

# North-west Syria

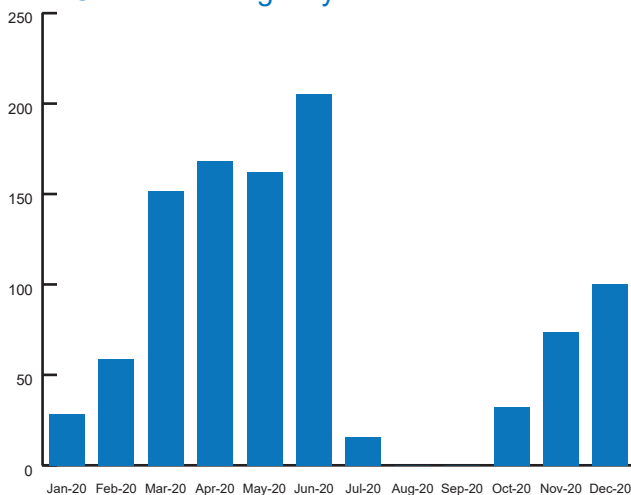
December 2020

In 2020, UNHCR sent across the border over 190,000 core relief items kits and shelter materials to assist more than **1 million individuals**.

UNHCR's protection partners have been able to adapt their activities to the COVID-19 situation, **without disrupting protection interventions**.

In 2020, through its partners, UNHCR has provided protection services, such as psychosocial support and referrals, to more than **250,000 individuals**.

CRI and Emergency Shelter Assistance



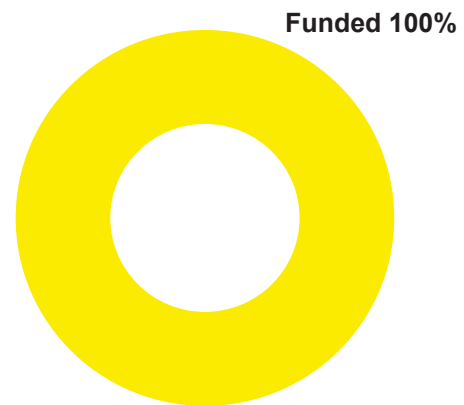
Number (in thousands) of **individuals targeted** per month with the **humanitarian assistance trans-shipped in 2020**.

Because of COVID-19 related pipeline disruptions, suppliers significantly slowed down production and delivery of tents and core relief items. Nonetheless, to respond to the humanitarian needs of the population, UNHCR was able to maintain its trend of highest number of items trans-shipped since the cross-border operation was established in July 2014.

Funding Level for 2020 as of 22 January 2021

**USD 56.7 million**

requested for the UNHCR cross-border humanitarian response



## Main Objectives

1. Support the coordination of the cross-border humanitarian response through the Cluster system
2. Identify protection risks and assistance needs and inform the overall response
3. Provide protection services and emergency assistance with core relief items and shelter solutions
4. Build capacity of (local) humanitarian organizations
5. Fill critical gaps in the basic needs of IDPs where required and feasible

## Major Developments

Of a total population of 4 million people in north-west Syria, there around 2.7 million IDPs, who are considered to be in need of humanitarian assistance. New and protracted IDPs share the same urgent needs, in an area that has limited shelter options and where the fighting has caused the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, schools, bakeries, and has disrupted the provision of basic services. With the Syrian Pound losing value in comparison to other currencies, with an increase in hostilities, and with harsh weather conditions that have been severely damaging IDPs' shelter and properties, the population is now facing more difficulties in addressing their basic needs.

In January, the UN Security Council Resolution that enables the cross-border humanitarian response was renewed for six months until 10 July 2020. On 11 July, the Resolution was renewed again for twelve months until 10 July 2021. This time, Bab Al-Salam, the other border crossing utilized for transshipments to north-west Syria, was removed.

The number of positive COVID-19 cases rose steadily in north-west Syria in December, surpassing the 20,000 confirmed positive cases. As access to health and adequate sanitation in the context of continuous displacement remains limited across the region, the humanitarian community is actively operating to deliver lifesaving assistance while ensuring the safety of the people.

