



The UNHCR is working against the clock to deliver supplies to Syrian refugees for another winter.

Weather forecasts are predicting a particularly harsh one. Even in a mild winter, the grinding toll of nearly three years of destruction would make life miserable.

The logistical challenge of getting refugees from the deserts to camps is an increasing challenge. Army helicopters now fly food into the border areas that are impossible to reach by truck. Some refugees have left luggage behind, because the priority for the few trucks that manage the terrible road trip is to take people over cargo.

The deserts that mark the border between Syria and Jordan have become a sea of muddy slop. Slanting rain and hail have made the passage of trucks an ordeal. Sometimes the trail is so bad that transport is impossible.

And so Syrian refugees from cities such as Homs, Idlib and Dara'a, as well as rural Damascus, make the crossing on foot. Some slog through in shoes; many cross barefoot and without coats as the chilly weather of winter approaches.

UNHCR Representative to Jordan Andrew Harper says that the organization and its partners are ready in both Za'atri Refugee Camp and in Jordan's cities to provide all that is needed to survive the cold season. Packages of winter clothing, some 600,000 items in total, have been distributed, and a consignment of Toms Shoes will dock in a few days in the southern Jordanian port of Aqaba. 485,000 blankets have been distributed since the camp opened last year.

But just as important are the access roads along which the Jordanian authorities transport refugees who have crossed the border. UNHCR is working to ensure that more than 60 kilometres of roads are repaired or constructed.

"In many ways road construction represents a key protection priority for us," says Harper. "We're working to ensure that the roads are constructed so that people can make it from the border to safer areas."

In Za'atri, refugees are also taking preparations for winter into their own hands. Along the roadside, vendors sell used winter clothing and shoes at bargain prices. People are digging trenches near their caravans and building up rubble and dirt mounds near their tents or caravan homes to protect against the rain.