

Syrian Arab Republic

January-February 2023

The Syria crisis will be entering its thirteenth year in March 2023. The UN estimates that **15.3 million** people need humanitarian assistance across the country, a 5 per cent increase from 2022.

The 6 February earthquakes have further exacerbated the situation. The UN estimates that **8.8 million** people in Syria were affected by the earthquakes and UNHCR is responding to this new emergency.

UNHCR also continues to provide protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, returnees, stateless people, and host community members based on identified needs and vulnerabilities.

HIGHLIGHTS

102,900

People affected by the earthquakes have received protection services as of end-February

109,800

People affected by the earthquakes were supported with core relief items as of end-February

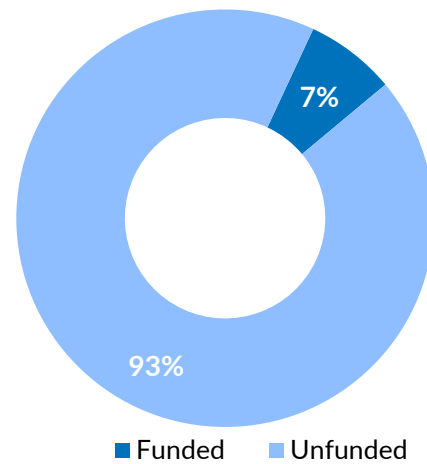
88,000

People received winter core relief items in January and February as part of UNHCR's regular winterization programme

FUNDING (AS OF 28 FEBRUARY 2023)

USD 504.3 million

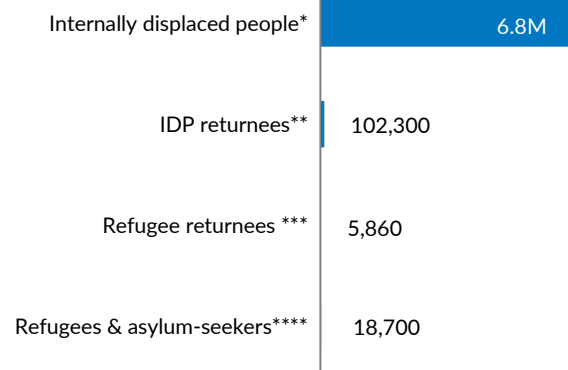
requested for the Syria Operation in 2023



PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DISPLACEMENT IN THE WHOLE OF SYRIA



With people affected by the earthquakes in the Sports City collective centre in Latakia, where UNHCR provided core relief items and protection services. ©UNHCR/E. Kabbas



* Source: 2023 HNO

** Source: OCHA, October 2022

***Source: UNHCR verified returns in 2023 as of 28 February

**** Source: UNHCR, 28 February 2023

Operational Context

The [2023 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview \(HNO\)](#) estimates that over 15.3 million people need humanitarian assistance in Syria. This is the highest number of people in need since the beginning of the crisis. Syria also has the largest number of internally displaced people in the world with 6.8 million people internally displaced. The 2023 HNO states that humanitarian and economic indicators in the country continue to deteriorate, and many basic services have collapsed. The 6 February earthquakes have further compounded existing needs in a country exacerbated by over 12 years of crisis.

UNHCR supports refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees (refugees and IDPs who have returned to their home areas) by providing assistance to those most in need using a *community-based and area-based approach*. UNHCR's *community-based approach* focuses on community mobilization and building self-reliance. It aims to reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks by providing services through community-based structures and networks. UNHCR's *area-based approach* entails working with partners to enhance support in geographic areas where the needs are greatest.

As of February 2023, UNHCR was working with 29 partners including international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national NGOs.

Operational Updates

Earthquake emergency response

A major earthquake of magnitude 7.8 struck south-east Türkiye and northern Syria on 6 February. Another magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck the Türkiye-Syria border on 20 February. The UN estimates that **8.8 million** people in Syria have been affected by the earthquakes. The most affected governorates are Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Latakia and Tartous.

