

#### Latest developments

- Winter storms and freezing temperatures compounded the suffering of people in north-west Syria. Between 18 – 25 January, heavy snow, rain, strong winds and freezing temperatures damaged or destroyed over 10,000 tents in nearly 300 displacement sites, impacting directly 57,000 people.
- Artillery shelling occurred on most days. There was an increase in airstrikes between 25 December – 5 January. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that airstrikes and shelling killed at least 11 civilians in January, including two women and seven children, and injured 32 civilians, including seven women and 13 children. Four Improvised Explosive Devices killed two civilian men and injured one child.
- The Arshani water pumping station, which provides water to the 225,000 people living in Idlib city, was affected by an airstrike on 2 January. An inactive water station was reactivated and repairs of Arshani water station have been undertaken. Since 20. January, the Arashi station is pumping at full output.
- The Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) recorded 7,130 new displacements of people, primarily due to the deterioration of the economic situation.
- Newly confirmed COVID-19 case numbers were in decline for the fourth consecutive month. In January, 118 new COVID-19 cases and 27 deaths were recorded, compared to 728 cases that were recorded in December 2021. As of 14 February, 295 new COVID cases were recorded.
- Sewage contaminated wells in the Idlib countryside and further threatens the main wells of Idlib city. 10,000 people in the villages of Kafr Ruhin, Murin and Boayba have been affected.

#### Winter hits north-west Syria's displaced communities

Heavy snow started to fall in north-west Syria on 18 January, coupled with rainfall, high-speed winds and freezing night temperatures. Displaced people who live in tents were severely affected.

The severe weather impacted 121 displacement sites in Aleppo governorate and 172 in Idlib governorate. The affected displacement sites host 300,000 residents in total. In January, there were 162 snowstorm incidents, 117 flood incidents and 14 incidents due to high winds, which primarily impacted Afrin and Azaz districts in Aleppo governorate and Harim district in Idlib governorate.

The weather damaged 9,570 tents and destroyed 939 tents, affecting about 57,000 people. Throughout January, there were at least 92 fire incidents, resulting in the death of two children and injuring 36 people. Two babies in displacement settlements in the Idlib countryside passed away from exposure. Out of the 1.7 million people in camps and informal settlements, more than 900,000 are children.

The most urgent needs were the relocation of families to safer locations and to maintain the road access for the delivery of aid such as fuel, food and non-food winter items.

The environmental conditions caused blocked roads for a time and more than 10,000 displaced people were affected. Roads were re-opened quickly and remained open throughout the response. Two emergency road rehabilitation teams operated in Aleppo and Idlib in support of local authorities and civil organizations to keep the road open and respond to floods.

Humanitarian partners responded to the emergency needs, replacing tents and providing non-food items, either kits or plastic sheets and blankets, and other assistance like fuel. Response plans extended to beyond 15,000 households, out of which 5,000 were targeted with cash assistance.

At the same time, emergency food assistance started immediately, with almost 50,000 people reached within ten days across the two governorates, with 90,000 more people expected to be reached in total.

Health partners deployed mobile clinics and staff to remote areas and coordinated with local health authorities for ambulance coverage in order to reach patients unable to access health services. Patients with non-communicable diseases, pregnant women and children were considered to be the most at risk groups.

Humanitarian partners provided nutrition specific supplies to affected communities and rapid response teams continued services. Children with Severe Acute Malnutrition were particularly at risk, as prolonged exposure to cold and interrupted access to treatment can result in higher mortality rates.

Water tanks were reported frozen in displacement sites. The response included water trucking services, repairing septic tanks, and solid waste removal.

The re-start date of schools after the mid-term break had to be postponed by a week.

Out of the funding request of \$83.7 million to meet the winter needs of 1.4 million people, about \$45 million had been received by the end of November.

The humanitarian community is advocating for and committed to providing more dignified shelter solutions for the displaced communities of the north-west. According to a recent HNAP report, 27 per cent of displaced households in north-west Syria live in tents. Nine out of ten tents are more than 12 months old, and more vulnerable to severe weather. 43 per cent of people in tents complain about the cold and damp conditions.

The experience of 45 year old Umm Alaa is one of so many in these winter conditions. She lives in a displacement site in Zardana Mashedad town in northern Idleb with her five children. Her worn-out tent gave way due to the heavy rain. Emergency response teams provided a new tent along with other necessary winter items, providing some warmth and safety.

## More children deprived of education

The number of children in north-west Syria who are out of school has increased by 39 per cent from 580,000 in December 2019 to 800,000 children in January 2022. With the conflict passing its 11-year mark, a generation of children is at risk of losing any access to education before reaching adulthood.

