
Closing Gaps in the Delivery of Aid to Syrian Armenians

ANCA policy recommendations for closing gaps in the delivery of U.S. and international aid that have left at-risk Syrian Armenian populations - in Syria, Lebanon, and Armenia - largely outside the stream of global humanitarian assistance.

Background on the Syrian Armenian Community

The Armenian community of Syria, a population with ancient roots, is comprised in large part of the descendants of survivors of the Armenian Genocide. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians and other Christians fleeing this crime - exiled from their homeland and abandoned by much of the Western world - found safe haven among the Syrian people. Their experience in Syria over the past century stands as a powerful example of tolerance, multicultural understanding, and cross-faith co-existence.

With this current crisis, however, they are being victimized for a second time. Armenians and other vulnerable civilian populations have been caught between warring sides in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere in the Middle East.

These conflicts have created humanitarian crises for Armenian communities across the region.

Within Syria, much of the historic Armenian community has been destroyed, with residential neighborhoods being bombed, churches desecrated, and individuals killed or kidnapped. Those that remain are working to save their community and serve the basic humanitarian needs of the most needy among them.

Troubling examples of anti-Armenian violence by ISIS extremists, supported by the Turkish military, include:

- In September of 2014, the Armenian Genocide Memorial - an international center of remembrance - was bombed by ISIS forces, operating with the support of the Turkish military.
- In March of 2014, the historic town of Kessab - one of the very few indigenous Western Armenian populations to have survived the Armenian Genocide - was attacked and depopulated by ISIS forces supported by the Turkish military.

The same international community that failed to justly resolve (or even in many cases to properly recognize) the Armenian Genocide - in a manner that would have allowed the Armenian survivors of this unpunished atrocity a rightful return to their homeland - now has an opportunity to help provide their at-risk grandchildren in Syria with the option of a secure future within the Republic of Armenia.

ANCA Policy Recommendations:

The ANCA calls on the Department of State and USAID in consultation with our nation's international partners - to investigate, identify, and eliminate gaps in the delivery of U.S. and international assistance to Syrian Armenians and other at-risk populations.

The ANCA requests:

In Syria: The ANCA asks that the US Government investigate delivery gaps in aid to Armenian and other at-risk groups in Syria, with a special focus on Aleppo, and develop - in coordination with international organizations and NGOs - partnerships, policies and practices to help ensure that assistance reaches these populations.

In Armenia: The ANCA requests that Armenia receive a level of U.S. and international aid at the very least on par with the per capita aid that Jordan and Lebanon receive per refugee. Our hope is for this short-term transitional aid to help those most at-risk to become self-sufficient in their homeland. The ANCA specifically ask that the U.S. Government - either directly or through international organizations or NGOs - target substantial aid to the following areas:

- Rental subsidies
- Integration services – job training and business orientations
- Health care – especially aid for procedures that require hospital care

In Lebanon: The ANCA requests that the US Government work to provide housing vouchers to Syrian Armenians in Lebanon, since this is their greatest need and it is not currently being met by other sources of international assistance.

On a broader level, in order to ensure the safety and security of the vulnerable Armenian population in Syria, the ANCA calls on the U.S government and the entire international community to leverage their political influence to demand a stop to attacks on civilians, including those by extremist groups backed by Turkey, and the restriction of military operations to non-residential areas.

Specific Challenges regarding US Assistance to Syrian Armenians:

In Syria:

Within Syria, due to a combination of geographic, security, cultural, political, logistical, military, and other factors, Armenian communities, particularly in the Aleppo region, have had difficulty receiving aid.

Based on on-the-ground reports from Armenian community leaders, current aid-delivery models, while channeling generous American and global support that meets many humanitarian needs across Syria, do not, as a practical matter, reach many of the country's most vulnerable populations. As a result, over the course of the past several years, and despite our government's allocation of several billions dollars of assistance, Armenians - an innocent civilian population caught in the crossfire of enemy combatants - have largely been forced to fend for themselves, with the humanitarian help of Armenians from the United States and around the world.

The main Armenian neighborhoods in Aleppo are Suleimaniyeh, Meydan, and Azizeyeh. It is the ANCA's understanding that, outside the assistance distributed through the Red Crescent, the Armenian community in Aleppo is not receiving any appreciable assistance from international institutions such as the United Nations World Food Program. Moreover, the Red Crescent provides aid to Aleppo usually only once every two months and sometimes once a month. It is our understanding that the Red Crescent provides food, medicine, blankets and tents.

The Armenian community relies, therefore, heavily on Armenian organizations for humanitarian assistance. For instance, the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), an humanitarian NGO which was established in the United States over 100 years ago, has been providing meals through its affiliates in Syria two times a week. They used to be able to provide meals three times a week, but because of bombings have had their assistance hampered.

The Emergency Relief and Recovery Body of Syrian Armenians (ERRBSA), a coalition of international Armenian NGOs, is providing 3,500 vulnerable Aleppo families with \$100,000 a month in food, medicine and other aid. Over 1,200 Syrian Armenian dwellings have been destroyed in Aleppo. ERRBSA is providing free housing to 300 homeless Syrian Armenian families. From 2012-2015, ERRBSA also provided \$500,000 in aid to Armenian schools in Syria.

