



# Security Council

Distr.: General  
9 June 2023

Original: English

---

## Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present review is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2672 \(2023\)](#), in which the Council requested that the Secretary-General provide a special report on the humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic by no later than 10 June 2023. Also in the resolution, the Council called upon humanitarian agencies to step up further initiatives to broaden the humanitarian activities in the Syrian Arab Republic, recognizing that humanitarian activities were broader than solely addressing the immediate needs of the affected population and should include support to essential services through water, sanitation, health, education, electricity where essential to restore access to basic services, and shelter early recovery projects. The report complements the inputs of the regular report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions [2139 \(2014\)](#), [2165 \(2014\)](#), [2191 \(2014\)](#), [2258 \(2015\)](#), [2332 \(2016\)](#), [2393 \(2017\)](#), [2401 \(2018\)](#), [2449 \(2018\)](#), [2504 \(2020\)](#), [2533 \(2020\)](#), [2585 \(2021\)](#) and [2642 \(2022\)](#), which the Council also requested in resolution [2672 \(2023\)](#).

2. The information contained herein is based on available data from the United Nations system, compiled from humanitarian agencies, partners and other relevant sources. Information was gathered both in writing and through meetings held during visits to Damascus, Ankara, Gaziantep and Amman.

#### II. Overview of humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic

3. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic is one of the world's most complex humanitarian and protection emergencies. The multiple earthquakes that struck the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye on 6 February 2023 have taken a terrible toll on Syrian communities already ravaged by 12 years of conflict. The earthquakes struck as humanitarian conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic were worsening, with needs at their highest level since the start of the conflict amid dwindling resources, a cholera outbreak, harsh winter conditions, ongoing violence and insecurity, displacement and related vulnerabilities, and deteriorating economic conditions. For the first time, people living in every subdistrict in the country are experiencing some degree of humanitarian stress. Some 4.1 million people are in areas with "extreme" or "catastrophic" needs. The Syrian Arab Republic still has the largest number of internally displaced persons in the world, and conditions in the country are driving one of the world's largest refugee crises.



*Assessments of humanitarian need*

4. Humanitarian operations in the Syrian Arab Republic benefit from disaggregated sector-specific data, some at the subdistrict level, relating to humanitarian needs. The data, collected by the United Nations and its partners, ensure enhanced accountability for affected populations by putting beneficiary needs at the centre of considerations. In the aftermath of the earthquakes, over 180 assessments of humanitarian needs had been conducted by early May 2023. These assessments have informed a more targeted response for subdistricts that are most in need.

5. The 6 February earthquakes have deepened needs, affecting some 8.8 million people, displacing hundreds of thousands and causing damage to more than 390,000 housing units, 2,149 schools and 241 health facilities. Over 5,900 people were killed and more than 12,800 people injured according to health sector actors and the Ministry of Health. The earthquakes were followed by more than 9,000 aftershocks. Public services that were already strained before the earthquakes have been put under severe pressure. Access to health care was further limited, with many hospitals overwhelmed. In addition, lack of fuel and heavy machinery and equipment have hampered efforts to reach those most in need. The impact of the earthquakes has also deepened existing gender inequalities in the Syrian Arab Republic.

6. The earthquakes occurred at a time of acute humanitarian needs. The assessed needs were already at their highest in the 12-year crisis, with 15.3 million people out of an estimated total population of 22.1 million, half of whom are women and girls, needing humanitarian aid. Some 4.1 million people live under extreme or catastrophic conditions. Thousands of families in the Syrian Arab Republic have lost their main breadwinner owing to death or injury, amid an already steep economic decline in the country. Hundreds of thousands of families have been uprooted from their homes, resulting in a wave of displacement that had not been seen in years. Adolescent girls are now often caregivers for younger siblings and older women care for grandchildren.

7. While the earthquakes affected many parts of the Syrian Arab Republic, the severe human and material damage are concentrated in the north-west of Idlib and Aleppo Governorates, including the city of Aleppo, and in western areas of Ladhqiyyah Governorate. In addition, Hama, Homs, Tartus and Raqqah Governorates were also affected. Prior to the earthquakes, humanitarian needs were already high in Idlib and Aleppo Governorates because of ongoing hostilities and displacement. The compounded effects of the earthquakes and pre-existing vulnerabilities have significantly exacerbated the humanitarian conditions of people who were already in need.

8. The earthquakes and their aftermath disproportionately affected women and girls, in particular older women and adolescent girls. Gender-based violence has increased, and the combined effects of the earthquakes and decreased funds for humanitarian programmes have reduced access to life-saving services. This dynamic has contributed to the normalization of violence against women and girls. Earthquake survivors face more obstacles to reporting incidents of gender-based violence and seeking help, leaving many victims to resort to negative coping mechanisms, including early marriage and sexual exploitation.

9. Assessments have been conducted by the United Nations and humanitarian partners to identify new and shifting needs and determine response priorities following the earthquakes. An assessment conducted across Idlib and northern Aleppo Governorates revealed a growing need among newly arrived internally displaced persons for shelter support. Access to key services was low, with no access to health care reported in 20 per cent of assessed communities. Between 25 March and 9 April, a comprehensive inter-sector assessment conducted in Aleppo, Ladhqiyyah, Tartus,

Hama, Homs and Idlib Governorates found that over 80 per cent of the assessed communities had been directly affected by the earthquakes, with some 62 per cent of communities hosting displaced persons. Interviewees indicated food assistance, electricity, lighting and medical assistance as their top priorities.

