

North-west Syria

March 2021

In 2021, UNHCR has sent across the border over 27,000 core relief items kits and shelter materials to assist close to **140,000 individuals**.

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

In 2021, through its partners, UNHCR has provided protection services, such as psychosocial support and referrals, to more than **70,000 individuals**.

Humanitarian assistance trans-shipped in March

71,000  people targeted with the humanitarian assistance trans-shipped this month

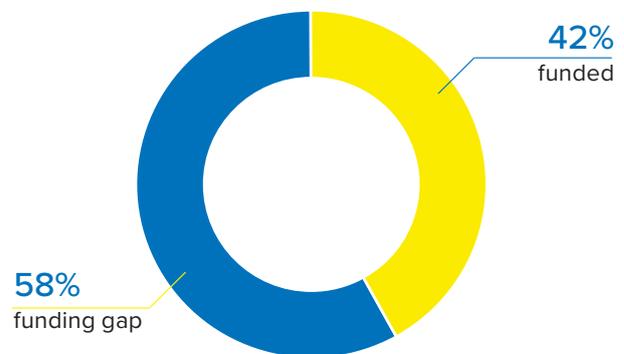
14,200  core relief items kits and shelter materials trans-shipped across the border from Turkey to north-west Syria

63  trucks used to transport the items

Funding requirements for 2021

US\$ 18 million

requested for the UNHCR cross-border humanitarian response



as of 20 April 2021

Main objectives of the cross-border operation

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 the basic needs of IDPs where required and feasible

Situation overview

Of a total population of 4 million people in north-west Syria, it is estimated that there are 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. Over 140,000 IDPs residing in camps were severely impacted by the floods that affected the region in the second half of January and first days of February. Weather and fire-related incidents continue to affect the displaced population.

On 11 July 2020, the UN Security Council Resolution that enables the cross-border humanitarian response was renewed again for twelve months until 10 July 2021, although this time trans-shipments are allowed only through one border crossing, Bab Al-Hawa.

As the number of positive COVID-19 cases rises slowly, 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 2021, through its own programme, UNHCR has partnerships with seven organizations - ACTED, BDC, Muzun, SEMA, Shafak, SRD and Watan - to assist displaced people by providing core relief items (CRIs), shelter support, and protection services. In addition, UNHCR is co-leading the Protection, Shelter/Non-Food Items (Shelter/NFI) 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.

Response updates

UNHCR Programme

In 2021, in coordination with its partners and other humanitarian actors, UNHCR continues 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 response was scaled up in 2020 to serve the urgent humanitarian needs of the population in the region, who has been severely affected by the ongoing hostilities, inadequate shelter conditions and a deteriorating economic situation, and continued despite the limitation of having only one border crossing through which deliver humanitarian assistance.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR closely monitors its partners' activities - which were modified in line with recommendations and guidelines issued by the WHO, clusters and relevant coordination fora - to ensure the continuity of the humanitarian response. Some of the measures that UNHCR's partners have put in place are door-to-door distributions and small groups sessions, avoiding large gatherings and ensuring social distancing.

In March, UNHCR organized five trans-shipments of a total of 8,800 core relief items (CRI) and 5,400 tents, which will be distributed by partners in Idleb and Aleppo Governorates.

During the month, around 36,000 conflict-affected people in Aleppo and Idleb were assisted with 7,269 CRI kits by UNHCR's partners, while, in coordination

with the CCCM Cluster, UNHCR's partners distributed tents to 186 families (around 930 individuals) in Idleb.

By the end of March, five of the six sites of improved shelter were completed and families had started to move in.

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 30,600 people.



A psychosocial support activity for children. ©SDR



The Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, led by UNHCR and co-led by Global Communities, coordinates the efforts of 68 member organizations providing cross-border assistance in north-west Syria; in March, 36 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 1,402 IDP sites that host around 1.7 million IDPs (316,000 families) in north-west Syria and, on behalf of the humanitarian community, track IDP movements. It is estimated that some 24,000 IDPs are persons with specific needs, while more than half

are children. Most sites are concentrated in Dana. In March, 52 new sites were added to the ISIMM and 29 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.

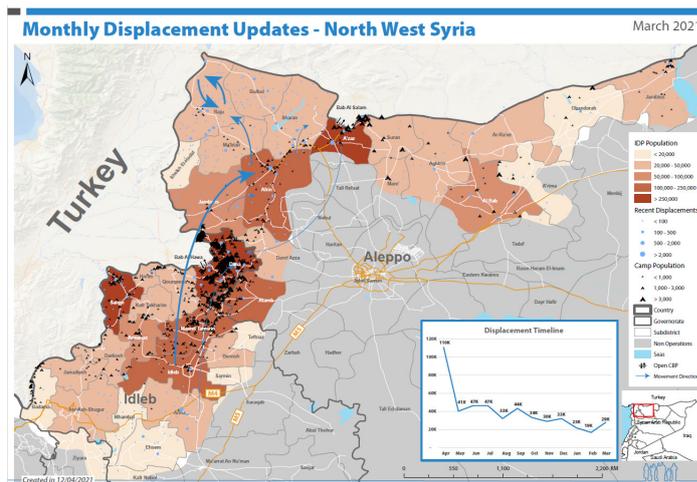
In addition, the Cluster continues to monitor, report

