BACKGROUND

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) estimates that 93,000 persons were evacuated from their homes following the fighting that started in February 2018 in East Ghouta, some 10 to 15 km from Damascus. These internally displaced persons (IDPs) were sent to seven shelters on the outskirts of Damascus. These shelters were empty structures such as schools and military camps that do not have the appropriate infrastructure to receive such large numbers of families.

When the families arrived, there were no basic services such as health, water, sanitation and nutrition. While only the elderly who were above the age of 60 were permitted by the Government of Syria (GoS) to leave the camps, some of the evacuees who had relatives in Damascus started sneaking out of the camps. A couple of months later, OCHA estimated that less than half (44,034) of the displaced people remained in the eight shelters. Yet most of these shelters remained considerably overcrowded. Table 1 shows data shared by OCHA on the populations entering and leaving the centres.
TABLE 1: UN OCHA data on populations entering and leaving IDP shelters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDP shelter</th>
<th>Total # of IDPs who have arrived since the site’s opening date</th>
<th># of IDPs as of 1 April 2018</th>
<th># of IDPs who have left the site</th>
<th># of IDPs as of 23 April 2018</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herjalleh</td>
<td>19,691</td>
<td>16,152</td>
<td>5,901</td>
<td>13,781</td>
<td>Multisectoral interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dweir</td>
<td>17,301</td>
<td>8,949</td>
<td>7,655</td>
<td>9,646</td>
<td>Multisectoral interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adra Electricity Institute</td>
<td>17,699</td>
<td>3,546</td>
<td>10,348</td>
<td>7,351</td>
<td>Multisectoral interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adra Reception Centre (3 schools)</td>
<td>8,513</td>
<td>4,869</td>
<td>3,988</td>
<td>4,525</td>
<td>Multisectoral interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Najha (education compound) + Kherbet Al Ward (2 mosques)</td>
<td>11,252</td>
<td>6,307</td>
<td>7,672</td>
<td>3,583</td>
<td>Najha: Multisectoral interventions Najha (education compound) + Kherbet Al Ward (2 mosques)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nashabieh (3 schools)</td>
<td>6,083</td>
<td>2,493</td>
<td>3,603</td>
<td>2,488</td>
<td>Multisectoral interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fayhaa Al-Sham (Adra)</td>
<td>6,433</td>
<td>2,084</td>
<td>4,526</td>
<td>1,908</td>
<td>WASH interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu Al-Nasser (Adra)</td>
<td>4,675</td>
<td>1,069</td>
<td>3,927</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>Multisectoral intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mualaka Mosque</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>92,397</td>
<td>46,219</td>
<td>48,370</td>
<td>44,031</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.²

The Communication for Development (C4D) team began the emergency response in March 2018 with senior management preparations and planning. Guided by the human rights approach and the humanitarian principles, C4D worked closely with the WASH and Health sections for better coordination and response. C4D also met with NGOs and other counterparts to plan the coordinating of efforts.

UNICEF’s emergency response was immediate, providing water and installing latrines. Over the reporting period of March to June 2018, UNICEF conducted multisectoral interventions in the existing eight IDP shelters. It was a huge effort that was commended by counterparts. This case study focuses on C4D-WASH interventions, showcasing a concrete example of how affected populations can be given a voice in the design and implementation of an emergency response in the context of conflict and internal displacement.

APPRAOCH AND METHODOLOGY

The C4D section conducted three field missions with WASH colleagues to the Harjalleh, Adra and Najha shelters in order to assess the situation and plan for the C4D-WASH response.

The aim of the first two field missions in March was to conduct a situation analysis and assessment during which seven focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to understand the IDPs’ hygiene knowledge and practices, and to identify specific hygiene needs that the WASH and Supply sections could support. Questions explored what the most important needs were, including hygiene requirements.

Findings showed that there was uncertainty among the evacuees about their situation – what would
Focus on the key WASH messages: critical times for handwashing with water and soap (before eating, before handling food, after using the toilet) and the importance of properly handling waste and garbage in the camp.