10. In February 2023, a protection cluster rapid assessment in government-controlled areas found that 68 per cent of interviewees needed mental health and psychological support. In Aleppo, for example, 85 per cent of key respondents reported high levels of stress among collective shelter residents following the earthquakes. Psychological distress in adults has translated into excessive worry, fear, nightmares, insomnia, disorientation and recollection of earthquake-related incidents. Meanwhile, children have exhibited unusual crying, sadness, nightmares, fear of loud noises and an unwillingness to enter rooms in which they were when the earthquake struck. Psychological distress has compounded other protection risks, in particular gender-based violence and violence against children.

11. The earthquakes hit the Syrian Arab Republic amid a cholera outbreak and a prolonged water crisis. It is estimated that there were 77 active cholera cases in earthquake-stricken subdistricts prior to 6 February. The disaster delayed planned cholera vaccination programmes and interrupted the implementation of response and mitigation measures, including disease outbreak surveillance systems. It forced people to move to temporary collective shelters with reduced access to water and sanitation and poor hygiene conditions, and it increased the risk of exposure to infectious diseases, including cholera. Humanitarian partners have observed a resurgence of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea cases because of the disruption of health and water, sanitation and hygiene services caused by earthquake damage and the ongoing water crisis. As primary caregivers, women often contracted cholera and, as a result, had a higher mortality rate than men. A cholera infection also significantly increases risks during pregnancy, including fetal death. As at 8 April, some 111,084 suspected cases of cholera had been reported from all 14 governorates, including 104 associated deaths. Across the country, at least 6.5 million people are at elevated risk for cholera because of severe water shortages resulting from damaged water networks, overcrowded emergency shelters and insufficient health and water, sanitation and hygiene facilities.

12. The earthquakes resulted in new waves of displacement in the Syrian Arab Republic. As at 5 March, a month after the earthquakes, more than 487,000 people had been displaced. Almost four months after the earthquakes, over 331,000 people were still displaced, most of whom were in shelters or in communities. Humanitarian partners estimate that most displaced persons were from Salqin and Harim subdistricts in Idlib Governorate and Jindayris in Aleppo Governorate. Many displaced families remain afraid to return home, fearing that another earthquake could strike, even after damage had been repaired. Others have left shelters and moved in with relatives, some of whom are located in other areas of the country. Some displaced persons are returning to their areas of origin, where their houses had also been destroyed during the years of hostilities.

13. Protection risks remain a concern in collective shelters. These risks are acute for women and girls because of overcrowding, lack of privacy and lack of gender segregation, including the absence of gender-segregated toilets and locks in toilets. Such conditions increased the risk of harassment and violence, including gender-based violence. In early March, some 158 collective shelters were open, most of which were in schools, mosques and other public facilities, including 120 in Aleppo, 14 in Hama and Homs and 24 in Ladhikiyah and Tartus. These facilities hosted 62,156 people. In subsequent weeks residents began to relocate to medium-term shelters, return to their homes or move in with family members and host communities. This population remains exposed to gender-based violence and other forms of harassment

and violence, and many people report limited access to basic and life-saving services. By early May, only 54 collective shelters remained open in Aleppo, Ladhqiyyah, Homs, and Hama Governorates, hosting some 15,305 internally displaced persons. In addition, 50 new sites for internally displaced persons were established in the north-western part of the country that are separate from the 27 existing sites.

14. Housing and basic services infrastructure were severely affected by the earthquakes, leaving communities without safe accommodations. The findings of the Syrian Arab Republic earthquake recovery needs assessment indicate that more than 2,260 buildings and 2,149 schools were damaged or destroyed. In addition, the earthquake affected more than 390,000 homes, of which 8 per cent were severely damaged or destroyed, 27 per cent sustained medium to partial damage and 6 per cent were lightly damaged. At least 200,000 houses lost their already limited supply of electricity, affecting nearly 10 million people. The findings also indicate that the estimated cost of damages and losses is \$8.9 billion and that \$14.8 billion will be required for recovery needs over the three-year period following the earthquakes. The World Bank, using a slightly different methodology and timeline for data collection, estimated that the total direct damages related to the earthquakes may amount to \$5.1 billion, with Aleppo and Idlib Governorates being the worst hit.

15. The earthquakes have worsened every aspect of economic recovery in the Syrian Arab Republic. The 2023 humanitarian needs overview shows that life in the country has become increasingly unaffordable. Prices for basic goods are rising and people across the country are struggling to meet their basic needs, in particular women and children who have been displaced multiple times and face a higher risk of exploitation and abuse. The prices of goods are likely to further increase. Days following the earthquakes, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that the nominal price of key commodities in the food basket in almost all of the severely affected governorates had increased in comparison with the week before the disaster. The first quarter of 2023 has seen the national average price of the standard reference food basket of staples increase by 10 per cent, reaching 511,623 Syrian pounds (\$113) in March 2023. An estimated 170,000 workers lost employment as a result of the earthquakes, with around 35,000 small and medium-sized enterprises affected. Female-headed households that suffer from unequal access to work opportunities are now even more vulnerable to long-term poverty.

#### *Humanitarian sector-specific needs*

16. **Protection.** Casualties caused by hostilities and violence continue to be reported in the country. From January to March 2023, the country task force on monitoring and reporting against children in armed conflict verified more than 320 grave violations against children.