## Background

Following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2165, UNHCR established its cross-border activities from southern Turkey in July 2014. In 2020, through its own programme, UNHCR has partnerships with nine organizations - IRC, ACTED-REACH, WATAN, Bir Dünya Çocuk Derneği (Children of One World; BDC), SHAFAK, NRC, Maram Foundation, SEMA and SRD - to assist displaced people by providing core relief items (CRIs), shelter support, and protection services. In addition, UNHCR is leading the Protection, Shelter/NFI (SNFI) and Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Clusters. All Clusters closely follow the humanitarian developments in the conflict areas in north-west Syria and contribute to emergency preparedness response plans accordingly.

## UNHCR Programme

In 2020, UNHCR and its partners scaled up their response to provide basic assistance and protection services to IDPs and conflict-affected vulnerable host community members in north-west Syria under the cross-border operation from Gaziantep, Turkey. The UN Security Council Resolution that allows for the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance was renewed in January 2020 for six months, and later, in July 2020, for 12 months, yet only through the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing. With these changes, UNHCR continued coordinating with its partners, as well as the other humanitarian actors, to keep responding to the humanitarian needs of the population in the region.

The response to the needs of the displaced population was further strengthened with the onset of the COVID-10 pandemic, which added to the ongoing hostilities, inadequate shelter conditions and a deteriorating economic situation. The UNHCR cross-border operation put in place mitigation measures and increased, prioritized and expedited trans-shipments and distributions of hygiene kits. UNHCR continued to closely monitor its partners' activities - which were modified in line with recommendations and guidelines issued by the WHO, the clusters and the relevant coordination fora - to ensure the continuity of the humanitarian response. In this context, partners carried out their activities preventing large gatherings and preferring door-to-door distributions and small groups sessions, and utilizing psychological first aid techniques. Partners staff were provided personal protective equipment and received awareness sessions on prevention and safeguarding.

UNHCR organized **12 trans-shipments** carrying 21,000 NFI kits, 500 semi-permanent shelter units and 2,500 tents, in December. These items will be distributed by UNHCR's partners to some 100,000 displaced people in north-west Syria. In total, in 2020, UNHCR trans-shipped 141,000 NFI kits, 51,000 tents and 1,500 semi-permanent shelter units.

In December, UNHCR's partners assisted **over 100,000 conflict-affected and displaced people in Idleb and Aleppo with 20,117 NFI kits**. UNHCR's partners also distributed **tents to 7,302 families** (around 43,000 individuals) in Idleb and Aleppo. All distributed tents were also gravelled. Moreover, UNHCR and its partners identified settlement plots where to install semi-permanent shelter. By the end of the year, land preparation works were proceeding speedily.

In 2020, UNHCR's partners distributed a total of 116,339 NFI kits and 50,324 tents to assist close to 900,000 conflict-affected and displaced people in north west Syria. UNHCR's partner also did quick fixing to rehabilitate 2,000 houses to support approximately 12,000 people with the provision of shelter assistance.

UNHCR's protection partners conducted awareness raising and psychosocial support sessions, identified cases and referred them to basic services in Idleb and Aleppo; such **community-based protection interventions reached 12,783 people in December and more than 210,000 people in 2020**. In addition, in December, 11,700 displaced and vulnerable people received protection services such as awareness raising on civil status documentation and housing, land and property rights, legal counselling and assistance, case management and referrals, while a total 50,000 people received these protection services in 2020. Moreover, during the year, **100,000 conflict-affected people were assisted with 20,000 hygiene kits** by UNHCR's protection partners in Idleb and Aleppo. During the distributions, outreach teams shared important information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

