

# North-west Syria

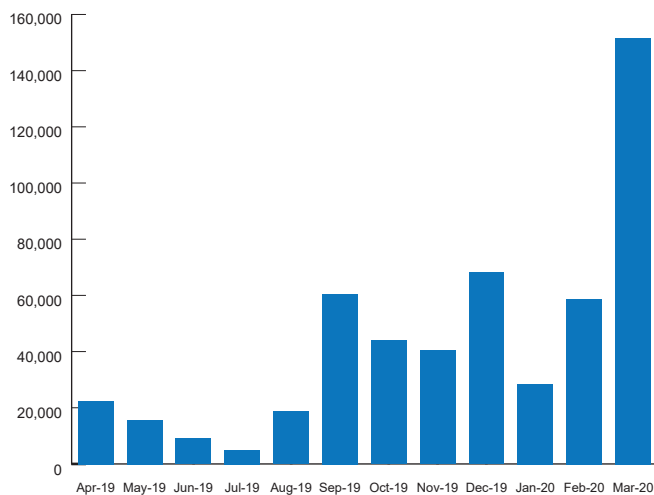
March 2020

In 2020, UNHCR has sent across the border over **440,000** core relief items and shelter materials to assist **239,000 individuals**.

**61%** of those items were sent in March alone and included 11,100 tents, 17,000 hygiene kits, 17,000 kitchen sets and 68,000 mattresses.

In 2020, through its partners, UNHCR has provided protection services, such as information dissemination and referrals, to over **26,713 individuals**.

## CRI AND EMERGENCY SHELTER ASSISTANCE

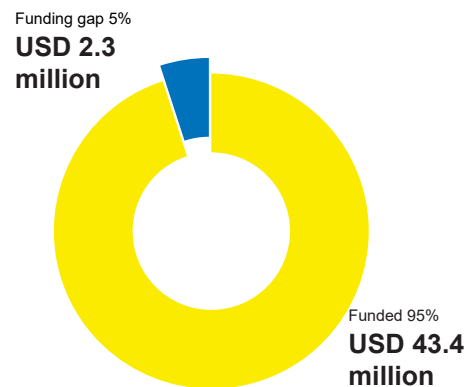


Number of **individuals targeted** per month with assistance transshipped. Despite COVID-19 mitigating measures, in March 2020, UNHCR increased its target by 4.5 times compared to February 2020, and by 6.5 times compared to March 2019. March 2020 was the month with the highest number of items transshipped since the cross-border operation was established in July 2014.

## FUNDING LEVEL as of 14 April 2020

**USD 45.7 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
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

Prior to the new wave of violence that has started in mid-December 2019, over 2.8 million people, out of a total population of 4 million living in north-west Syria, were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance. The 960,000 newly displaced people because of this latest escalation in hostilities in Idleb and western Aleppo are part of a much larger displaced population that shares a now saturated area with the host community: more than 400,000 new IDPs have found shelter in Aleppo and over 555,000 in Idleb. The fighting has caused the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, schools, bakeries, and has disrupted the provision of basic services in the region, thus further deteriorating an already dire situation for the population. Most of the new IDPs are women and children and a high number are people with specific needs. Protracted IDPs share the same urgent needs as new IDPs.

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

In March, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. While there are no known cases in north-west Syria, 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.

## 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 Dunya Çocuk Derneği (Children of One World), 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

**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. When compared to February, despite the COVID-19 mitigation measures, in March UNHCR increased its target by 4.5 times, and by 6.5 times when compared to March 2019. In March, **UNHCR's partners assisted 80,102 people with 9,400 emergency non-food item (NFI) kits** (2,144 kits in Aleppo and 7,256 in Idleb) **and 5,517 tents** (411 tents in Aleppo and 5,106 in Idleb). In February, UNHCR had assisted a total of 43,323 people. In the first three months of 2020 alone, UNHCR transshipped NFIs and tents to assist 239,000 people in north-west Syria.