17. The earthquakes affected the already compromised capacities of communities to cope with protection risks. Partners have observed an increase in movement restrictions, issues related to civil documentation and housing, land and property, psychological distress among affected populations and humanitarian actors, exploitation, abuse and trafficking, separated and unaccompanied children, gender-based violence and reliance on harmful coping mechanisms, including child labour and early marriage.

18. Following the earthquakes, the loss of documentation and housing, land and property-related issues have added further complexity and barriers for communities seeking to exercise their basic rights and have access to protection services. Evictions have increased and homelessness has been reported as an additional protection risk faced by families owing to a lack of documentation, discrimination and stigma. Many people affected by the earthquakes were initially forced to seek refuge in inadequate

shelters with minimum privacy and safety. As noted above, temporary shelters have exposed women and girls to increased sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence risks, in particular sexual harassment and violence, because of the lack of lighting in the shelters and in toilets, the absence of gender-segregated toilets and limited safety during distributions. Older people and persons with disabilities who were affected by the earthquakes have seen their ability to access services further restricted, and they have indicated that they face additional challenges because of the loss of supportive devices, inadequate shelter arrangements and insufficient availability of services tailored to their needs.

19. Children have shown signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, including anxiety, panic attacks, sleep disorders and depression. According to the findings of a child protection rapid needs assessment that was conducted in parts of the country, 14 per cent of the key respondents reported children being involved in hazardous work, 20 per cent mentioned seeing unaccompanied and separated children living on their own and 24 per cent reported children living under an informal foster care system, primarily owing to the death of the main caregiver. Child protection partners in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic estimate that about 8,000 more children have become at high risk of violence and abuse because of the earthquakes.

20. Displaced persons and rubble removers faced increased risk of being exposed to explosive ordnance. Following the earthquakes, an increase in explosive-related incidents in Aleppo Governorate was reported as people moved back to or across contaminated areas.

21. **Food security and agriculture.** An estimated 15 million people are in need of food security and agricultural assistance in 2023. That figure comprises 12.1 million people facing acute food insecurity and 2.8 million people at risk of sliding into food insecurity, compared with parallel estimates of 12 million people and 1.9 million people, respectively, for 2022. The figure for the acute food-insecure includes 2 million people living in camps and deemed to be completely food-insecure. Food security assessments have confirmed the continued deterioration in the food and nutrition situation and the adoption of negative coping strategies that impact the resilience of households.

22. The situation in Syrian Arab Republic continues to hinder people's ability to meet their immediate food needs and restore their livelihoods. Some 12 years of conflict and violence and a deteriorating economy have driven 90 per cent of the population below the poverty line. Additional drivers and contributing factors include a weakened local currency, drought-like conditions and severe agroclimatic fluctuations, water scarcity, limited energy supply and food, as well as increases in agricultural commodity prices. In addition, inflation, lack of purchasing power because of limited livelihood and lack of income sources, population movements and the economic impact of increasing global food prices on markets and the cost of commodities have affected the ability of food security and agriculture partners to meet the needs of the most food-insecure people. For example, without additional donor funding, WFP will need to reduce its beneficiary caseload by cutting 2.5 million persons from emergency food assistance as early as July. Such a move would affect people in every part of the Syrian Arab Republic.

23. **Early recovery and livelihoods.** In the north-west part of the Syrian Arab Republic, a significant proportion of earthquake-affected communities (15 per cent to 28 per cent) reported disruptions to electricity, water and health services. Unrelated to the earthquakes, in other parts of the country, over 79 per cent of communities noted that they had faced disruptions in access to electricity and water. Markets have also been affected, with the constrained availability of basic food and non-food items leading to price increases. The ongoing risk posed by collapsed buildings and

sewerage infrastructure is putting further pressure on an already damaged service delivery system. That pressure includes, in some areas, the need to clear unexploded ordnance that has shifted or is buried in rubble.

24. The key priorities remain to reduce the gap between income and expenditure on essential needs, raise income at the household level and create additional livelihood opportunities, in particular in the northern part of the country, where employment rates at the household level are lower. In many areas of the north-western Syrian Arab Republic, households cannot afford food or other essential items even when they are available in the markets. Moreover, limited access to livelihoods for many households, a barrier that existed before the earthquake, indicates that immediate assistance is required in order to meet urgent needs. Given that household incomes are insufficient to cover the cost of living without further assistance, several coping strategies, such as buying on credit, borrowing money, or shifting consumption preferences, may become less effective and severely harmful. Households may also start reverting to even more negative coping strategies.

25. **Shelter and non-food items.** The number of people in need of shelter support in the Syrian Arab Republic increased from 5.7 million in 2022 to 7.4 million in 2023. At the same time, the number of people in need of non-food items increased from 5.7 million to 5.9 million over that same period. Before the earthquakes, 34 per cent of the population lived in shelter or housing with inadequate safety and security, protection from the elements, access to basic services, privacy and dignity. The earthquakes exacerbated the situation by directly affecting at least 390,000 houses or apartments, resulting in a deterioration in shelter and housing conditions, a significant portion of which falls outside the scope of a humanitarian shelter response.