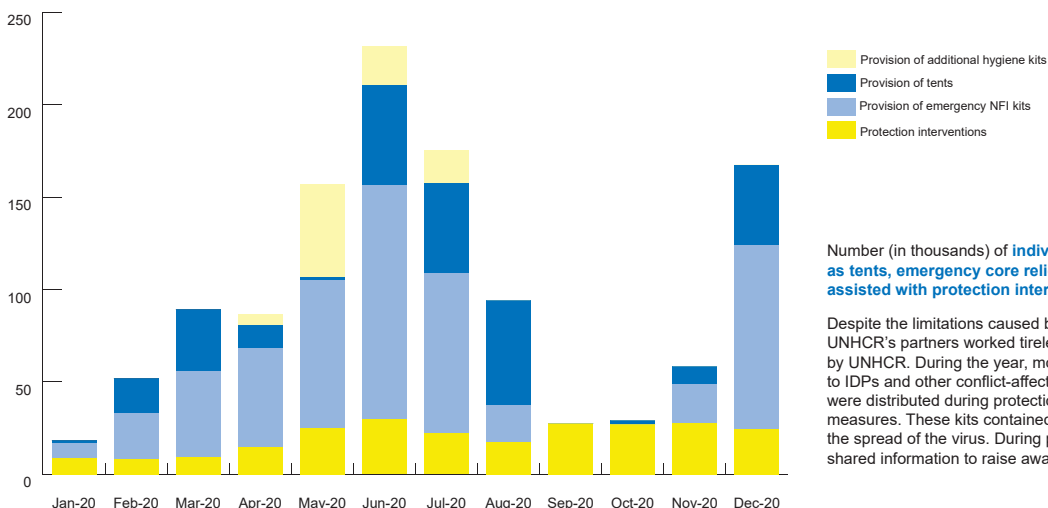


Core relief items distributions. ©MARAM



A recreational activity for children. ©Shafak

## Protection, CRI, Emergency Shelter Assistance Delivered



Number (in thousands) of individuals who received humanitarian assistance as tents, emergency core relief item (CRI) kits, hygiene kits and who were assisted with protection interventions per month.

Despite the limitations caused by the measures put in place against COVID-19, UNHCR's partners worked tirelessly to provide the humanitarian aid coordinated by UNHCR. During the year, more NFI kits and tents than before were distributed to IDPs and other conflict-affected people. Moreover, additional hygiene kits were distributed during protection interventions, as part of COVID-19 mitigating measures. These kits contained an increased quantity of soap to help preventing the spread of the virus. During protection interventions, UNHCR's partners also shared information to raise awareness on COVID-19.



Left - A site of semi-permanent shelter units in construction. ©MARAM

Right - A COVID-19 awareness session. ©Shafak



The **Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster**, led by UNHCR and co-led by Global Communities, coordinates the efforts of 78 member organizations providing cross-border assistance in north-west Syria; in November, 41 members actively responded to the needs of the displaced population. Activities focus on coordinating and monitoring the Cluster members to cover the multi-sectoral needs in **1,302 IDP sites that host over 1.6 million IDPs** (more than 302,000 families) in north-west Syria and, on behalf of the humanitarian community, track IDP movements. It is estimated that over 22,000 IDPs are persons with specific needs. Most sites are concentrated in Dana. In December, 113 new sites were added to the ISIMM and 27 sites were inactivated for reasons such as depopulation of sites and their subsequent closure. **The majority of these sites are self-settled and lack camp management systems.** To identify gaps and facilitate the coordination of multi-sectoral services, the Cluster is prioritizing monitoring and collecting information as part of its coordination response, which is particularly important in the implementation of the COVID-19 response and mitigation measures.

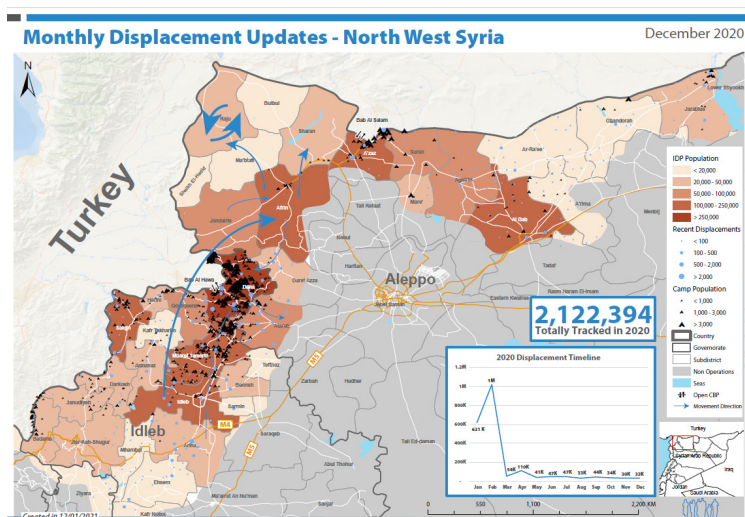
In addition, the Cluster continues to monitor, report and coordinate the respond to **multiple incidents in IDP sites**. In December, 33 families had their tents destroyed in 21 fire and weather-related incidents, while 895 families had their tents destroyed or damaged in 8 flood incidents. Some of the reasons behind the high number of incidents recorded in the past few months relate to an increased reporting capacity of Cluster member, but also overcrowding in IDPs sites, lack of awareness of risks, bad use of gas and electric cooking or heating equipment. Working with the Education Cluster, the CCCM Cluster has been using the ISIMM to share important information on access and obstacles to education (including remote education) in IDP sites.

