Winterization in Syria
October 2022

This will be the 12th consecutive winter in displacement for many people in Syria. They have continued to face increased hardships particularly food insecurity, increased cost of living and loss of employment opportunities due to the economic situation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the 2022 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, the overall number of people in need of core relief items increased in 2022 by 5 per cent to 4.9 million. Due to the deteriorated economy and severe inflation, 67 per cent of the population cannot afford essential items available in the market.

UNHCR plans to support people in dire need with winterization assistance. The planned interventions are in the form of cash assistance and in-kind assistance, including tents, winter clothes, and blankets, to protect people from harsh weather conditions.

3.2 million people are in urgent need of winter assistance in Syria

19,000 tents needed to protect people living in camps from harsh winter

90% of the population in Syria lives below the poverty line

Operational context

The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. In 2022, 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance, an increase of 1.2 million from 2021. The rapid rise in needs is driven by a deepening economic crisis, climatic shocks, ongoing displacement, and recurring hostilities. Additionally, much of the country’s public infrastructure and services have been damaged or destroyed. Chronic electricity and fuel shortages further undermine the functionality of essential services, livelihoods, and delivery of assistance. There are major gaps in the provision of and access to essential basic services.

Under the circumstances, people are struggling to afford basic items, and it is estimated that 3.2 million people across the country are in urgent need of winter assistance to prepare for the harsh weather conditions in winter.

****** Estimated by Shelter and Non-food item Sectors
UNHCR Syria’s winterization interventions

1. Winter cash assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers

Winter cash assistance is a seasonal unconditional multi-purpose cash grant. The grant targets refugees and asylum-seekers individually registered with UNHCR Syria, a total of approximately 7,000 households. The aim of the winterization grant is to help refugee and asylum-seeker families to meet increased expenditures and needs during the harsh winter period.

In previous years, UNHCR conducted a market survey of winter items (clothing and fuel/gas) to understand the financial needs of beneficiaries and determine the amount of the cash assistance. However, in 2022, due to budgetary constraints, UNHCR Syria has had to decide the assistance rate based on the budget available. As a result, assistance in 2022 will be significantly lower than in 2021 (an overall reduction of over 50%).

Implementation will start in November 2022, and the assistance will be primarily provided through cash at the counter in bank branches and its subcontracted supplier to all eligible refugee and asylum-seeker families.

2. Non-food item assistance

Besides regular core relief items, such as plastic sheets, mattresses, sleeping mats, and kitchen sets, UNHCR distributes supplementary seasonal items to provide additional protection against extreme and life-threatening weather conditions.

UNHCR’s winter assistance targets the most vulnerable people, including those recently displaced, newly returned, living in hard-to-reach or newly accessible areas, or in sub-standard shelters as well as persons with specific needs. The winter non-food items (NFIs) include extra high thermal blankets, sleeping bags, waterproof floor covers, extra-plastic sheeting, portable heaters, rubber boots and winter jackets.
UNHCR’s 2021-2022 winterization NFI programme assisted 139,600 Syrian families (close to 640,000 people) in 14 governorates. Some 1,400 asylum-seeker families (around 5,000 people) also benefited from additional winter assistance.

New displacement, surging economic inflation, fluctuating currency, limited livelihood opportunities, and unpredictable weather patterns have diminished people’s purchasing power and increased their vulnerability. Therefore, for this year’s winterization NFI programme (September 2022-March 2023), UNHCR is planning to support over 168,500 vulnerable families (around 842,500 people). This represents approximately a 20 per cent increase from 2021.

3. Shelter assistance
Access to adequate housing is a basic human right, and shelters are vital to protect the well-being of displaced people, maintain their dignity, and reduce protection risks, particularly for women and girls. As part of its regular programme to protect people in need, UNHCR Syria provides family tents for those newly displaced or living in camps and conducts minor repairs to damaged houses for returnees.

In north-east Syria, UNHCR provides family tents in camps, and some 33,000 families (approximately 165,000 people) are living in tents while the rest are in collective centres or host communities. The weather conditions in north-east Syria are harsh with temperatures dropping to sub-zero degrees during the winter and rising over 40 degrees in summer. Given the challenging weather conditions, the tents tend to be damaged more quickly and need to be replaced in less than one year.

However, during the last nine months, UNHCR has been able to replace only one-third of the total number of tents that require replacement due to disruptions in the global supply chain and declining financial resources. Thousands of displaced families living in damaged tents face significant risks to their health and well-being in extreme weather conditions.

To respond to the urgent need for tents in the north-east, UNHCR is planning to distribute 19,000 tents benefitting approximately 95,000 people during the coming winter.

After the snowstorm in Al-Hasakeh in 2022, people pitched the tent newly received from UNHCR.
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Challenges

The operational environment in Syria poses various challenges to UNHCR’s activities, particularly winterization assistance. These challenges have caused delays in assistance delivery and impacted people’s quality of life:

- **Lack of funding:** Due to the challenging global context and multiple competing emergencies, funding from the international community to the Syria operation decreased in 2022. The current funding level (as of 18 October) is 32 per cent against the requirement of USD 465 million. UNHCR will be unable to respond to urgent needs this winter unless additional funding is urgently received.

- **High prices of items:** The depreciation of the Syrian currency, global inflation and rising prices of oil and other commodities drastically increased the production and procurement costs of the required winter assistance items.

- **Economic coercive measures:** Under the current measures, only a limited number of containers can be imported to Syria making the delivery of goods unpredictable and often resulting in delays.

- **Administrative delays:** Delays in obtaining the required administrative and security approvals by the relevant authorities sometimes hinders the delivery of assistance.

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**USEFUL DOCUMENTS**
UNHCR 2021-2022 Regional Winterization Programme – Final Report
UNHCR Regional Winterization Assistance Plan 2022-2023

**LINKS**
UNHCR Global Focus – Syrian Arab Republic
UNHCR Syria Data Portal
UNHCR Syria Website
UNHCR Syria (@UNHCRinSYRIA) / Twitter
UNHCR Syria | Facebook
Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022
Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2022

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