26. Shelter and non-food item partners have focused on emergency relief efforts, providing shelter and non-food items to those who have been displaced to new and expanding informal settlements, collective centres and open areas. Extensive efforts have been made to identify, rehabilitate and adapt collective centres in order to meet short- to medium-term needs. Rapid structural assessments of residential buildings have been conducted in order to inform the second phase of relief efforts. Humanitarian shelter needs remain extensive, requiring substantial repair and rehabilitation of partially or moderately damaged housing through cash and contractor modalities. In addition, support is needed in order to offer medium-term shelter solutions for permanently displaced persons, including through the provision of collective centres and cash assistance for rent.

27. **Winter needs.** Shelter and non-food item actors estimated that 5.78 million people in the Syrian Arab Republic would be in urgent need of winter-specific assistance during the winter of 2022/23, an increase of 28 per cent compared with the winter of 2021/22. Shelter and non-food item actors delivered winter non-food items to 4.16 million individuals in order to provide timely, life-saving and life-sustaining support to the most vulnerable persons, through both material provision and cash-based modalities. The available resources for the winter response prior to the earthquakes declined to a level that had never been reached throughout the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. The earthquakes exacerbated the shortfall, as partners diverted resources intended for the winter response to address emergency needs.

28. As at the end of March 2023, shelter and non-food item partners had reached only 1.71 million individuals (41 per cent of the target number) with some form of assistance. The most vulnerable people residing in camps, collective shelters, informal settlements and areas of high altitude and snowfall were prioritized.

29. **Water, sanitation and hygiene.** Over 13.5 million people need water, sanitation and hygiene assistance in 2023. Over 5.2 million people in communities, reception centres and internally displaced person sites across the most affected governorates have been affected by the earthquakes. The already fragile conflict-affected water and

sanitation infrastructure has suffered another massive shock. The resulting disruptions in the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene services increase public health risks. These risks are most acute in internally displaced person sites and within communities affected by the prolonged water crisis or in which there is an ongoing acute watery diarrhoea or cholera outbreak. Between 25 August 2022 and 8 April 2023, a total of 111,084 suspected acute watery diarrhoea cases were reported in all 14 governorates, including 104 associated deaths. Most of the population in the north-west of the country, who already depend on humanitarian water, sanitation and hygiene services, have been directly affected by a new influx of internally displaced persons, either by the sharing of facilities in existing internally displaced person sites or by cost increases and interruptions in service within communities as resources are spread more thinly. There is a high risk of using unsafe water from uncontrolled water supply sources and the spread of waterborne diseases.

30. As indicated in the Syrian Arab Republic earthquake recovery needs assessment report, over \$148 million is required to respond to immediate water, sanitation and hygiene sector needs in the 18-month period following the earthquakes. A further \$243 million is required to meet medium-term recovery needs. Inadequate access to vital water and sanitation services poses significant risks to public health, protection and survival of the population. The United Nations and partners report that access to life-saving water, sanitation and hygiene assistance in earthquake reception centres is not consistently available, with special attention being drawn to gender-based violence mitigation measures in water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. The uninterrupted provision of water, sanitation and hygiene assistance must be sustained for over 2 million internally displaced persons living in displacement sites, including informal settlements, in particular in the north-west and north-east of the country. Areas with overcrowded community shelters and damaged infrastructure or that are suffering from water scarcity are at heightened risk with the arrival of warm weather, which facilitates the spread of waterborne and vector-borne diseases. The north-east of the country remains at high risk owing to major disruptions in the operation of water systems.

31. **Health.** With regard to the health sector, data from the 2023 humanitarian needs overview report indicate that subdistricts classified as being in severity phase 5 (catastrophic) increased from zero in 2022 to 21 in 2023, while subdistricts classified as being in severity phase 4 (extreme) increased from 32 in 2022 to 113 in 2023. Multiple factors have compounded the existing health crisis, including a weak, fragile and disrupted health system, an ongoing fuel crisis, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and multiple outbreaks of such diseases as measles and cholera. The earthquakes that occurred in February have further stretched the country's fragile health system. An estimated 5.1 million people have been directly or indirectly exposed to a traumatic incident because of the earthquakes and have experienced increased mental distress as a result. Data from the Syrian Arab Republic earthquake recovery needs assessment indicate that more than 620,000 individuals are expected to require specialized mental health interventions from trained personnel.

32. A post-earthquake rapid assessment of 975 public and non-governmental organization-operated health facilities revealed that 214 have suffered minor or partial damage, while three hospitals and 24 primary health-care centres were destroyed. The damages and losses sustained by the health sector as a result of the earthquakes are estimated to range from \$385 million to \$1.05 billion. Across earthquake-affected areas of the Syrian Arab Republic, at least 6.5 million people are at elevated risk of contracting cholera because of ongoing water crises, damaged water networks, overcrowded emergency shelters and insufficient water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. As at 8 April 2023, some 111,084 suspected cholera cases have been reported in all 14 governorates, including 104 associated deaths, with a case fatality rate of 0.1 per cent.