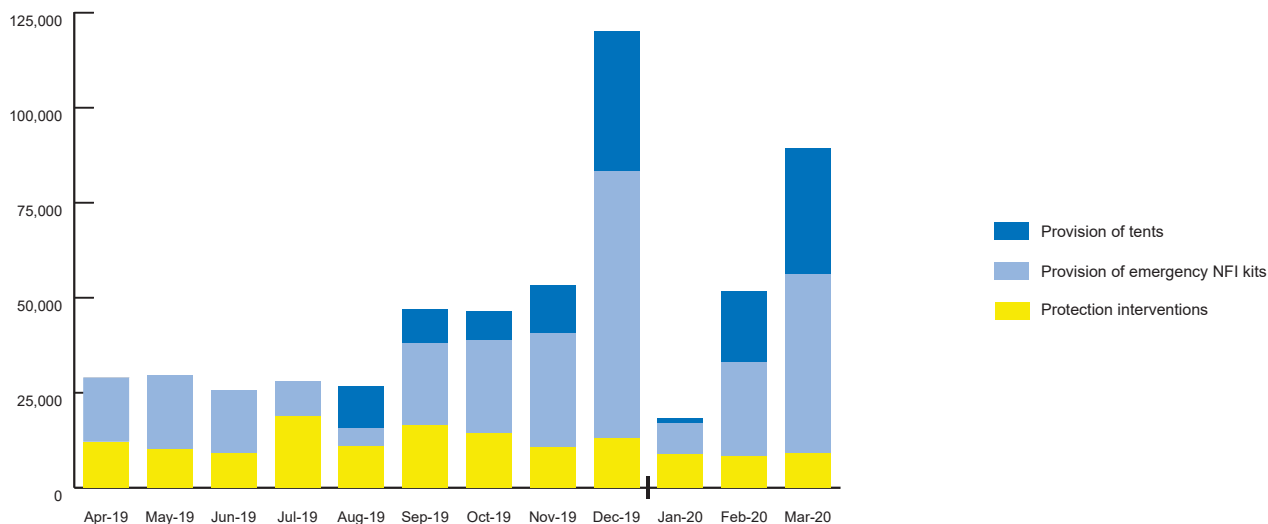
Tents being installed in north-west Syria  
© Maram Foundation

**In March, 14 transshipments** took place through the Reyhanli-Bab Al Hawa and Kilis-Bab Al Salam border crossings carrying 17,000 emergency NFI kits and 11,100 tents that will be distributed to 151,600 newly displaced people. UNHCR adjusted its transshipment plans to deliver as many items as possible before the end of March, reaching this way 44% of the shelter target by the end of the month (28% of tents were transshipped in March only) and 35% of the target for NFIs.

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 5,459 people** in March. In addition, 3,854 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.

Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, 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 has also been closely monitoring its partners' activities to ensure the continuity of the humanitarian response. UNHCR partners have reviewed all their activities to align with the recommendations and guidelines issued by WHO, the clusters and the relevant coordination fora.

## IDPS AND HOST COMMUNITY MEMBERS REACHED IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



Number of **individuals who were assisted with tents, emergency NFI kits and protection interventions** per month by UNHCR partners. As part of the winterization plan, between October and December 2019, UNHCR provided also winter NFI kits.

The **Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster**, led by UNHCR, coordinates the efforts of 29 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 **884 IDP sites that host 1.3 million IDPs** (500,000 families) in north-west Syria and, on behalf of the humanitarian community, track IDP movements. In March, 194 new sites were added to the ISIMM and 16 sites were inactivated for reasons such as depopulation of sites and their subsequent closure. It is estimated that 60 per cent of the population in these sites is comprised of children; around 17,000 IDPs hosted in those sites are persons with specific needs and 52,000 people are elderly.

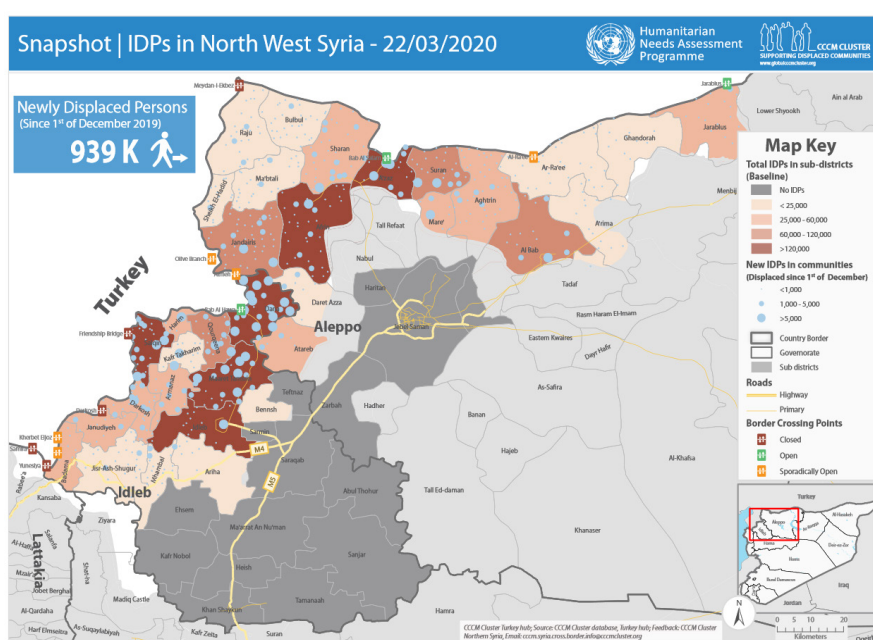
The violence that had started in mid-December continued in March and caused hundreds of thousands of people to move towards the Syria-Turkey border, in an area that continues to shrink. Movements were mainly to the north of Idlib and to Aleppo, particularly in the sub-districts of Suran, Jandairis, Al Bab and A'zaz. The Cluster tracked more than 1.6 million individual displacements between January and March, which includes second or third displacements, meaning that some people may have been forced to move multiple times within the same period. **As of 22 March, the number of people who had been newly displaced since 1 December 2019 stood at around 940,000.**

Due to **challenges in finding shelter** with relatives, host families or rented houses, many IDPs have approached **IDP sites, which are now operating over their maximum capacity.** Likewise, with the reception centres, which are designed as a temporary solution for new influxes, are now hosting IDPs who cannot find shelter elsewhere. Whereas some 3,500 people were reported in open areas, urgently seeking shelter, and around 23,000 IDPs have used schools for shelter, thus disrupting educational activities, in addition to those finding shelter in unfinished buildings.

