

Syrian Arab Republic

May 2023

The Syria crisis entered its thirteenth year in March 2023. The UN estimates that **15.3 million** people need humanitarian assistance across the country, a 5 per cent increase from 2022.

The February earthquakes further exacerbated the situation in Syria. An estimated **8.8 million** people in Syria were affected by the earthquakes, and UNHCR has been responding to this additional emergency.

UNHCR also continues to provide protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, returnees, stateless people, and host community members based on identified needs and vulnerabilities.

HIGHLIGHTS

211,000

People affected by the earthquakes have been supported by UNHCR with protection services

183,650

People affected by the earthquakes received core relief items from UNHCR as of end-May

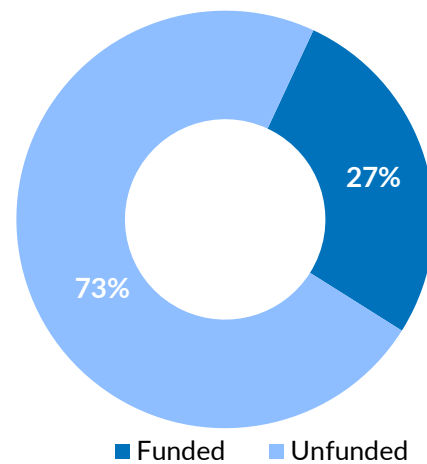
560

People benefitted from entrepreneurship and business trainings as part of UNHCR's **livelihoods** programme as of end-May

FUNDING (AS OF 01 JUNE 2023)

USD 504.3 million

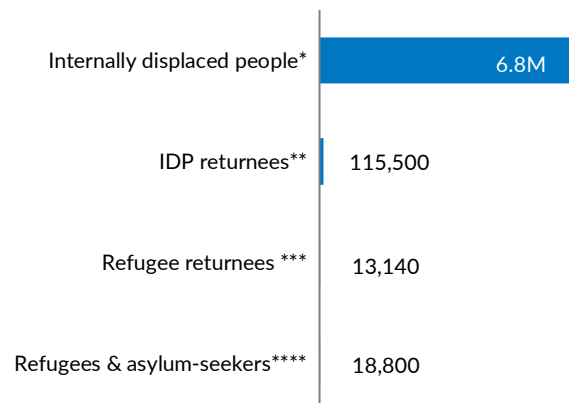
requested for the Syria Operation in 2023



PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DISPLACEMENT IN THE WHOLE OF SYRIA



UNHCR and partners supported the rehabilitation of mid-term collective shelters for people affected by the earthquakes in Aleppo Governorate. ©UNHCR/H. Maarouf



* Source: 2023 HNO

** Source: OCHA, January-December 2022

***Source: UNHCR verified returns in 2023 as of 31 May

**** Source: UNHCR, May 2023

Operational Context

The [2023 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview \(HNO\)](#) estimates that over 15.3 million people need humanitarian assistance in Syria. This is the highest number of people in need since the beginning of the crisis. Syria also has the largest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world with 6.8 million people internally displaced. The 2023 HNO states that humanitarian and economic indicators in the country continue to deteriorate, and many basic services have collapsed. The February earthquakes have further compounded existing needs in a country exacerbated by over 12 years of crisis.

UNHCR supports refugees, IDPs and returnees (refugees and IDPs who have returned to their home areas) by providing assistance to those most in need using a [community-based and area-based approach](#). UNHCR's *community-based approach* focuses on community mobilization and building self-reliance. It aims to reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks by providing services through community-based structures and networks. UNHCR's *area-based approach* entails working with partners to enhance support in geographic areas where the needs are greatest.

In 2023, UNHCR is working with 29 partners including international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national NGOs.

Operational Updates

Earthquake emergency response

A major earthquake of magnitude 7.8 struck south-east Türkiye and northern Syria on 6 February. Another magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck the Türkiye-Syria border on 20 February. The UN estimates that around [8.8 million](#) people in Syria have been affected by the earthquakes. The most affected Governorates are Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Latakia and Tartous. Four months since the earthquakes, UNHCR is transitioning to a longer-term response to address the needs of affected populations and help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods. The earthquake emergency response is gradually being integrated into UNHCR's regular programming.

Key findings from a UN earthquake rapid needs assessment were issued in May and provide an overview of the needs of affected people residing in communities outside of collective shelters. UNHCR was among the agencies that provided the enumerators who carried out the assessment. Respondents estimated that assessed communities

hosted somewhere between 583,000 and 793,000 additional IDPs because of the earthquakes.

As of end-May, there were eight active collective shelters in Aleppo hosting 369 families (over 1,800 people) and 10 collective shelters in Latakia hosting 648 families (around 2,500 individuals).

Protection

UNHCR, in partnership with national NGOs, has so far provided 211,000 protection interventions to people in need of assistance. This includes legal support for civil documentation and housing, land and property issues, mental health and psychosocial support, monitoring, referral and case management, and individual protection assistance to people with disabilities and older people.