**The total reported IDP population in December 2020 is 2,745,020 IDPs.** The number of displacement movements was around 32,500 mostly to Afrin, Sharan and Raju sub-districts, whereas the number of IDPs who were reported as having returned to their community of origin is around 3,500 IDPs, with Mhambal, Afrin and Raju sub-districts recorded as the top three returnee destinations. The Cluster tracked **over 2 million individual displacements between January and December 2020**, which include second or third displacements, meaning that some people may have been forced to move multiple times within the same period and that the reasons for movement may vary.

In coordination with other humanitarian actors, the Cluster has been collecting data on COVID-19 cases inside camps.



By December, there were more than 2,152 cases reported in camps. Over-crowding and lack of camp management remain major challenges in the fight against the pandemic in IDP sites. Earlier in the year, the Cluster developed a guidance note on COVID-19 for camp and camp-like settings specifically in north-west Syria, a practical tool to assist CCCM humanitarian workers and field teams in preparing to respond to potential emergencies. At the same time, the Cluster collected information on living conditions and available facilities, especially for sanitation and health, in reception centres in the region and coordinated with partners to monitor mitigation measures currently being implemented, as well as planned actions, which include decongestion of IDP sites as well as identification of lands for isolation purposes.



Map produced by the CCCM Cluster.

## Shelter/NFI Cluster

The **Shelter/Non-Food Items (SNFI) Cluster** is led by UNHCR coordinating the efforts of 75 member organizations in the cross-border operation who have implemented shelter and/or NFI activities since the beginning of 2020. Specifically, 40 member organizations actively responded to shelter and/or NFI needs in December. The Cluster addresses emergency shelter and NFI needs by providing in-kind assistance as well as cash or voucher assistance. It promotes household and community resilience. The Cluster also raises awareness and provides technical guidance on housing, land and property rights relevant for humanitarian shelter activities. The Cluster is co-chaired by CARE.

Cluster members continue to actively respond to the needs of the newly displaced population as well as protracted IDPs in north-west Syria. In December, more than 580,000 individuals received NFI assistance, mainly seasonal and supplementary NFI distribution such as stoves, fuel and winterized NFI kits containing mattresses, jerry cans, carpets, solar lamps, tarpaulin and thermal blankets. Shelter needs of over 135,000 people were addressed during the month, with the provision of emergency shelter, shelter rehabilitation and transitional shelters. **During 2020**, Cluster members have reported reaching **over 1.3 million people with shelter assistance**, including rehabilitation of infrastructure, provision of emergency shelter, shelter rehabilitation and transitional shelters, and seasonal shelter assistance, and **more than 2.6 million people with NFI assistance** like seasonal and/or supplementary, and core NFI distributions.

There is still a significant gap in funding of infrastructure, especially for the sites that have been established by the IDPs themselves. **Improving infrastructure in camps and IDPs sites is essential to avoid floods** that happen regularly, particularly during the winter months. The Cluster supported partners with site planning expertise, in order to enhance shelter solutions in north-west Syria. A Site Planning Support Group was set up to assist cluster members designing new IDP settlements and settlement expansion.

The Cluster is active in the coordination of the **winterization response** to ensure that plans are implemented in an efficient and timely manner to target close to 1.5 million people. As several partners have reported that they will receive top-up funding for winterization, the Cluster continues to identify gaps and guide members to uncovered and underserved areas. From October to December, Cluster member **reached over 889,000 individuals** with winterization assistance. As IDPs sites in the region are often affected by rainfall causing various degrees of damages, in July the Cluster published a document that examines different levels of floods and their effects and aims to provide possible response interventions.