33. **Nutrition.** The nutritional status of Syrians is expected to continue deteriorating because of such aggravating factors as suboptimal infant and young child feeding practices, food insecurity, poor water and sanitation conditions, insufficient health services and suboptimal technical operational capacities. Currently, only 53 per cent of children under 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed, while only 10.8 per cent consume the minimal acceptable diet in the north-west of the country. Micronutrient deficiency is another major problem. The 2022 Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions surveys showed that the anaemia rate was 54 per cent among surveyed women of reproductive age (15–49 years) and 46 per cent among children aged 6 to 59 months. Some 544,752 pregnant and lactating women suffer from moderate acute malnutrition, of whom 460,124 also suffer from anaemia. Similarly, approximately 25 per cent of children aged less than 5 (721,388) suffer from anaemia, compounding the vulnerabilities caused by malnutrition. Moreover, an estimated 609,979 children less than 5 years of age are stunted, with stunting prevalence ranging from 25 per cent to 28 per cent across different regions. Stunting has long-term effects on individuals and societies, including poor cognitive and educational performance, low adult wages, low productivity and, when accompanied by excessive weight gain later in childhood, an increased risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases in adult life. About 363,556 children aged less than 5 years suffer from acute malnutrition. Like stunting, the prevalence of global acute malnutrition varies from region to region; some areas in the north-east of the country have recorded levels as high as 12 per cent, which is a critical level on the malnutrition severity ranking scale, in particular when aggravating factors are present.

34. **Education.** The earthquakes affected education access for over 4 million learners and heightened the education needs of children and adolescents. Prior to the earthquakes, access to education was already constrained by the protracted conflict, economic duress, displacement, the water shortage and the cholera outbreak. Girls and boys, many of whom have lost their entire families, now see the chance of returning to a normal life further jeopardized, creating even greater levels of traumatic stress.

35. The impact of that the earthquakes have had on education highlights the immense need to invest in school rehabilitation. Further assistance is needed to support the establishment of safe school environments with sufficient gender- and disability-sensitive water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, where children's wellbeing and safety is nurtured through provision of psychosocial support services. According to a World Bank assessment, repairs to education infrastructure in the nine most affected cities in the Syrian Arab Republic will cost approximately \$138.5 million. The latest available data at the national level indicate that over 2.4 million children were out of school and 1.6 million were at risk of dropping out. These figures are likely to increase in the aftermath of the earthquakes, exposing children to a myriad of protection risks, including child or early marriage (in particular for girls) and child labour (in particular for boys).

36. **Camp coordination and management.** Over 1.9 million internally displaced persons are spread across 1,459 internally displaced person sites in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic. An additional 108,000 people have been sheltered in reception or collective centres since the earthquakes. The majority of internally displaced persons (80 per cent) are women and children, and over 85 per cent live in overcrowded camps and unplanned locations with dilapidated and unsafe shelters, which pose safety and protection risks. Over 70 per cent of internally displaced person camps have been established on temporary sites with no land documentation, exposing occupants to housing, land and property concerns, including the risk of eviction. Tents comprise 63 per cent of shelters in internally displaced person sites, 35 per cent of which are in flood-prone areas. Infrastructure needs to be maintained and improved to mitigate the risk and impact of flooding. The displacements caused by the earthquakes have exacerbated already dire humanitarian conditions in



internally displaced person sites; an additional 109 displacement and collective centres and reception facilities were established following the destruction of homes and properties. Up to 81 per cent of internally displaced person sites do not have community self-management structures in place. Existing self-management structures are inadequate, with limited or no representation of women and youth.

*Lack of electricity and humanitarian needs*

37. Electricity usage is at 15 per cent of the levels recorded a decade ago in the Syrian Arab Republic. Several factors have contributed to this sharp reduction, including the loss of technical staff and infrastructure requiring urgent repair after years of damage, mismanagement and neglect. Electricity shortages in the country continue to affect access to basic services, such as education, health and water, sanitation and hygiene. Electricity shortages, for example, affect emergency and intensive care units in hospitals, potable water supply systems, wastewater treatment plants and bakeries. The reduced provision of electricity also affects humanitarian partners' ability to implement planned interventions.

38. Household access to electricity is a further challenge. Over 58 per cent of households interviewed before the earthquakes reported having only three to eight hours of electricity per day. At the household level, 41 per cent of respondents to the multisectoral needs assessment stated that electricity is a priority need, up from 27 per cent in 2022. Limited access to electricity increases the reliance of households on humanitarian assistance and negative coping mechanisms. Households reporting access to more hours of electricity are better able to meet basic needs. Conversely, the households reporting access to fewer hours of electricity per day also report lower abilities to meet their needs.

### **III. Update on cross-line deliveries of humanitarian assistance**

39. There are 7.5 million people living in the areas not under government control in the Syrian Arab Republic, of whom 6.8 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. They are concentrated primarily across northern parts of the country, with a smaller population located in Rukban in the south-east. Humanitarian needs in those areas are significant, as a result of hostilities and the high proportion of internally displaced persons, many living in camps, informal settlements or collective centres for prolonged periods.

*Cross-line access in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic*

40. Since the adoption of Security Council resolution [2585 \(2021\)](#), in July 2021, the United Nations agencies have completed 10 inter-agency cross-line missions to Sarmada, in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, pre-positioning 152 truckloads of supplies (5,187 metric tons) from WFP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The convoys delivered assistance for an average of 43,500 beneficiaries per month. The most recent inter-agency mission, on 8 and 9 January 2023, was the fifth since the adoption of resolution [2642 \(2022\)](#). The convoy transported water and sanitation, education and child protection supplies for 58,500 beneficiaries, 500 core relief items for 2,500 people, 535 tons of food and nutrition items and 1.2 tons of medicines and medical equipment. A sixth cross-line mission, scheduled for mid-February, has not materialized. The United Nations continues to engage all relevant authorities and those with influence to facilitate a resumption of cross-line missions.

