

# North-west Syria

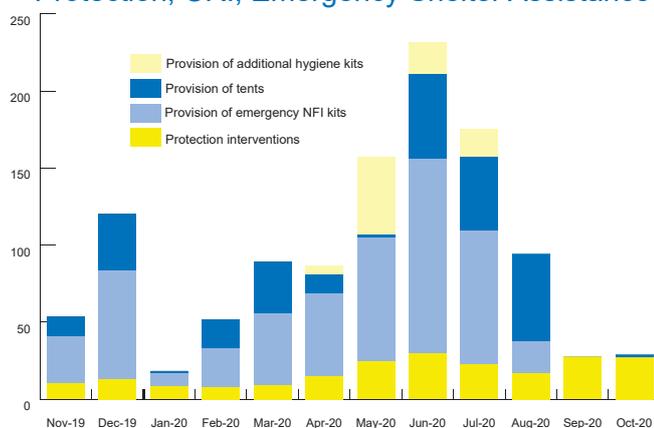
October 2020

Since January, UNHCR has sent across the border 155,000 core relief items kits and shelter materials to assist over **820,000 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 nearly **180,000 individuals**.

## Protection, CRI, Emergency Shelter Assistance



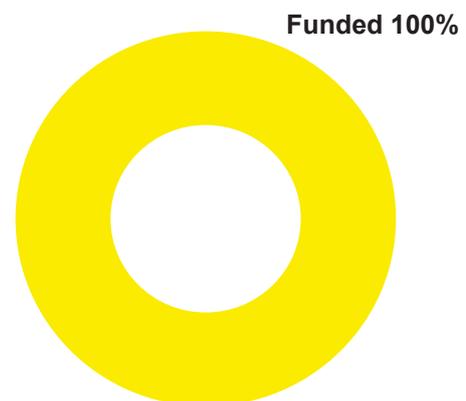
Number (in thousands) of **individuals who received humanitarian assistance as tents, emergency core relief item (CRI) kits, hygiene kits and who were assisted with protection interventions** per month.

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 last few months, 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.

## Funding Level as of 17 November 2020

**USD 55.2 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 assistance with core relief items and shelter solutions
2. Identify protection risks and assistance needs and inform the overall response
3. Provide protection services and emergency
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, and with an increase in hostilities, the population is now facing more difficulties in addressing their basic needs.

On 11 July 2020, the UN Security Council Resolution that enables the cross-border humanitarian response through the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing was renewed for twelve months until 10 July 2021. 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 October. 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

With the spreading of COVID-19 in the region that has added to the ongoing hostilities, inadequate shelter conditions and a deteriorating economic situation, in 2020, UNHCR provides 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. Following the renewal of the UN Security Council Resolution that allows for the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance in July 2020, UNHCR has been coordinating with its partners, as well as the other humanitarian actors, to continue responding to the humanitarian needs of the population in the region.

In October, UNHCR's partners **distributed 322 tents to assist nearly 2,000 conflict-affected and displaced people** in Idlib. All distributed tents were also graveled. **Four transshipments** were organized to transport 5,400 tents through Bab Al Hawa border crossing. Those tents will be distributed to 32,400 displaced people.

UNHCR and its partners focused on **protection interventions for IDPs and vulnerable host community members**. Community-based protection interventions, such as awareness raising and psychosocial support sessions, identification and referral of cases to basic services, reached 24,556 people. In addition, 2,671 displaced and vulnerable 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.



COVID-19 awareness session for children. ©Shafak



The **Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster**, led by UNHCR and co-led by Global Communities, coordinates the efforts of 76 member organizations providing cross-border assistance in north-west Syria; in October, 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 **1,172 IDP sites that host nearly 1.5 million IDPs (over 287,000 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 23,000 IDPs are persons with specific needs. Most sites are concentrated in Dana. In October, 24 new sites were added to the ISIMM and 13 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 October, 7 families had their tents destroyed in 5 fire 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.

**The total reported IDP population in October 2020 is 2,692,529 IDPs.** The number of displacement movements was over 34,000 mostly to A'zaz, Afrin and Dana sub-districts, whereas the number of IDPs who were reported as having returned to their community of origin is around 10,000 IDPs, with Ehsem, Ariha, and Idlib sub-districts recorded as the top three returnee destinations. The Cluster tracked **over 1.9 million individual displacements between January and October 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 26 October, there were 331 COVID-19 cases reported in camps, of which 251 were active cases, 75 recovered and 5 deceased. Most of the cases were located in A'zaz, Dana and Jarablus. The Cluster's monitoring of sites showed that personal protective equipment was not available in the vast majority of IDP sites, while only half of the sites, where overcrowding remains a major concern, were partially applying COVID-19 physical distancing measures.



## Shelter/NFI Cluster

The **Shelter/Non-Food Items (SNFI) Cluster** is led by UNHCR coordinating the efforts of 73 member organizations in the cross-border operation who have implemented shelter and/or NFI activities since the beginning of the year. Specifically, 26 member organizations actively responded to shelter and/or NFI needs in October. 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 October, **more than 66,000 individuals received NFI assistance** in the form of NFI kits, kitchen sets, mattresses, jerry cans, carpets, solar lamps, tarpaulin and blankets. **Shelter needs of over 103,000 people were addressed during the month**, with the provision of emergency shelter, especially gravelling of tents, and shelter rehabilitation and transitional shelters. This year, Cluster members have reported reaching over 1.1 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 1.8 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 new 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 is active in the coordination of the **winterization response**. The objective is to ensure that winterization plans are implemented in an efficient and timely manner to target over 1.36 million people. The Cluster updated the *Guidance Note on Winterization for North-west Syria*, which combines recommendations, based on experience, inputs from donors and Cluster members as well as members of the Cash-Working Group. However, the funding secured so far leaves a gap for winterization assistance of over 260,000 people.

As part of the COVID-19 response, Cluster members provided over 418,000 people with additional soap with their NFI distributions since March 2020, when the Cluster shared this as a recommendation in coordination with the WASH and Health Clusters.



## Protection Cluster

The **Protection Cluster** (co-led by UNHCR and IRC) brings together 68 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 October, Cluster members reported to have provided **276,486 protection interventions** to IDPs and affected host community members in Aleppo, Idlib 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; community mobilization and community-based protection initiatives, and referrals to other services. Partners of the **Protection Monitoring Task Force** conducted a total of 861 key informant interviews (475 men, 386 women) in Idlib and Aleppo, reaching 146 communities.

The protection environment remains 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 continue to be increasingly reported** by Cluster partners since April this year; all forms of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence and sexual violence, continue to be reported, as are cases of families adopting negative and harmful coping strategies such as child marriage and child labour. Restrictions of movements are impacting access to services for survivors of GBV. There has been an increase in reported evictions of IDPs from residential and commercial property as well as public buildings such as schools. It is estimated that between 10,000 and 17,000 IDPs are residing in school buildings. Moreover, reports continue to be received of stigma and associated bullying of community members and health workers related to COVID-19, which result in persons who test positive to be unwilling to seek treatment or isolate.

### External and Donor Relations

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

Germany | Japan | United States of America | CERF | International Organization for Migration