North-west Syria

May 2020

Since January, UNHCR has sent across the border nearly 110,000 core relief items kits and shelter materials to assist 569,000 individuals. As humanitarian needs increase, despite COVID-19, UNHCR has quadrupled its emergency response and support to the people in north-west Syria. In 2020, through its partners, UNHCR has provided protection services, such as information dissemination and referrals, to over 66,700 individuals.

CRI AND EMERGENCY SHELTER ASSISTANCE

FUNDING LEVEL as of 22 June 2020
USD 45.7 million requested for the UNHCR cross-border humanitarian response

Funded 100%

Number of individuals targeted per month with the humanitarian assistance transshipped. Because of COVID-19 related pipeline disruptions, suppliers have significantly slowed down production and delivery of tents and core relief items. Nonetheless, to respond to the humanitarian needs of the population, UNHCR has been able to maintain its trend of highest number of items transshipped since the cross-border operation was established in July 2014.

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 material
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 are 2.7 million IDPs, who are estimated 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. Half of the IDPs are children and many are people with specific needs. With the Syrian Pound dramatically losing value in comparison to other currencies, the population is now facing economic hardship that compounds the already dire situation.

In January, the UN Security Council Resolution that enables the cross-border humanitarian response was renewed for six months until 10 July 2020.

While there are no known COVID-19 cases in north-west Syria, access to health and adequate sanitation in the context of continuous displacement remains limited. Humanitarian actors are active in preparedness and response planning to ensure effective prevention and response to COVID-19 and, at the same time, continue delivering lifesaving humanitarian assistance.
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 Dunya Cocuk Dernegi (Children of One World), SHAFAK, NRC, Maram Foundation, SEMA and SRD - to assist displaced people by providing core relief items (CRI), 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 have 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. Moreover, to respond to the COVID-19 situation, the UNHCR cross-border operation has been putting in place mitigation measures and has increased, prioritized and expedited transshipments and distributions of hygiene kits. UNHCR continues to closely monitor its partners’ activities - which are 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 carry out their activities preventing large gatherings and preferring door-to-door distributions and small groups sessions, and utilizing psychological first aid techniques. Partners staff are provided personal protective equipment and receive awareness sessions on prevention and safeguarding.

In May, UNHCR’s partners distributed a total of 16,228 non-food item (NFI) kits (10,516 NFI kits in Idleb and 5,712 in Aleppo) and 325 tents (all in Aleppo) to assist 83,090 conflict-affected and displaced people. Moreover, 49,975 people were assisted with 9,995 hygiene kits in Idleb and Aleppo Governorates.

UNHCR’s protection partners conducted awareness raising and psychosocial support sessions, identified cases and referred them to basic services in Idleb and Aleppo Governorates; such community-based protection interventions reached 23,705 people in May. In addition, another 1,270 people received protection services such as awareness raising on civil status documentation and housing, land and properties, legal counselling and assistance, case management and referrals.

During the month of May, despite COVID-19 preventing measures that caused delays in procurement of items, UNHCR organized 14 transshipments through the Bab Al Hawa and Bab Al Salam border crossings: The distributions of the items transshipped (27,500 NFI kits and 4,100 tents) will target a total of 162,100 people. From January to May 2020, UNHCR transshipped NFIs, tents and hygiene kits to assist 569,000 people in north-west Syria.

IDPS AND HOST COMMUNITY MEMBERS REACHED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

As shown in the graph, in May, UNHCR’s partners continued with the distribution of additional hygiene kits 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.
The **Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster**, led by UNHCR, coordinates the efforts of 33 active member organizations providing cross-border assistance in north-west Syria. Activities focus on coordinating and monitoring the Cluster members to cover the multi-sectoral needs in **990 IDP sites that host 1.41 million IDPs** (more than 274,000 families) in north-west Syria and, on behalf of the humanitarian community, track IDP movements. It is estimated that 80 per cent of the population in these sites is comprised of women and children; over 20,000 IDPs are persons with specific needs and around 52,000 people are elderly. In May, 21 new sites were added to the ISIMM and 14 sites were inactivated for reasons such as depopulation of sites and subsequent closure.

Key findings of the Cluster’s monitoring on WASH services in 907 IDP sites indicated that most IDPs had access to potable water; however, hygiene kits had been systemically distributed in only 8 per cent of sites. In terms of health services, 733 sites were found to have a gap in the availability of community health workers, compared to 174 sites that were assessed as having no gap.

**The total reported IDP population in May 2020 is 2,680,117 IDPs**, whereas the number of IDPs who were reported as having returned to their community of origin is 74,894 IDPs; with Ariha, Ehsem and Atareb sub-districts recorded as the top three returnee destinations. The Cluster tracked more than 1.8 million individual displacements between January and May 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. The number of displacement movements during the month was above 41,000, mostly to Atareb and Dana sub-districts.

Economic problems are increasingly severe in north-west Syria as the value of the Syrian pound has decreased in comparison to other currencies. The Cluster found that one of the main needs for new arrivals in May was cash/voucher assistance (36 per cent), reflecting an increase in this reported need from the April update (11 per cent).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding and establishing camps are essential to decongest overcrowded sites, whilst also ensuring that services are available in the new locations. Likewise, establishing and reinforcing camp management is required. The Cluster’s multisectoral service monitoring factsheet for May indicates that out of 907 sites hosting more than 1.2 million IDPs, camp management is not available in 515 sites. The Cluster urges to consider its 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.

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**Shelter/NFI Cluster**

The **Shelter/Non-Food Items (SNFI) Cluster** is led by UNHCR, coordinating the efforts of 58 active member organizations in the cross-border operation. 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.

Shelter/Non-Food Item (SNFI) Cluster members continue to actively respond to the needs of the newly displaced population as well as protracted IDPs in north-west Syria. In May, **more than 146,000 individuals received NFI kits**, which contain kitchen sets, mattresses and blankets, as well as winter items. **Shelter needs of around 55,000 people were addressed** with activities including emergency shelter assistance and shelter rehabilitation. At the same time, the Cluster supports partners with **site planning expertise**, in order to enhance shelter solutions in north-west Syria. A Site Planning Support Group has also been set up to assist cluster members designing new IDP settlements and settlement expansion.

The SNFI Cluster is actively coordinating with the Health and WASH Clusters to respond to the needs of the IDP population in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SNFI Cluster aims to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 during distributions, to improve the conditions of inadequate shelters and decongest overcrowded collective shelters. In contribution to the Health Cluster response plan, 316 tents were provided to be used as triage stations in the health facilities in north-west Syria, and soap and washing powder continue to be included in the NFI kits. Hygiene measures, in line with recommended WASH practices specific for COVID-19, are promoted during assistance distributions to reduce the risk of transmission. The SNFI Cluster has developed and widely shared its recommendations to mitigate the risks related to the COVID-19 outbreak for shelter and NFI activities.

In coordination with the WASH Cluster and UNICEF, over 2,300 posters and 48,000 stickers have been provided to 10 SNFI Cluster members to raise awareness. SNFI Cluster members also continue to provide awareness-raising sessions, either at an individual level or in small groups. The Cluster supports OCHA to map the gap of personal protective equipment, whereas surveys have been conducted to monitor gaps reported by members. Some cluster members...
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