As part of the COVID-19 response, earlier in the year, the cluster set up triage stations in the existing health facilities in Idlib Governorate. All the triage stations operated with family tents used for health purposes. As was recommended in March in coordination with the WASH and Health Clusters, Cluster members provided **over 476,000 people with additional soap** with their NFI distributions. The Cluster shared recommendations for shelter and NFI activities in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, available in English and Arabic.



The **Protection Cluster** (co-led by UNHCR and IRC) brings together 71 member organizations, which include actors of the three Sub-Clusters: Child Protection (led by UNICEF and World Vision), Gender Based Violence (led by UNFPA and Global Communities) and Humanitarian Mine Action (directed by UNMAS and Halo Trust). The Cluster also convenes the Protection Monitoring Task Force (led by UNHCR and IRC) and a Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Technical Working Group (co-led by UNHCR and NRC) regularly, as well as a Technical Working Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, formed in February 2020 (co-led by UNHCR and HI). The Cluster continues to prioritize the provision of lifesaving emergency protection services to newly displaced populations and to deliver specialized protection services to communities and individuals in need and at risk, including using outreach capacity and mobile teams. Besides, the Cluster continues to inform advocacy and the overall response through protection monitoring, while also supporting capacity building of cluster members to strengthen programming, information collection and advocacy on protection concerns, and do-no-harm efforts.

In December, Cluster members reported to have provided **528,307 protection interventions** to IDPs and affected host community members in Aleppo, Idleb, Hasakeh and Ar-Raqqa. Key interventions were: psychological first aid; legal awareness-raising sessions focusing on housing, land and property and/or civil status documentation; integrated/comprehensive case management services, and referrals to other services. Partners of the **Protection Monitoring Task Force** conducted a total of 85 key informant interviews (43 men, 42 women) in Idleb and Aleppo, reaching 22 communities.

During the year, **the protection environment remained strongly affected by the compounding impacts of COVID-19 mitigation measures, the economic downturn, large-scale displacement as well as the ongoing armed conflict.** Human rights violations and abuses continued to be increasingly reported by Cluster partners since April 2020; all forms of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence and sexual violence, continued to be reported, as were cases of families adopting negative and harmful coping strategies such as child marriage and child labour. Restrictions of movements impacted access to services for survivors of GBV.

The economic downturn, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of commercial crossings with areas under the control of the Government of Syria, impacted the protection situation of displaced communities, which already faced obstacles in accessing livelihoods. Due to difficulties to address basic needs, households are at risk of adopting negative coping mechanisms, which often disproportionately affect children.

There was an **increase in reported evictions** of IDPs from residential and commercial property as well as public buildings such as schools. It was estimated that between 10,000 and 17,000 IDPs are residing in school buildings. The Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Technical Working Group rolled out an eviction monitoring tool, aiming to increase understanding of forced eviction trends, which are being increasingly reported. In December, some 200 primarily field-based staff of WASH, Shelter/NFI, CCCM and Protection Clusters attended trainings on HLP due diligence aiming to improve HLP-sensitivity of interventions and achieve higher levels of tenure security. A connected issue is the lack or loss of civil documentation, which also hinders access to jobs as well as humanitarian assistance. In an effort to identify solutions to this issue, around 100 sector members staff participated in an online workshop to share field experiences, challenges and good practices.

In the context of the COVID-19 situation, the Cluster issued its guidance on protection concerns, a guidance specific to persons with disabilities and a guidance note on how to integrate protection considerations into Community-Based Isolation Centres. The Cluster also conducted a survey on the protection impact of COVID-19 and mitigation measures. Moreover, reports continued to be received of **stigma and associated bullying of community members and health workers related to COVID-19**, which resulted in persons who test positive to be unwilling to seek treatment or isolate. Protection partners conducted a series of focus group discussions (FGD) with men and women to better understand the dynamics around COVID-19-related stigma, health-seeking behaviour and barriers to voluntary entrance to quarantine and isolation facilities, to inform community engagement, information provision and facility design.

In May, the Humanitarian Liaison Group (HLG) adopted guidance prepared by the Protection Cluster for organizations conducting last resort relocations for individuals and households at immediate risk. The guidelines aim to ensure that do-no-harm principles are upheld and relocations are conducted in a protection sensitive manner. The activity is considered a preparedness measure.

### External and Donor Relations

#### Thanks to UNHCR's donors for supporting the humanitarian response in north-west Syria:

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