In Aleppo, a rapid protection needs assessment in the eight remaining collective shelters was completed by the Protection Sub-national Sector led by UNHCR. The assessment was carried through 42 focal group discussions with the participation of 490 shelter residents. Results highlighted the presence of protection risks and needs in all collective shelters. These include the need for legal assistance due to the loss of civil status documentation; gender-based violence prevention and response activities; child protection needs including the increase in out-of-school children and child labour, incidents of violence against children and forced marriage; widespread psychosocial support needs; the need for assistive devices for the elderly and people with disabilities; and the need to strengthen feedback and complaint mechanisms in collective shelters. The assessment results will inform the prioritization of protection activities in the shelters.

Core relief items

Since the beginning of the emergency, UNHCR has distributed approximately 38,200 core relief item kits (around 546,400 relief items) reaching over 183,650 affected individuals in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Hama and south Idlib Governorates. The distributed items include high-thermal blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets, plastic sheeting, jerry cans, solar lamps, sleeping mats in addition to winter jackets, winter clothing kits, rubber boots and adult diapers.

Shelter

Families who still require shelter support are gradually being relocated to mid-term shelters. UNHCR and partners continue providing support to the affected population in mid-term shelters and in the host community, while aiming to ensure a safe, voluntary and dignified relocation as temporary shelters are closed.

UNHCR and partners have so far rehabilitated seven collective shelters in Aleppo and Latakia Governorates. Rehabilitation works include the installation of gender-segregated WASH facilities and partitions for added hygiene and privacy. In addition, in Latakia Governorate, UNHCR completed the delivery of eight Rubb halls in seven schools acting as collective shelters. The Rubb halls are being used as temporary classrooms for children.



Children attend classes in one of the Rubb halls installed by UNHCR in Latakia Governorate. ©UNHCR/E. Kabbas

Cash assistance

UNHCR is providing emergency cash assistance to people affected by the earthquakes in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama Governorates in line with the recommendations of the Cash Working Group. Disbursements to affected families started in March, and as of end-May, 722 households out of a planned 11,000 households had received their cash entitlements. The eligibility of remaining families is being verified for assistance. Priority is given to people residing in the most affected neighbourhoods by the earthquakes with available buildings safety assessment data, while avoiding duplication of assistance with other humanitarian actors.

Regular response



Protection

- In line with its community-based protection approach, as of end-May, UNHCR was supporting 114 [community/satellite centres](#) and 108 mobile units across the country. UNHCR also engaged over 2,400 community outreach volunteers in all 14 Governorates.
- A new UNHCR community centre was opened in Abtin, rural Aleppo Governorate, an area highly affected by the crisis and the recent earthquakes. The centre replaced the one in Hader sub-district which was severely damaged during the earthquakes. In total, 29 out of 31 community

centres in Aleppo Governorate are now functional while two remain closed due to damage sustained in the earthquakes.

- Fifty additional outreach volunteers were recently recruited in Latakia Governorate to enhance the response to people affected by the earthquakes. The outreach volunteers will help provide information to affected communities and referrals to services.
- In Rural Damascus, 10 community-led initiatives were approved this month. The initiatives will benefit around 21,500 refugees, IDPs and returnees across different areas of Rural Damascus Governorate. The initiatives include repairing a school sidewalk and minor repairs to a playground for children. In Tartous and Latakia Governorates, nine community-led initiatives were approved. The initiatives aim to support 2,000 people and include improving access to water for vulnerable communities and facilitating access to WASH facilities for 200 students.
- In Damascus, a mobile unit which operates from the Al-Qutaifeh community centre conducted three focus group discussions with 45 women and children who work in factories in Al-Dhmail, Helleh, and Al-Qutaifeh. The sessions introduced the services offered at the community centre and referred women to relevant service providers. As a result of this outreach, some of the attendees (14%) visited the community centre to benefit from available services, particularly related to education support.



Core relief items

- In May, UNHCR provided core relief items to 614 vulnerable Syrian IDP and returnee families (3,279 individuals) in Hama, Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqqa, Deir-ez-Zor and Idleb Governorates (this excludes the support provided as part of the earthquake emergency response). In total this year, 23,210 families (almost 116,000 individuals) have received core relief items through UNHCR's regular programme.



Shelter

- So far this year, UNHCR has provided and installed 2,528 solar streetlights in underserved communities in six governorates (Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Ar-Raqqqa, Latakia, As-Sweida and Quneitra) to enhance the protection of those living there.



Education

- UNHCR is contributing to inter-agency efforts to support Syrian students traveling to take their [national exams](#) which are due to start on 7 June. UNHCR will provide the students residing at the

accommodation centres with remedial educational sessions, psychosocial support and legal support services. The legal support will help students access documentation such as IDs which are required to sit exams. In addition, UNHCR's partner will support transportation for more than 11,000 students and supervisors in Ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Rural Damascus and Idlib Governorates. This includes transporting students from crossing points/borders to accommodation centres and providing transportation from the accommodation centres to the exam centres and civil registries.