Protection

The UNHCR Syria operation and partners have been providing protection services to those affected, including awareness sessions on child protection and gender-based violence, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in collective shelters, referral of people in need of case management services, psychosocial support and psychological first aid. In total, as of 2 March, UNHCR had reached 102,900 people with protection services in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Homs, Hama and southern governorates. Over 6,500 children and caregivers received child protection services in collective shelters in Aleppo. These services include psychological first aid,

psychosocial support and child protection counselling. UNHCR and partners have also been providing social and recreational activities such as games and sports in collective shelters in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama. These activities aim to foster a safe space for the children to de-stress and maintain a positive daily routine. UNHCR, together with NRC, UN-Habitat and UNDP, is also providing legal guidance to partners on housing, land and property rights.

Core relief items

As of end-February, UNHCR distributed approximately 23,100 core relief item kits reaching a total of 109,800 individuals. Additional core relief items will be released for distribution to affected families in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Hama and south Idlib governorates. UNHCR also released 68,300 winter jackets and 31,450 winter clothing kits from its warehouses in Aleppo, Tartous and Homs for distribution to affected families. In addition, almost 537,900 adult diapers, critical for thousands of elderly persons and persons with disabilities, were released for distribution.



Distribution of core relief items in February to people taking shelter in a mosque in Aleppo. ©UNHCR/H. Maarouf

Shelter

As lead of the Shelter and Non-Food Item (NFI) Sector, UNHCR is closely engaged in coordination with the Operations Rooms in Aleppo and Latakia led by authorities. As of 2 March, 120 collective shelters were formally designated in Aleppo, 14 in Hama, and 24 in Latakia.

Together with other UN agencies and in coordination with the Operations Rooms in Aleppo and Latakia, UNHCR is supporting the structural assessments of buildings to help identify shelter needs and provide a better overview of the structural status of the buildings affected by the earthquakes.

According to the authorities and the Shelter/NFI Sector, more than 49,400 buildings had been assessed by end-February in Aleppo, Latakia, Homs, and Hama.

The buildings in need of reinforcement or maintenance represented 41% of the total number of buildings assessed.

Cash-based assistance

UNHCR plans to reach over 7,000 vulnerable families (35,000 people) affected by the earthquake mainly in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama governorates with emergency cash assistance. The assistance will be provided in two instalments and is aligned with the recommendations of the Cash Working Group, with disbursements beginning in March.

Regular response



Protection

- In line with its community-based protection approach, as of end-February, UNHCR was supporting 114 operational [community/satellite centres](#) and 106 mobile units across the country. UNHCR also engaged around 2,400 community outreach volunteers in all 14 governorates.
- Out of 31 community centres in Aleppo, 24 of them were active as of end-February. Five out of the seven centres that were not operational had been damaged during the earthquakes and were under assessment.
- UNHCR is collaborating with its partners to raise awareness on Amnesty Decree No. 24/2022 which waives fines imposed on delayed registration of civil events within a limited grace period. UNHCR lawyers in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Tartous and Latakia provided legal counselling to refugees and asylum-seekers on residency permit documents and personal status-related issues. Some refugees were directly accompanied and assisted by UNHCR lawyers to renew their residency/regularize their status in the country. UNHCR has also reached out to hundreds of IDPs and returnees to facilitate their delayed registration of vital events (e.g. births or deaths) through legal awareness sessions, individual counselling and dissemination of flyers.



Core Relief Items

- In January and February, UNHCR assisted around 17,600 vulnerable families (over 88,000 people) with winter items such as high-thermal blankets, plastic sheeting and warm clothes.
- UNHCR also assisted around 7,800 IDP and returnee families (around 39,000 people) with regular core relief items such as plastic sheets, mattresses, solar lamps, blankets, sleeping mats, jerry cans and kitchen sets.



Livelihoods

- In January, UNHCR distributed plastic rolls used for greenhouses to 3,000 families. This material will be used in farms to grow vegetables through the winter. The distribution supported farmers in rural Tartous Governorate who were affected by the floods and storms and had received tomato seeds as part of UNHCR's livelihoods support in September 2022. Greenhouse farming constitutes the main source of livelihoods for many families in the coastal area and helps provide a steady supply of winter vegetables to the country. The families were selected based on expertise, farm size and socioeconomic conditions, among other factors.



Cash-based assistance

- UNHCR received the required approvals to deliver cash assistance for 2,500 vulnerable displaced Syrians in Aleppo, Latakia and Tartous governorates. This project, which was planned before the earthquakes, will allow recipients to address the most critical needs more efficiently and will help enhance dignity.