As a result of the FGDs, several practical and actionable recommendations based on the affected population’s input were put forward. With the endorsement of the Head of Office, these findings were shared with the WASH and Supply sections. These colleagues, in turn, used the findings to better inform the nature of their responses and the composition of the hygiene kits distributed in the shelters.

**Development of culturally appropriate messages and IEC package**

Communications approaches were also informed by the IDP discussions. The Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were amended based on the feedback from the affected populations. In consultation with WASH and Health sections, it was agreed to:

- Produce two brochures on WASH and Health and Nutrition key messages during the response;
- Focus on three key hygiene promotion messages: the importance of washing hands with water and soap at critical times, water storage and food handling;
- Focus key Health and Nutrition messages on the importance of vaccination and breastfeeding to improve children’s health and nutrition.

Despite all the difficulties encountered when delivering the flyers containing these key messages to the designated shelters, the C4D section was able to manage the delivery of IEC materials with the use of UNICEF Armoured Vehicles (AVs) through joint missions. A total of 12,000 education brochures and 200 posters were produced and disseminated in all the IDP shelters, as planned. The key education messages focused on the importance of education, especially in emergency situations, and introducing Curriculum B and self-learning programmes. Curriculum B is an accelerated programme for children who have dropped out and have been out of school for few years. The
Curriculum B programme enables them to graduate to the level of the normal curriculum in a specified period of time which is based on the number of years they have been out of school.

A total of 24,000 health brochures and 66,550 WASH brochures were delivered to the following shelters as detailed in table 2.

### Monitoring mechanism
Two weeks after the second field mission, a follow-up meeting was held with the WASH partner, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East (GOBA), to develop an emergency C4D-WASH plan response to East Ghouta that would be included in the existing Programme Cooperation Agreement.

The enhanced C4D-WASH plan focuses on addressing the dire need for awareness of effective hygiene behavioural practices and activities among the IDP community. The measures included:

- Raising awareness around C4D messages on water and sanitation practices;
- Encouraging displaced volunteers, community leaders and young people to participate as change agents in project activities. Their involvement will ensure a wider diffusion of the C4D messages throughout the community. (The volunteers will make house-to-house visits to influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of community members related to the C4D-WASH messages);
- Distributing IEC materials at water points and displaying them on the walls of toilet facilities in shelters;
- Conducting entertainment activities and campaigns among IDP communities especially with women and children;
- Referring cases to health services as needed.

## RESULTS

- As a result of the FGDs, several practical and actionable recommendations based on the input of the affected population were put forward. For example, findings informed the composition of the hygiene kits.
- The participation of IDPs also influenced the revision of communication materials to better address their needs.
- The emergency C4D-WASH plan includes a commitment to engage volunteers from the displaced communities themselves to spread messages and influence behaviours, allowing them to become active participants in the process.

## LESSONS LEARNT

- Consultations with the affected populations contributed in informing the response and helped UNICEF to respond to the actual needs as they are perceived by the population.
- The discussions and consultations with caregivers and people in the shelters were very much appreciated by the affected population.
- Involving youth, especially from the IDPs in the shelters, to conduct awareness and entertainment activities and campaigns among IDP communities is very important and effective.
- Planning and coordinating with other sections and having integrated plans help UNICEF be well prepared for any emergency crisis.
- Senior management’s understanding and support are key for the C4D section to be able to show their added value in an emergency.

**TABLE 2: Brochure and poster distribution in shelters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Harjalleh</th>
<th>Adra schools</th>
<th>Adra electricity</th>
<th>Najha</th>
<th>Fayhaa</th>
<th>Al-Huda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health brochure</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASH brochure</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education brochure</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education poster</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acknowledgements:**

We would like to recognize the UNICEF colleagues who assisted with the preparation of this case study: Cecilia Sanchez Bodas, Emily Ramos, Ibrahim Elsheikh, Naureen Naqvi and Vincent Petit.

We acknowledge the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the development and production of these case studies.