Livelihoods

- In May, UNHCR and partners completed entrepreneurship and business training for 463 people in Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama, Al-Hasakeh, Idlib, As-Sweida, Dar'a, Quneitra, Latakia, Tartous, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor Governorates. In total this year, over 560 people have so far benefited from these trainings. UNHCR plans to support around 2,000 people through trainings which are prerequisite to receive grants to start small businesses. So far, 20 small business projects have been approved and selected people received relevant tools and equipment in Aleppo and Hama Governorates.
- In Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, UNHCR supported 30 returnee farmers with agricultural inputs including seeds and fertilizers.



In May, the UNHCR Representative and the Ambassador of Switzerland visited UNHCR projects in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, north-east Syria, including farmers who had received agricultural inputs. ©UNHCR



Refugee Response

- **Legal developments:** On 2 April 2023, the Syrian Government issued Law No. 4/2023 amending Law No. 2/2014 related to the entry, exit, residency of Arabs and Foreigners in Syria. The new law, in the

part relevant to asylum-seekers and refugees, introduces new provisions including the authority of the Government to waive the passport requirement for "persons holding a refugee card in the Syrian Arab Republic but not holding a passport or holding an expired passport that could not be renewed"; as well as a permanent exemption for refugees and their family members from residency fees. This is a significant development and a result of continued UNHCR advocacy to facilitate residency procedures and to enhance the protection space for refugees and asylum-seekers in the country. UNHCR will follow up on the implementation of the new law and is developing a brochure to inform refugees and asylum-seekers of the new criteria to obtain residency.

- **Education:** In May, UNHCR organized a graduation ceremony for DAFI scholarship students at a community centre in Latakia city. The DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship programme offers qualified refugee students the possibility to earn a university degree. Also in May, as part of DAFI scholarship programme, UNHCR provided cash assistance to 83 out of 85 DAFI students who received a grant of USD 300. Twenty-eight newly enrolled students also received an additional USD 500 to help cover university registration fees.
- **Registration:** As of end-May, some 18,800 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered with UNHCR. The majority of the registered refugees are from Iraq and reside primarily in urban areas in Damascus, Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Homs, Tartous and Latakia Governorates. Meanwhile, in May, UNHCR renewed identification cards for more than 1,270 refugees. The identification cards will protect against *refoulement*, ensure access to basic rights and services, and facilitate freedom of movement.
- **Refugee Status Determination (RSD):** In May, 12 asylum-seeking families comprising 18 individuals were interviewed to determine if they are refugees. During the same period, eight families comprising 12 individuals were recognized as refugees, ensuring that they could be protected from *refoulement* and detention due to irregular stay and could access basic services. UNHCR also provided counselling on the RSD process and individual cases through its hotline. Inquiries received during May were primarily related to the status of individual cases and requests for cash assistance.



Return

- In May, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of 3,076 individual refugees from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.¹ This brought the total number of refugee returnees verified or monitored by UNHCR in 2023 to 13,139 individuals. The long-term impact of the February earthquakes on the overall return trend in 2023 remains to be seen. In total between 2016 and May 2023, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of some 366,910 individual refugees.²

UNHCR co-led inter-agency sector updates

- UNHCR leads the inter-agency Protection and Shelter and Non-Food Item (SNFI) Sectors as part of the Syria and Whole of Syria inter-agency response.
- Since the beginning of the earthquake emergency, partners in the Protection Sector have carried out over 870,400 protection interventions to support people affected by the earthquakes. Protection partners distributed more than 170,150 dignity kits (containing for example soap and sanitary pads). Over 270,700 people attended awareness-raising sessions on protection concerns, 144,180 people benefitted from psychosocial support sessions, and 92,800 people attended psychological first aid sessions. Legal services, including legal counselling, awareness, and legal interventions/assistance have been provided to more than 36,750 people.
- Since the onset of the earthquake response, SNFI Sector partners have supported more than 276,200 individuals with emergency relief items in different collective shelters and in hosting arrangements, and 169,000 individuals with shelter assistance.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

- [Whole of Syria Earthquake Emergency Response](#) (April 2023)
- [Syria Earthquake Response: Protection Sector Update - Flash Update #15](#) (11 May 2023)
- [Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Factsheet](#) (May 2023)
- [Area-based Programming and Humanitarian Early Recovery Factsheet](#) (December 2022)
- [Eighth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria](#) (May 2023)
- [2022-2023 Regional Winterization Programme - Final Report](#) (May 2023)

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LINKS: [UNHCR Global Focus](#) | [UNHCR Syria Data Portal](#) | [UNHCR Syria Website](#) | [UNHCR Syria Twitter \(@UNHCRinSYRIA\)](#) | [UNHCR Syria Facebook](#)

¹ Provisional figures pending further verification.

² The numbers reported are only those verified or monitored by UNHCR and do not reflect the entire number of returns, which may be significantly higher.