41. Following the earthquakes in early February, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic issued a blanket approval for humanitarian cross-line missions to the north-west of the country, waiving the requirement for separate approvals for each cross-line mission.

42. The United Nations continues to do everything in its power to scale up cross-line assistance to people in need in the north-west. It has updated plans for inter-agency cross-line convoys for an additional six months. Given the severity and scale of needs in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, cross-line assistance complements the cross-border response by targeting people in need who would otherwise not receive assistance through the cross-border modality.

#### *Cross-line access in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic*

43. Between 1 November 2022 and 30 April 2023, the United Nations dispatched 1,261 trucks carrying 38,333 tons of humanitarian assistance to areas in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, including Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah and Qamishli. Despite some access and operational challenges, the delivery of assistance remained relatively consistent throughout the period.

44. Between January and April 2023, UNHCR distributed 677 core relief and winter kits to 2,550 individuals in camps and urban settings in the north-east. UNICEF delivered life-saving primary health-care services for 5,200 children and provided routine immunizations to 26,140 children under five years of age in Manbij and Ayn al-Arab districts, Aleppo Governorate. UNICEF also provided preventive and curative nutrition services and supplies for 26,890 children under five years of age and 10,120 pregnant and lactating women through three static health centres and four mobile teams. Capacity-building activities were conducted for 45 health and community workers.

45. WHO continued to provide critical health services, referrals and life-saving supplies to people living in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic, including cross-line assistance to non-government-controlled areas. From January to March 2023, five road convoys of eight trucks reached Qamishli and provided assistance to health facilities and health partners. The supplies contained 78 metric tons of medicines and medical supplies, including trauma and surgical kits, medical equipment, water purification tablets, cholera kits and oral rehydration solutions.

46. On 26 February, a second inter-agency humanitarian cross-line mission was conducted to the Ra's al-Ayn subdistrict of Hasakah Governorate. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO and UNFPA conducted a multisectoral needs assessment with key informants in Ra's al-Ayn and visited the Ameen health facility and Uluk water station. UNICEF delivered water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition and health items to people in need in the subdistrict. The previous humanitarian cross-line mission to the area was conducted in October 2022. A third cross-line mission was carried out on 24 May 2023. The inter-agency mission conducted a multisectoral needs assessment in the Tall Abyad subdistrict, visited a hospital and a collective shelter and delivered health and hygiene items.

#### *Cross-line access to Rukban*

47. The last United Nations humanitarian convoy to reach Rukban from within the Syrian Arab Republic was completed in September 2019. Access by commercial trucks, using informal routes, has been sporadic. Since the decision by the Government of Jordan in March 2020 to close the border as a preventive measure to contain the spread of COVID-19, people from Rukban who require medical care have been unable to gain access to health facilities on the Jordanian side of the border. Critical health cases are referred to Damascus, in coordination with the Syrian Arab

Red Crescent. Rukban residents continue to live in dire conditions, with limited livelihood opportunities and access to food, water, health care and other basic services. The United Nations advocates full access in order to be able to provide regular humanitarian assistance, including seeking assurances of the necessary security guarantees for humanitarian staff. The United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent jointly developed an operational plan for a cross-line mission to Rukban aimed at providing humanitarian assistance, including immunizations, carrying out needs assessments and supporting voluntary departures.

#### *Challenges to cross-line access*

48. Despite some progress, challenges still need to be overcome to achieve sustained cross-line operations in the Syrian Arab Republic. Adequate and timely clearances are required to expand cross-line operations, in terms of both frequency and the number of people assisted. Timely security guarantees from parties to the conflict are required to ensure the safe passage of cross-line convoys and humanitarian personnel. The commitment by all parties to non-interference at all stages of humanitarian activities is essential. Ensuring accountability for affected people is another important aspect that needs to be considered, including by adhering to the principle of doing no harm, employing conflict-sensitive programming and ensuring community acceptance for the deliveries.

## **IV. Progress on early recovery**

49. Early recovery and livelihood activities comprise one of three core pillars of the humanitarian response in the Syrian Arab Republic. Early recovery activities are aimed at preventing an increase in the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, by strengthening self-reliance, improving individual and community welfare and reducing dependence on external assistance. The United Nations and its partners support projects across five distinct domains: (a) repair and rehabilitation of critical civilian infrastructure; (b) removal of debris and solid waste; (c) income-generating activities and market-based interventions; (d) vocational and skills training; and (e) social cohesion and community interventions.

50. Between January 2022 and 20 April 2023, at least 495 projects supporting early recovery efforts were undertaken across all 14 governorates. More than 35 per cent of the projects related to the provision of electricity, whether for basic services or household consumption. Humanitarian partners estimate that, in 2022 and 2023, some 5.8 million people in the Syrian Arab Republic have been reached directly, and a further 12.9 million indirectly, through projects aimed at increasing resilience. Donors provided \$640.5 million to support these projects, with an almost equal share of funding directed to projects in areas supported by the humanitarian country team (\$261.5 million) operating from Damascus and cross-border projects in the north-west of the country coordinated by the Humanitarian Liaison Group (\$265.8 million). The remaining funding was directed to projects in the north-east under non-governmental organizations and the humanitarian country team (\$85.5 million) and through the “Whole of Syria” structure (\$27.7 million).

