North-west Syria

January-March 2023

The earthquakes have worsened a long-standing humanitarian crisis in north-west Syria, where **2.7 million** people were already displaced and living in temporary sites, and **4.1 million** people are reliant on humanitarian assistance.

UNHCR and its partners have scaled up the provision of core relief items and protection services to support those affected by the earthquakes. UNHCR has also strengthened the coordination of all three clusters under its responsibility.

EARTHQUAKE ASSISTANCE

74,500 Individuals supported with protection services

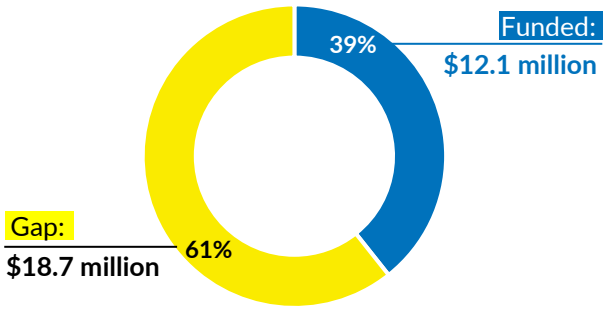
48,665 Individuals supported with core relief item kits

37,045 Individuals supported with emergency shelter

FUNDING AS OF 12 APRIL

USD 30.8 million

requested for the cross-border operation



UNHCR Protection team visits families affected by the earthquakes in Harim, Idleb. Photo: ©UNHCR/P. Gomes

POPULATION OF CONCERN

2.7 million

internally displaced people*

**Source: CCCM Cluster March 2023*

CROSS-BORDER OPERATION OBJECTIVES	Support the coordination of the cross-border humanitarian response through the Cluster system	Identify protection risks and assistance needs and inform the overall response	Provide protection services and emergency assistance with core relief items and shelter solutions	Build capacity of local humanitarian organizations	Fill critical gaps in meeting the basic needs of IDPs where required and feasible

Update On Achievements

Operational Context

After more than 12 years of conflict, humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate in north-west Syria due to ongoing hostilities, a worsening economic crisis, and the aftermath of devastating earthquakes in February 2023. Some 4.1 million people, of which an estimated 2.7 million are internally displaced (IDPs), continue to be in need of critical lifesaving assistance. Sites that were established as emergency, last-resort solutions still host 1.8 million IDPs; around 80% are women and children and particularly vulnerable to many risks, including gender-based violence.

The current UN Security Council Resolution on cross-border aid operations into north-west Syria is set to expire on 10 July 2023. While the UN and partners have prepared a continuity plan, the gap created by a potential non-renewal scenario is concerning and would rapidly increase human suffering. Following the earthquakes, on 13 February UN Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the decision by the Syrian President to open two additional border crossing points (Bab Al-Salam and Al Ra'ee) from Türkiye to north-west Syria for an initial period of three months to facilitate the immediate scale up of humanitarian aid to those affected by the earthquake. The Government of Syria has also accepted that UN staff can cross into north-west Syria from Gaziantep, allowing interagency and sectoral missions as well as a scale up of UNHCR operations and Cluster leadership.

Following the earthquakes, UNHCR immediately released pre-positioned relief items and has been scaling up its response. UNHCR has also undertaken multiple missions inside north-west Syria to better understand the operating environment and strengthen its operation. UNHCR is leading the coordination of three clusters – Shelter/NFI, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) and Protection.

Shamseh and her family were first displaced by the conflict three years ago. When the earthquake hit her host town of Jandairis, she, her husband and four children found safety in Afrin, Aleppo and received emergency shelter support from UNHCR.
Photo: ©UNHCR/P. Gomes

Key Developments

Protection

UNHCR's protection partners have been conducting protection interventions for conflict-affected persons in north-west Syria and, from February, also for earthquake-affected persons.

In January, close to **4,700** individuals were supported with community-based protection interventions, such as awareness raising and psychosocial support sessions, case identification and referrals to basic services, as well as legal assistance and information related to civil status documentation.

UNHCR team visits areas affected by the earthquakes in Jirs-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Photo: ©UNHCR/P. Gomes

Following the 6 February earthquakes, UNHCR partners continued to conduct outreach activities and work in community centres, communal shelters and through mobile teams. Between February and March, UNHCR's partners have reached more than **74,500** individuals with protection interventions, including psychological first aid, psychosocial support, awareness-raising activities on gender-based violence prevention, case management and referrals to basic and specialized services, child protection activities, and legal counselling and awareness-raising activities on civil status documentation and housing land and property rights.

Protection Cluster

In February, the Protection Cluster conducted a rapid protection assessment following the earthquakes, which found that around 27% of key informants interviewed reported housing land and property (HLP) related issues in their communities, including shelter sharing in overcrowded conditions and evictions. To address this concern, the HLP Working Group under the Protection Cluster has developed an eviction monitoring tool which will identify trends and patterns, including possible rights violations, identify most affected and exposed population groups and monitor access to multisectoral services. The tool aims at strengthening community-based mechanisms for evictions mitigation and guarantee safeguards of existing legal documents.

