

North-west Syria

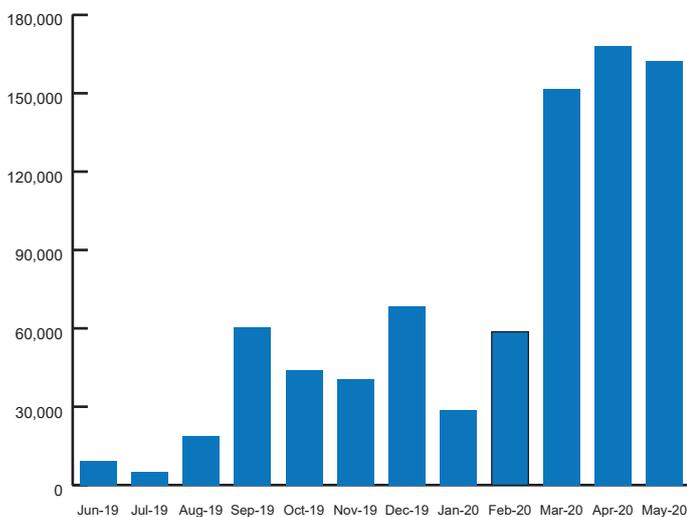
May 2020

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



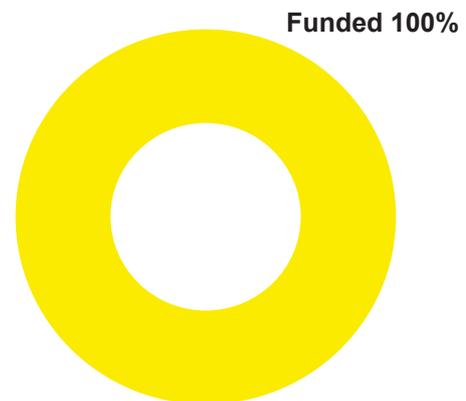
Number of **individuals targeted** per month with the **humanitarian assistance transshipped**.

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.

FUNDING LEVEL as of 22 June 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

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.

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 Cocuk Dernegi (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

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.



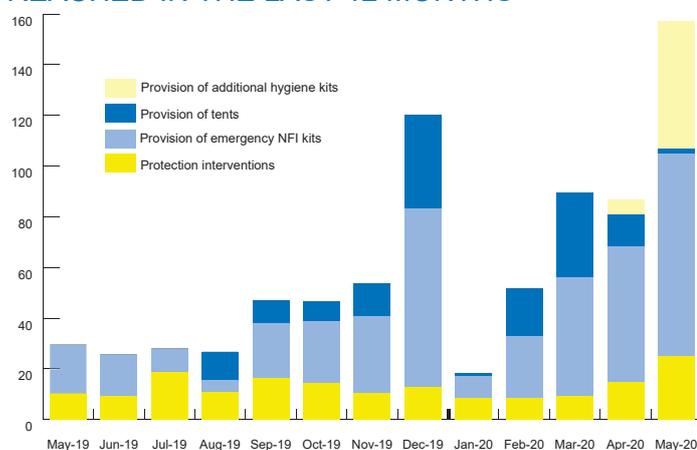
Distribution of humanitarian assistance with social distancing measures in place in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak © Maram Foundation

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



The graph shows the number (in thousands) of **individuals who received humanitarian assistance as tents, emergency NFI kits, hygiene kits and who were assisted with protection interventions** per month.

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.



Women participating in a COVID-19 awareness sessions © SRD



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 their subsequent closure.



Installation of tents in north-west Syria
© Maram Foundation

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, Ehsam 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.



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

were able to provide protective equipment to their staff.



Protection Cluster

The **Protection Cluster** (co-led by UNHCR and IRC) brings together 69 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 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) on a regular basis, 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. In addition, 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 May, Protection Cluster members reported to have provided **157,634 interventions to IDPs and affected host community members in 219 communities in three governorates** (Aleppo, Idlib and Ar-Raqqa). Key services provided were: psychological first aid for 573 girls, 604 boys, 1,275 women and 1,397 men; legal awareness raising sessions focusing on housing, land and property and/or civil status documentation for 52 girls, 79 boys, 1,170 women and 1,352 men; integrated/comprehensive case management services for 75 girls, 116 boys, 105 women and 67 men; and referrals to other services for 387 girls, 404 boys, 1,024 women and 471 men. Moreover, around 80,000 psychosocial and wellbeing focused interventions were conducted, reaching predominantly children. Around 18,000 explosive hazard risk education interventions were implemented in communities at risk.

Partners of the **Protection Monitoring Task Force** conducted in May a total of 519 key informant interviews (296 males, 223 females) in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates, reaching 101 communities within 18 sub-districts.

The Cluster is concerned about the impact of the **economic downturn** on affected communities. The crisis, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of commercial crossings with areas under the control of the Government of Syria, is especially compounding the protection situation of displaced communities, which already faced obstacles in accessing livelihoods. Due to difficulties to address basic needs, households are at risk of adopting negative coping mechanisms, which often disproportionately affect children; increases in GBV and child rights violations have been reported by partners in May. Moreover, due to the hardship, partners are concerned that persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls, are at an increased risk of experiencing violence, abuse and neglect.

In May, the Humanitarian Liaison Group (HLG) adopted guidance prepared by the Protection Cluster for organizations conducting last resort relocations for individuals and households at immediate risk. The guidelines aim to ensure that do-no-harm principles are upheld and relocations are conducted in a protection sensitive manner. The activity is considered a preparedness measure.

In the context of the **COVID-19 situation**, the Cluster issued its guidance on protection concerns, a guidance specific to persons with disabilities and a guidance note on how to integrate protection considerations into Community-Based Isolation Centres. The Cluster also conducted a survey on the protection impact of COVID-19 and mitigation measures. Initial findings highlight difficulties in adopting mitigation measures by communities due to lack of resources and rising prices, including of water, while one third of key informants reported a disruptive impact on livelihoods, increasing concerns of households resorting to child labour, child marriage and other negative coping strategies. Key concerns raised were also reduced access to health facilities and disruption of education.

UNHCR Protection Unit conducted a survey on learning needs of nine partners. Community-based protection, PSEA and working with persons with specific needs were the prioritized topics for learning needs for field staff. In addition, UNHCR and community-based protection partners discussed best practices on working with community networks and (remote) psychosocial support activities, aiming to develop approaches to reach more beneficiaries in a remote modality and to continue mobilization of communities for awareness raising and information dissemination.

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