It appears that none of the Armenian NGOs providing crucial assistance to the vulnerable communities in Aleppo have received any UN assistance. For instance, ARS spent considerable effort to apply for a US grant to provide assistance to Syrian refugees, but was rejected. The complicated funding process is overwhelming for such a small organization, which relies primarily on volunteers.

There are several Armenian families who want to flee Aleppo, but do not have the means. If Aleppo falls, all Armenians will face catastrophic consequences. As a religious minority in a sectarian war, where many rebel factions have routinely targeted religious minorities for extermination, slavery, and torture, Armenians would face a far greater risk of being killed and tortured than other Syrians in Aleppo.

Complicating international aid distribution to Armenians in Syria is the history of the genocide against Armenians and their status as a vulnerable minority. As a result, the Armenian community in Syria is particularly reluctant to engage in any acts that may be perceived as political in nature. The attack on Kessab, the destruction of the Armenian Church and Genocide Memorial at Der-Zor, and other acts of anti-Armenian violence only contribute to this fear. Even the simple act of entering a refugee camp or engaging with international relief agencies is often considered dangerous. That is why finding ways to channel international assistance through Armenian NGOs will help address these unique challenges Syrian Armenians face.

ANCA Request: The US Government should investigate delivery gaps in aid to Armenian and other at-risk groups in Syria, with a special focus on Aleppo, and develop - in coordination with international organizations and NGOs - partnerships, policies and practices to help ensure that assistance reaches these populations.

In Armenia:

Armenia has received considerably less U.S. and international assistance, on a per capita basis, than other countries that have received those fleeing the Syria conflict.

The numbers refugees reaching Armenia (approximately 17,000) are, in absolute terms, smaller than those who have reached Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and other states, but Armenia - a landlocked and blockaded country - is both smaller and poorer than each of these countries.

Here is a table of U.S. aid for Syrian refugees (as of 6/25/15), as reported by the State Department and USAID:

<u>Country</u>	<u>U.S. aid since 2012</u>	<u>Refugees</u>	<u>Aid/Refugee</u>	<u>GDP</u>
Turkey	\$291,000,000	1,700,000	\$171	\$822 B
Jordan	\$603,000,000	630,000	\$957	\$33 B
Iraq	\$183,000,000	249,000	\$734	\$229 B
Lebanon	\$869,000,000	1,100,000	\$790	\$44 B
Egypt	\$84,000,000	132,000	\$636	\$272 B

ANCA estimates U.S. aid to Armenia through UNHCR funding to be approximately \$2,450,000 (35% of the estimated \$7,000,000 expended by UNHCR in Armenia since 2012). Given an estimated 13,000 individuals with refugee or refugee-like status and Armenia’s GDP of \$10 billion, the aid translates to approximately \$188

per person, considerably less than nearly all the above countries. The only country receiving less aid per refugee is Turkey, which has a GDP more than 80 times larger than Armenia's.

The Armenian state and society have, within their means, sought to constructively and compassionately absorb those arriving from Syria. The Armenian government has undertaken a broad array of programs, including specialized educational initiatives, support for housing, and health care. Armenia, however, is unable to fully meet the needs of the refugee population. For instance, the Armenian Ministry of Diaspora reports that of the over 2,200 applications for medical assistance from Syrian refugees, Armenia was able to provide medical assistance to only a little over 1,000 of them.

Armenian churches (Apostolic, Catholic, and Evangelical) are also actively engaged in providing relief and transition support, as are a range of Armenian charitable groups, including the Syrian Armenian Relief Fund, the Armenian Relief Society, and the Armenian General Benevolent Union. These organizations are also, however, tasked with providing aid to vulnerable Armenians around the world, including in Armenia, where over 30% of the population lives in poverty.

ANCA Request: Taking into consideration Armenia's relative poverty in comparison to other countries that have received refugees from Syria, the dual illegal blockades imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the growing number of Syrian refugees who are arriving with fewer means, our request is for Armenia to receive a level of U.S. and international aid at the very least on par with the per capita aid that Jordan and Lebanon receive per refugee, in order to help those most at-risk to become self-sufficient.

The ANCA asks that the US Government - either directly or through international organizations or NGOs - target substantial aid for:

- Rental subsidies
- Integration services – job training and business orientations, since many Syrian Armenians are entrepreneurs but lack knowledge about business practices in Armenia
- Health care – especially for procedures that require hospital care

In Lebanon:

As many as 20,000 Syrian Armenians have found refuge in Lebanon where they have cross border connections and shared families. While the Armenian community in Lebanon has provided assistance, the situation is not sustainable and in desperate need of additional financial assistance.

Around 80% of the Syrian Armenians have settled in Bourj Hammoud, one of the poorest and most densely populated neighborhoods in Beirut. Several families are sharing one room apartments together.

They are reportedly not receiving rent subsidies or vouchers, although this is their greatest need. Very few Syrian refugees in Lebanon have received housing vouchers in general, and ANCA has no reliable evidence of any meaningful number of Syrian Armenians receiving such aid in Lebanon.

Rent in Beirut, where the vast majority of Syrian Armenians have support networks and there is greater opportunity to find work, costs around \$500/month. These costs are rising as more and more refugees enter Lebanon.

Armenian charities are providing subsidized education for around 660 Syrian Armenian students. They are not receiving any international assistance to cover these costs.

ANCA Request: The US government work to provide housing vouchers to Syrian Armenians in Lebanon, since this is their greatest need and it is not being met by any international assistance.