51. According to the early recovery and livelihood sector, between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023, 1.07 million people benefited directly and 4.4 million people indirectly from relevant programming. These direct and indirect beneficiaries were reached through job creation and the rehabilitation of water stations, sewage networks and basic productive infrastructure assets, among other things. Some 16,670 jobs were created in all 14 governorates. A total of 39 classrooms were rehabilitated, benefiting 46,300 children, and an additional 27 hospitals and clinics were

rehabilitated, benefiting more than 58,000 people. A total of 430,681 m<sup>3</sup> of debris was removed, benefiting 426,780 people, and 137,000 people received vocational training. In addition, 71,650 children with severe disabilities were provided with cash and case management support, and 4,550 vulnerable households received assistance.

52. On 1 December 2022, the clearance teams funded by the Mine Action Service released 2 million m<sup>2</sup> of agricultural land in Darayya, Rif Dimashq, for safe cultivation by local communities for the cultivation of food and cash crops, contributing to better livelihoods for vulnerable communities in the region.

53. In 2023, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) supported the development of a standardized methodology to assess earthquake damage across the Syrian Arab Republic and assessed the structural integrity of buildings in Aleppo, Ladhīqiyah, Hama and Rif Dimashq. It also supported local communities in developing seven city-level plans in Homs, Hama and Rif Dimashq Governorates and assisted with the development of a climate change adaptation strategy in eastern Ghutah.

54. WFP has completed five early recovery projects in Qunaytirah, Homs, Dar‘a and Rif Dimashq Governorates in 2023, which benefited over 142,400 people by restoring access to irrigation water, improving agricultural production and increasing access to bread. WFP rehabilitated treated wastewater irrigation schemes in eastern Ghutah, Rif Dimashq Governorate, including parts of an irrigation plant, raising its treatment capacity from 60 per cent to 80 per cent of wastewater, restoring electricity to the Rayhan lifting station and rehabilitating an irrigation canal, thereby securing irrigation water for 3,000 hectares of agricultural land and an income source for 17,500 people. It also provided productive agricultural inputs and tools, such as fodder, fertilizers, drip irrigation nets and technical training, enabling 900 farmers in Dar‘a Governorate to improve the quality of agricultural production. In addition, WFP rehabilitated three bakeries in Hama, Homs and Qunaytirah Governorates, which provide bread daily to 120,000 people. Some 350 daily labourers received support through employment in these rehabilitation projects.

55. In 2022 and 2023, UNHCR and partners supported the repair of four irrigation sites, including pumping stations and canals, in rural Dayr al-Zawr and Aleppo Governorates. The projects enabled access for an estimated 10,000 families to irrigation water during the most recent farming season. By improving access to water, the repairs enabled farmers to grow crops, generate incomes and create local employment opportunities during the harvest season. The interventions also contribute to enhancing food security for the local community by enabling the cultivation of seasonal vegetables and essential crops. UNHCR has continued to provide livelihood support through agriculture inputs and small business grants, benefiting over 10,000 families that were either internally displaced or returnees in 2022. It has also cooperated with the United Nations Development Programme to repair vocational training centres, offering free training to beneficiaries and linking them with local markets.

56. In 2023, UNICEF rehabilitated 25 earthquake-damaged schools, directly serving 10,700 children. Working with partners, it provided remedial support, non-formal education services and teaching and learning supplies to 48,890 children who are out of school or at risk of dropping out. UNICEF also supported an upgrade of self-learning materials for grades 1 and 2 to enable out-of-school children to receive certified education even when access to schools is not possible. In addition, UNICEF procured 3.9 million doses of children’s vaccines, in addition to 18 environmentally friendly autoclaves to ensure the adequate disposal of syringes and biomedical hazards. It installed 20 prefabricated clinics and 11 prefabricated stores in areas affected by the earthquakes where health centres were destroyed. As part of

its earthquake response, UNICEF rehabilitated the children's ward at Aleppo University Hospital. It also began the rehabilitation of 47 health centres across the Syrian Arab Republic and is supporting the rehabilitation of water treatment and pumping facilities, benefiting some 4.7 million people.

57. As an immediate response to the earthquakes, UNFPA sent team members to the most affected areas of Aleppo, Hama and Ladhqiyyah. Initial service delivery consisted of the distribution of blankets and hygiene kits. The distribution of relief items was done in coordination with the integrated mobile teams, which provided emergency reproductive health services to women and girls. These teams, drawn from the regular programme in the governorates, were retasked to serve the immediate needs of those affected most by the earthquakes. After the earthquakes, UNFPA maintained regular support to its implementing partners to ensure that the provision of adapted and high-quality gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services was well targeted.

58. Following the earthquakes, WHO worked to restore and strengthen mental health services by training mental health workers and mobilizing mobile health teams to provide some 626,000 services, including psychological first aid, emergency counselling, individual consultations and referrals to specialized services. In March 2023, WHO implemented an oral cholera vaccination campaign, reaching 1.7 million people. It also organized a measles, rubella and polio campaign in April, reaching over 2,232,000 people.

59. In addition, WHO has rehabilitated an emergency operating centre and three Ministry of Health warehouses and has trained over 2,000 health-care workers on a range of health topics to improve the quality of care and service delivery at the community level. Equipment was provided to the Harasta hospital in eastern Ghutah, which resumed operations in late 2021 with the support of the United Nations Development Programme and WHO. Additional operational materials were provided to four health centres in Dayr al-Zawr, Homs and Hama Governorates.