The Cluster also launched a rapid needs assessment in the IDP sites most affected by the March floods to better understand protection risks and needs. Pregnant and lactating women, and people with chronic illnesses have been identified as the most affected vulnerable groups. Loss of property, shelter sharing in overcrowded conditions, and lack of access to basic services were indicated as the most relevant protection issues and needs. The Protection Cluster is working with partners to improve identification and referral mechanisms for missing persons.

Between 6 February and 27 March, Protection Cluster partners provided psychosocial support and psychological first aid services to more than 59,000 individuals, awareness sessions for some 46,000 individuals, legal assistance to over 5,000 individuals, case management and referral for close to 4,000 individuals.

Additional information on the UNHCR-led Protection Cluster response in north-west Syria is available online.

Shelter and Core relief items

So far in 2023, UNHCR has sent **140 trucks** loaded with humanitarian assistance across three crossing points:

Crossing point	CRI Kits	Tents	Rubb halls*	RHUs**
Al Ra'ee	1,250			
Bab Al-Hawa	7,750	6,500	8	850
Bab Al-Salam	4,000	3,200		150
	13,000	**9,700**	**8**	**1,000**

** Large tent* *** Refugee Housing Unit*

Thanks to stock already prepositioned in north-west Syria and the expansion of its delivery assistance following the earthquake, UNHCR has managed to quickly distribute CRI kits and tents to people in need. Between 6 February and 26 March, UNHCR partners were able to support more than 37,000 individuals with 7,409 tents and close to 48,700 individuals with 9,733 CRI kits. Additional deliveries of assistance is in the pipeline. The distribution of assistance is fully coordinated with the Shelter/NFI Cluster.

Shelter/NFI Cluster

In January, the Shelter/NFI Cluster coordinated the winterization response and continued advocacy efforts for dignified shelter and living conditions in IDP sites. The Cluster estimated that extremely cold and unpredictable winters in north-west Syria caused acute suffering for two million people living without adequate shelter. In January, over **136,700** individuals received NFI assistance, mainly in the form of seasonal assistance such as distribution of fuel and winterized NFI kits. Close to **6,000** individuals were reached with shelter interventions, including dignified shelters and infrastructure improvements in IDP sites.

Following the earthquakes, the already dire shelter situation deteriorated further. Cluster partners have been responding with emergency shelter and NFIs in affected communities, newly established reception and collective centers, and existing IDP sites. As of 27 March, Shelter/NFI Cluster members have distributed NFI kits to over **191,500** individuals and tents to over **91,800** individuals. Around 16,770 individuals have moreover been reached with the provision of emergency shelter kits. Shelter/NFI Cluster partners faced challenges following the earthquakes including rapid prices increases for shelter items, difficulties in procuring quality items from the local markets, and restrictions on procurement and transshipment of prefabricated shelters and related construction materials into north-west Syria.

Following the conclusion of the immediate earthquake response, the Shelter/NFI Cluster will now prioritize and advocate for more resources for dignified shelter, and rehabilitation and repair assistance of partially damaged buildings, to de-congest overcrowded reception centres and camps. Estimations indicate that more than 855,000 individuals have damaged houses and that some 265,000 individuals are not able to return to their damaged homes need dignified shelter. However, a comprehensive damage assessment is still required to better understand recovery needs.

Additional information on the UNHCR-led Shelter/NFI Cluster response in north-west Syria is available online.

Camp Coordination and Camp Management

Prior to the earthquake, the Cluster had recorded 1,441 IDP sites hosting some 1.8 million individuals, of which 80% were women and children, across north-west Syria. During the month of January, the CCCM Cluster tracked more than 4,500 displacements and some 400 spontaneous IDP returnee movements. There were also many fire related incidents due to lack of access to safe fuel sources and properly installed stoves, forcing people to burn hazardous material for survival during winter.

In the month of February alone, CCCM Cluster tracked more than **108,900 displacements**[1], of which almost all were because of the devastating earthquake. By way of comparison, the total number of displacements for the entire year 2022, was 126,000. Many of the displaced families report fears of returning home, even when damage to their homes have been repaired. At the same time, the CCCM Cluster tracked more than 17,500 IDPs returning to their place of origin within north-west Syria.

Intense rainfall in late March led to in further deteriorating conditions in informal sites hosting families displaced both prior to and earthquake. According to the CCCM Cluster, at least 52 IDP sites across north-west Syria were affected, with floods destroying or damaging more than 2,100 tents sheltering some 10,500 IDPs.

The CCCM Cluster is leading the process of drafting a roadmap for the response in reception and collective centres established in response to the earthquakes. In close collaboration with other clusters, the CCCM Cluster has created a Multisector Reception and Collective Centre Indicator Checklist to guide a coordinated humanitarian response in these centres. Findings from assessments carried out in 109 sites show that nine sites have severe service gap. These sites are all located in Aleppo governorate and of these nine, six can be found in Jandairis sub-district. The rapid establishment and closure of reception and collective centres is challenging data collection.

Additional information on the UNHCR-led CCCM Cluster response in north-west Syria is available online.

Donors

UNHCR is grateful to the donors who have contributed to its cross-border operation for north-west Syria.

German humanitarian assistance
From the People of Japan
United Nations CERF

For more information, please contact the UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau in Amman, Jordan at: MENAreporting@unhcr.org

[1] *This figure reflects the number of displacement and IDP returnee movements, noting that individuals may have been exposed to multiple displacement, and that the reasons for moving may vary.*