Refugee Response

- **Registration:** As of end-February, some 18,700 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered with UNHCR. The majority of the registered refugees are from Iraq and reside primarily in urban areas in Damascus, Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Homs, Tartous and Latakia governorates. Meanwhile, in January and February, UNHCR renewed identification cards for more than 2,500 refugees. The identification cards will protect against *refoulement*, ensure access to basic rights and services, and facilitate freedom of movement.
- **Refugee Status Determination (RSD):** In January and February, 23 asylum-seeking families comprising 30 individuals were interviewed to determine if they are refugees. During the same period, 15 families comprising 23 individuals were recognized as refugees, ensuring that they could be protected from *refoulement* and detention due to irregular stay and could access basic services. UNHCR also provided counselling on the RSD process and individual cases through its hotline. Inquiries received during January and February were primarily related to the status of individual cases and requests for cash assistance.
- **Resettlement:** In January and February, UNHCR facilitated the departure of five families comprising nine individuals to three countries.

- **Cash-Based Assistance:** UNHCR continues to provide regular multi-purpose cash grants (MPCG) to the most vulnerable refugee families. Around 4,400 refugee families comprising 11,800 individuals received cash grants in January and February. For more information on the MPCG programme, please refer to the [UNHCR Syria Factsheet](#). In addition, UNHCR started the distribution of the second round of cash grants for winter to refugees and asylum-seekers in January. As of end-February, more than 5,850 refugee and asylum seeker families (in total 16,675 individuals) received assistance as part of the second round of distribution.

UNHCR Co-led Inter-Agency Sector Updates

- UNHCR leads the inter-agency Protection and Shelter and Non-Food Item (SNFI) Sectors as part of the Syria and Whole of Syria inter-agency response.
- In the first weeks following the earthquakes, the Protection Sector conducted a [Rapid Protection Assessment](#) and participated in inter-sectoral rapid assessments to identify emerging protection risks and needs. The main protection issues identified included gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, psychological distress, lack of specialised services for people with chronic illnesses, people with disabilities and older people, and lack/loss of civil and housing, land, and property documentation.
- As part of the earthquake response, the Protection Sector identified the following protection services to be included in a minimum response package: psychosocial support for individuals and groups, psychological first aid, dignity kits and in-person or/and remote case management. The minimum package is designed to enhance coordination and ensure that collective shelters hosting earthquake-affected families are receiving the same set of assistance/services.
- The Protection Sector promoted protection mainstreaming in the emergency response through

the dissemination of “key messages on protection, safety, well-being and services”, a guidance on “safe distribution to reduce protection risks in in-kind distributions” and a guidance on “protection risk mitigation in the response to the Syria earthquake” to protection and non-protection partners.

- The SNFI needs in the aftermath of the earthquake are significant. As of end-February, the emergency response was focussed on displaced populations in collective centres. The SNFI Sector has been providing technical support to adapt collective centres aimed at ensuring safety, security, privacy, and protection for thousands of people affected by the earthquakes. Shelter Sector partners are also supporting the authorities on rapid damage assessments in the most affected governorates. Meanwhile, NFI Sector focal points have been coordinating with the authorities and partners to provide emergency NFIs to the affected population.
- The SNFI Sector has also facilitated the design of a training module aimed at building capacity of partners to manage the collective centres. The module focuses on identifying shelter and protection needs and proceeding with referrals to the service providers available.



Return

- In January and February, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of 5,860 individual refugees from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt – a slight increase compared to the same reporting period last year (4,690 individuals).
- UNHCR verified/monitored some 50,760 refugee returnees to Syria from the above-mentioned five neighbouring countries in 2022 (compared to 35,580 in 2021). The impact of the earthquakes on this movement trend in 2023 remains to be seen.
- In total, between 2016 and February 2023, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of some 359,700 individual refugees.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

- For UNHCR’s latest updates on the earthquake emergency response, please visit <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria>
- [Syria and Türkiye Earthquake Emergency Supplementary Appeal](#) (February 2023)
- [UNHCR Syria Key Figures and Achievements](#) (January-December 2022)
- UNHCR thematic factsheets: [Community Centres](#); [Child Protection](#); [Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response](#); [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support](#); [Education](#); [Legal Assistance](#); [Refugees and Asylum-Seekers](#) (January-September 2022)

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