a million children are no longer going to school. In many of the neighboring countries, refugees are not staying in camps, but are “urban refugees” living within the local population. Providing new and innovative ways to provide these children and youth with opportunities for learning is crucial.

## Approach

NetHope will mobilize its private sector partners to help identify and provide eLearning solutions that can be deployed in the austere environments that child and youth refugees are living in.

NetHope will mobilize its members organizations involved in the education cluster and provide them with access to the eLearning platforms that the private sector has helped identify and provide.

## Deliverables

The following set of deliverables are associated with this part of the response:

* eLearning platform free of use for NetHope member organizations working on education of children and youth
* Training in the use of eLearning platform for NetHope member organizations