Further constraints severely affecting people on the move are the lack of options to shelter, connected with the limited capacity of humanitarian actors: in Idlib, lands to pitch tents are either unavailable or privately owned, or present physical characteristics, such as rocky or prone to flood terrain, that impede proper and safe installation of tents; in northern Aleppo, instead, it is the lack of access or difficulties in obtaining permissions from authorities that inhibits shelter.

Since its establishment, the **Land Identification Task Force** has identified 301 expandable camps/lands, has excluded 147 location, is verifying 107 locations and has verified 47 locations. The total area of the already established camps is 3 million square metres, which accommodates 124,288 individuals.

In preparation for possible interventions for the COVID-19 outbreak, the Cluster continued to enhance coordination and develop a unified approach to deal with the specific risks that an outbreak would pose in reception centres. To this end, in March, the Cluster collected additional information on living conditions and available facilities, especially for sanitation and health, in reception centres in the region and coordinated with partners to monitor mitigation measures currently being implemented, as well as planned actions, which include decongestion of IDP sites as well as identification of lands for isolation purposes.



Snapshot of IDPs in north-west Syria on 22 March 2020  
Source: CCCM Cluster



## Shelter/NFI Cluster

The **Shelter/Non-Food Items (SNFI) Cluster** is led by UNHCR, coordinating the efforts of 51 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.

Cluster members continue to actively respond to the needs of the newly displaced population as well as protracted IDPs in north-west Syria. In coordination with the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, SNFI Cluster members are trying to identify more land to extend the perimeter of existing camps.

In March, almost **200,000 individuals, both IDPs and host community members, received NFI kits**, which contain kitchen sets, mattresses and blankets, as well as winter items. **Around 159,000 people received shelter assistance**, such as emergency shelter (family tents or shelter kits), seasonal shelter assistance and shelter rehabilitation.

Between October 2019 and March 2020, the SNFI Cluster reached close to **818,000 IDPs** with **winterization** activities, almost two months earlier than last year.

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. 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 encouraged its members to provide hygiene kits together with NFI kits and has recommended to add soap. In addition, the SNFI Cluster identified tents to be used as isolation units. The SNFI Cluster has also developed and widely shared its recommendations to mitigate the risks related to the COVID-19 outbreak for shelter and NFI activities.



## Protection Cluster

The **Protection Cluster** (co-led by UNHCR and IRC) brings together 65 active members, 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). 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) on a regular basis, as well as a Technical Working Group on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, formed in February 2020. The Cluster continues to prioritize the provision of lifesaving emergency response services to newly displaced populations and to expand specialized protection services through a wider geographic coverage and outreach capacity, including through mobile teams. In addition, the Cluster seeks to inform the overall response through protection monitoring, while also supporting capacity building with humanitarian actors to strengthen information and advocacy on protection concerns, and do-no-harm efforts.

In March, Cluster members reported to have provided **168,319 interventions to IDPs and affected host community members** in 254 communities in three governorates (Aleppo, Idlib and Ar-Raqqa). Main services provided were: psychological first aid for 1,048 girls, 1,678 boys, 2,370 women and 1,739 men; legal awareness raising sessions focusing on housing, land and property and/or civil status documentation for 367 girls, 208 boys, 2,543 women and 1,963 men; integrated/comprehensive case management services for 169 girls, 216 boys, 431 women and 286 men; and referrals to other services for 138 girls, 337 boys, 639 women and 380 men.

The **Protection Monitoring Task Force** conducted in March a total of 412 key informant interviews (228 males, 184 females) in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates reaching 87 communities within 17 sub-districts. The PMTF conducted a key informant **survey** with newly displaced households and host communities **on intentions and protection concerns** in districts of Idlib Governorate. Key findings show that displaced civilians in western districts of Idlib fear aerial bombardments and shelling pervading all aspects of life, while households feel like they have run out of options to seek safety and security.

The Cluster issues its guidance on protection concerns in relation to the COVID-19 situation, recommending the protection actors to prioritize lifesaving and critical protection activities while taking appropriate precautions, including changing the modalities of activities which ordinarily involve large gatherings. Specifically, the protection activities prioritized are: awareness-raising; community-based protection; protection monitoring; service referral; case management; psychosocial support; individual protection assistance; and advocacy. The Cluster has also issued COVID-19 related guidance specific to persons with disabilities.

### External and Donor Relations

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

Denmark | Germany | Japan | Netherlands | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America | CERF | International Organization for Migration | Private donors Republic of Korea | Private donors Spain