SEVERE WINTER WEATHER RESPONSE IN NORTH-WEST SYRIA

FLASH UPDATE #2

3 February 2022

This update provides a summary of the response to the recent severe winter weather in north-west Syria (NWS) by UNHCR and the UNHCR co-led Clusters of Protection, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) and Shelter/Non-Food Items (SNFI).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Heavy snowfall and snowstorms since 18 January 2022 have affected at least 287 IDP sites in Aleppo and Idleb governorates.
- More than 250,000 people have been impacted, and some 10,000 tents have been destroyed or damaged by the severe winter weather.
- A multi-sectoral response is ongoing, including road repairs to provide access to the affected sites; food, winter clothing, means of heating and shelter rehabilitation assistance are urgently needed.

Heavy snowfall damages tents in IDP sites. Photo: © Maram Foundation

SITUATION OVERVIEW

There are an estimated 2.8 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in NWS. As of December 2021, there were around 1,400 displacement sites in NWS hosting 1.7 million IDPs, according to information collected by the CCCM Cluster. Of this population, 80% are women and children, and almost 46,000 IDPs are reported to be people with specific needs.

While snowfall has subsided, freezing temperatures and heavy storms continue to cause damage to IDP sites. Urgent needs include cash assistance for securing means of heating and other essentials, road repairs to allow access, replacement of destroyed tents, and emergency food rations.

Provision of winter clothing for children remains an urgent priority to alleviate immediate suffering. The provision of heating supplies (diesel and coal) and tarpaulins for tents with damaged roofs were also identified as urgent needs. As the snow begins to melt, the ground level will need to be raised with cement and muddy surfaces stabilized with gravel to mitigate against flooding into the tents. Damage to roads is affecting access and also impacting COVID-19 preparedness and response, with limited access to safe water and hand-washing stations, particularly for IDPs living in camps.

UNHCR RESPONSE

Despite adverse climate conditions, in January 2022 the UNHCR cross-border operation from Turkey was able to trans-ship 5,000 winter core relief item (CRI) kits, 1,200 emergency CRI kits and 4,900 tents to assist more than 10,000 families (50,000 individuals). UNHCR, also through its three active clusters, is closely monitoring the situation on the ground and continuously liaising with partners to identify and address emerging risks and needs. In addition, as part of UNHCR's emergency response to the harsh weather conditions, some 4,000 winter CRI kits and 240 emergency CRI kits were distributed, while 415 new tents were installed, assisting more than 4,600 families (23,300 individuals). Items provided include carpets, mattresses, high thermal blankets, plastic sheeting and hygiene kits. The remaining trans-shipments for 5,800 emergency CRI kits, 10,000 winter CRI kits and 4,900 tents are expected to be implemented in the coming weeks.

In addition to the current response, in 2021, UNHCR supported vulnerable people to prepare for winter through site improvement projects in IDP settlements across NWS. These projects included ground insulation for tents, road gravelling, as well as the construction of drainage and sewage networks with particular attention on stormwater management. Internal drainage systems for flood mitigation were also installed in at-risk areas. In total, 23,520 tent insulations were completed, benefitting close to 120,000 people in 193 IDP sites. In addition, 55 kilometres of roads, 49 kilometres of drainage and sewage lines, and 580 solar streetlights were installed, benefiting more than 53,000 people in 28 IDP sites.

Displaced population in NWS affected by dire winter conditions. Photo: © Maram Foundation

UNHCR CO-LED CLUSTER UPDATES

As severe winter weather is a regular occurrence, all UNHCR co-led clusters – Protection, CCCM and SNFI – along with other clusters had already developed winterization response plans to minimize the impact, and all three clusters are currently coordinating to quickly respond to the urgent needs of the affected population.

CCCM

As a consequence of the heavy snow, some 940 tents have been destroyed while 9,600 tents have been damaged, along with many personal belongings. The CCCM Cluster continues to coordinate and follow-up on incidents reported in IDP sites in Aleppo and Idleb Governorates. A multi-sectoral response is ongoing, including road rehabilitation to re-establish access to the sites. Further interventions are urgently required to clear roads of snow and commence repairs, as well as to repair or replace damaged tents.

Protection

Cluster partners are engaging with affected communities to identify families and individuals in situations of extreme vulnerability and requiring specific interventions and support. Protection Cluster partners provided assistance to children through the Emergency Case Fund to support urgent needs including health care, WASH and transportation. The weather conditions and limited resources continue to impact cluster partners' ability to address protection needs. Partners are also providing transportation services to relocate at-risk families to warmer and safer locations.

SNFI

Cluster partners are actively responding to the emergency shelter needs of the affected population as well as re-directing ongoing winter assistance to vulnerable people in the affected areas. Humanitarian partners are targeting 10,000 families with a range of shelter and NFI support. Out of these families, 5,000 are being supported with winter cash assistance amounting to $150 per family. Nevertheless, supplies stocked in NWS is currently limited and may be insufficient to cover the needs in the coming days and weeks. As accumulated snow begins to melt, preventing and responding to floods will become an emerging concern.

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