and coordinate the respond to multiple incidents in IDP sites. Fire and weather-related incidents have been reported in the last several months, often resulting in the destruction of tents and loss of furniture and personal belongings. In March, the Cluster reported on wind incidents affecting 168 sites, a higher number than in previous months; at the same time, floods impacted 15 sites and fires impacted 18 sites. Some of the reasons behind the high number of incidents recorded in the past few months relate to an increased reporting capacity of Cluster members, but also overcrowding in IDPs sites, lack of awareness of risks, bad use of gas and electric cooking or heating equipment. Cluster members report that some families struggle to fix their tents with available materials (like ropes, rocks, gravel or plastic sheets); while other families faced obstacles in finding shelter after their tents were affected by the wind. Because of the greater impact of the wind incidents, affected families were not always able to be hosted by other families in the camp, a usual coping mechanism in these cases.

The total estimated IDP population in north-west Syria in March 2021 is 2,824,283 IDPs. The number of displacement movements during the month was around 28,600, mostly to Afrin, Raju and Sharan sub-districts, whereas the number of IDPs who were reported as having returned to their community of origin is around 5,200 IDPs, with Elsem, Ariha and Mhambal, 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. As of 11 April 2021, there were 2,289 confirmed COVID-19 cases reported in camps (760 in Aleppo Governorate and 1,529 in Idleb Governorate), of which 1,931 are recovered cases and 56 are COVID-19 associated deaths. Overcrowding and lack of camp management remain major challenges in the fight against the pandemic in IDP sites.



Map produced by the CCCM Cluster.



Shelter/NFI Cluster

The Shelter/Non-Food Items (Shelter/NFI) Cluster, led by UNHCR, is coordinating the efforts of 55 member organizations in the cross-border operation who implemented shelter and/or NFI activities as of March 2021. 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 March, more than 275,000 individuals received NFI assistance, in the form of NFI kits, kitchen sets, mattresses, jerry cans, carpets, solar lamps, tarpaulins, blankets and seasonal assistance such as fuel and stove, or through multi-purpose cash transfers. Shelter needs of close to 52,000 people were addressed during the month, including the provision of emergency shelter, shelter rehabilitation and transitional shelters. Moreover, some 60,000 individuals were

reached with infrastructure improvements in IDP sites, such as roads and drainage. The need for infrastructure support in north-west Syria is still significant, especially for the sites that have been established by the IDPs themselves. Improving infrastructure in camps and IDP sites is essential to avoid future flooding that happens regularly, especially during winter.

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. During this winter season, from October to March, Cluster member reached over 1.66 million individuals with winterization assistance. The main activities included fuel distribution, and cash and voucher assistance for winter NFIs.

As part of the COVID-19 response, as was recommended at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in coordination with the WASH and Health Clusters, Cluster members have so far provided over 328,000 people with additional soap with their NFI distributions in 2021.



Protection Cluster

The Protection Cluster (co-led by UNHCR and IRC) brings together 78 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 (led by UNMAS and Halo Trust). The Cluster also convenes regularly the Protection Monitoring Task Force (led by UNHCR and Shafak) and a Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Technical Working Group (co-led by UNHCR and NRC), as well as a Technical Working Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, formed in February 2020 (co-led by UNHCR and Humanity and Inclusion). 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. 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 principles.

Civilians experiencing multiple displacements, socio-economic disruptions, and systematic rights violations continue to face mental health-related issues, with impact on women and children more prevalent. As these issues are compounded with COVID-19 related restrictions and social stigma, the available mental health and resilience building resources re-

main inadequate to respond to all the needs.

In March, Cluster members provided 175,774 protection interventions to IDPs and affected host community members in Aleppo, Idleb, Damascus and Homs. Key interventions included: psychological first aid; legal awareness-raising sessions focusing on housing, land and property and/or civil status documentation; integrated/comprehensive case management services; community-based protection initiatives; and referrals to other services. At the same time, thirteen Protection Monitoring Task Force (PMTF) partners conducted 807 (346 females and 461 males) key informant interviews on general protection trends in Idleb and Aleppo Governorates covering 125 communities.

Cluster members engage flood-affected communities via outreach modalities to provide psychosocial first aid and identify households and individuals in situations of vulnerability and requiring specific interventions and support. Cluster partners provided referrals to appropriate service and assistance providers, as well as direct individual cash or material support for protection. The Cluster also has mechanisms, resources and standards for the voluntary relocation process of impacted families who wish to move to another location. Major protection concerns vulnerable individuals persist, particularly among displaced children, older people and persons with disabilities, with temporary family separations being reported.

UNHCR is grateful for the support of:

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