There are not enough learning facilities, especially for displaced children. In 1,322 camps, there are around 576,000 school aged children in total and only around 114,000 of them are attending primary level education and 3,290 are attending secondary level of education. More than 850 displacement sites are without primary schools. About 96 per cent of the sites do not have secondary schools.

Physical learning returned with the 2021-2022 academic year after previous COVID-19 closures. A survey of 711 schools carried out in September 2021 by the Education Cluster showed that 89 per cent of schools lacked adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and 67 per cent needed sterilization items, additional space and seats to maintain safe learning. About half of the teachers remain unvaccinated due to hesitancy or other reasons.

The survey showed more than half of the schools needed heaters and fuel for the winter. Children struggle to learn in cold classrooms and parents can be hesitant to send their children to school. Humanitarian partners planned to provide 800,000 children with winter aid, including stoves, fuel and rehabilitation of facilities.

A Multisectoral Needs Assessment for 2021 says over 25 per cent of households across Syria reported that financial burdens were the main obstacle to school attendance. In the north-west, economic conditions worsened in 2021 due to the rapid devaluation of the Turkish lira.

One in three teachers working in north-west Syria are not paid. In January 2022, strikes started across the region as teachers became unable to meet their families' basic needs anymore. At the moment, teachers are demanding payment before resuming work in 100 schools in Idleb.

"The sound of my children crying from hunger has become louder than my love for teaching," said Bashir, a 45-year-old teacher and a father of five from Jisr-Ash-Shugur. Bashir had to leave his profession of 20 years after not earning a salary for more than three years. "I'm the breadwinner of a large family. I have to secure their needs," he said.

Out of school children are more exposed to risks such as child labor, child marriages and pregnancies and recruitment by armed groups, all leading to a lost generation. By the end of December, education partners received only 32 per cent of the required \$61.4 million for its activities for the last quarter of 2021. Education in the north-west needs urgent support to provide children with safe learning and a future.

## Mental health crisis goes untreated

More than a decade of crisis has placed a strain on Syrians, with increasing reports of stress and mental health issues, particularly among the younger generation. The worsening economic conditions in the north-west has eroded people's ability to secure their basic needs, contributing further to increased stress levels. Children are particularly affected by the mental trauma of living in a warzone and being displaced for their whole lives.

Across Syria, signs of psychological distress in boys and girls under the age of 18 are reported by one third of households. There is also a link between humanitarian needs and mental health as children of households with lower income and poor food security status show higher levels of distress than children from households not experiencing these problems. The population inside displacement settlements experience a number of diverse challenges and associated needs, often facing worse living conditions and having to resort to harmful coping strategies, which frequently put their physical and mental health at risk.

Reports from humanitarian partners show an increasing trend in suicides attempts. There is a widely shared view reflected in surveys of the population that suicide rates have risen, with a clear increase after the large displacement in 2019 – 2020. More than nine in ten people have heard of suicides in their communities. Reasons include depression and mental health, domestic violence, particularly against women, financial hardship and/or loss of property. Child marriage was also identified as a reasons for suicide among girls.

Maryam lives with her husband and two children in a camp in Jandairis. Her husband tried to hang one of the children. Maryam and her son were deeply traumatized by the incident. She visited a psychological support center and was told that she needed a psychiatrist to properly diagnose and help her. She was told that her children also needed psychological support. Deterioration of their conditions are preventable. However, Maryam has no meaningful access to specialized doctors and there are no specialists in her area who provide free help. She cannot afford treatment.

For people with mental health illnesses, 75 per cent are estimated to have had no treatment. More than 50 per cent of healthcare workers are estimated to have left the country in the last decade, including qualified mental health professionals.

At the moment, the ratio of healthcare workers to population has crossed emergency thresholds in more than half of all sub-districts in Syria. According to a mapping exercise conducted by health, 109 Mental Health Gap Action Programme trained doctors and 38 trained midwives. In two locations in Aleppo – Al Bab and Azaz – and one location in Idleb – Harim - there are specialized Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) facilities with inpatient care. There are 24 mobile mental health clinics across Idleb and Aleppo, providing support to people in need of mental healthcare, in addition to other facilities with non-specialized MHPSS services. Each month, partners are supporting some 10,000 people with mental health consultations.

**For further information**

[www.unocha.org](http://www.unocha.org)

[www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)

**Sanjana Quazi, Head of Office**

[quazi@un.org](mailto:quazi@un.org)