## V. Transparency in humanitarian operations

### *Damascus-based operations*

60. Humanitarian actors inside the Syrian Arab Republic have reinforced standards of due diligence and monitoring procedures to ensure that assistance reaches people in need in a transparent and principled manner. The approach follows a global framework of mandatory indicators, tools and guidance documents. Tailored monitoring and evaluation strategies are also adopted for the Syrian context. Direct and third-party monitoring is conducted to follow project implementation. These strategies complement regular United Nations on-site visits to oversee project implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

61. A high degree of due diligence in humanitarian programming in the country is contractually ensured through strict agreements between donors and partners and between partnering organizations. Independent auditors regularly audit projects to ensure independence and prevent corruption. Feedback mechanisms help agencies to understand how deliveries are meeting household needs. United Nations agencies also conduct evaluations to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of programmes.

62. The United Nations in the Syrian Arab Republic follows strict due diligence standards when awarding procurement contracts, as guided by the United Nations procurement principles of transparency, fairness and competition. United Nations entities are required to screen suppliers against the United Nations Security Council

Consolidated List, the listing of ineligible firms and individuals of the World Bank, and the United Nations ineligibility list, which is the aggregated list of entities under sanctions of the Security Council and vendors suspended for proven unethical practices and poor performance.

63. The humanitarian country team has established a standing working group to develop and maintain a risk management system tailored for its operating environment. A Risk Management Unit, located in the Resident Coordinator Office, provides analysis and coordination support to ensure that the United Nations, its partners and donors can deliver the most impact in a principled and transparent manner. In 2022, the United Nations country team also established a timebound task force on human rights due diligence to assess current due diligence practices and identify further improvements and a procurement task force.

#### *Cross-border operation*

64. In three reports on humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations ([S/2018/617](#), [S/2020/401](#) and [S/2021/1030](#)), the Secretary-General described the steps taken by the United Nations cross-border operation to monitor the delivery of aid across the border from Türkiye until it reaches people in need in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic. The reports detail the monitoring at four distinct levels: (a) at the border by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic; (b) at warehouses inside the Syrian Arab Republic; (c) at distribution points; and (d) after distribution to beneficiaries. The cross-border operation has been, and remains, a transparent operation that enables the United Nations to monitor the status of aid deliveries at every step in the process, despite being a remotely managed operation.

65. Since 2014, the humanitarian nature of the cross-border assistance has been verified consistently by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism at the trans-shipment hub near the Bab al-Hawa crossing point, and at other crossing points that had previously been authorized for use by the Security Council. The Mechanism continues to work closely with customs officials of the Government of Türkiye to enhance transparency and ensure that humanitarian goods are not interfered with or manipulated. The Mechanism benefited from the excellent cooperation of the Government of Türkiye. From the introduction of the closely monitored system in July 2014 until May 2023, 62,580 trucks with humanitarian aid crossed into the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic. No non-humanitarian items have been found in the consignments.

66. Aid deliveries are confirmed upon arrival at warehouses by trusted and vetted implementing partners and by third-party monitors contracted by the United Nations. As in aid operations managed from within the Syrian Arab Republic, third-party monitors observe the distribution of supplies to beneficiaries or health centres and other facilities. At distribution points, videos and time-stamped, geotagged photos are used to confirm delivery. Modalities for post-distribution monitoring include focus group discussions, complaint and feedback mechanisms and beneficiary satisfaction surveys.

67. In February 2023, United Nations staff began additional missions to the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic to monitor first-hand the delivery of aid across the border from Türkiye. Between 14 February and 22 May, the United Nations completed 105 cross-border missions, which provided an opportunity to engage with local communities, partners and authorities on all aspects of the cross-border operation. Conclusions from the missions have helped to ensure better assessments of humanitarian needs, improved programming and enhanced monitoring based on direct feedback from beneficiaries. This has led to a more targeted humanitarian response.

68. Individual agencies manage risks on an ongoing basis. A Risk Management Unit in the office of the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator consolidates efforts to jointly assess and respond to risks in the cross-border operation and supports the risk management working group of the Humanitarian Liaison Group.

## VI. Observations

69. Humanitarian needs in the Syrian Arab Republic continue to increase. Ongoing conflict along front lines, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, limited access to basic services, the cholera outbreak and the earthquakes of 6 February have left more people struggling than ever before. This has led to yet another projected increase in the number of people needing humanitarian aid, from a staggering 15 million in 2022 to 15.3 million in 2023, the highest level since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Summer weather is expected to worsen the situation for millions of already vulnerable people across the country in the coming months. Warmer temperatures can compound existing shortages of water, in particular for drinking and irrigation, and the transmission of waterborne diseases, including cholera, is also liable to increase amid inadequate sanitation infrastructure.

70. Ongoing violence and attacks harming civilians are indicative of a general lack of compliance by all parties with international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. I reiterate my call for all parties to take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects throughout their military operations, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

71. Women and girls continue to be affected disproportionately and differently by the crisis, including by being exposed to greater protection risks, gender-based violence, forced and early marriage and restricted access to livelihood opportunities. Women also bear the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, compounded by dire circumstances and the multifaceted impact of dealing with countless missing, detained or disappeared family members and friends. Increased support for Syrian women-led civil society organizations and enhanced coordination with their networks are critical for ensuring protection outcomes.

72. My Special Envoy will continue to focus on the file of detained, abducted and missing people. The report on missing people in the Syrian Arab Republic ([A/76/890](#)) could contribute to finding a path to address the issue in a humanitarian and holistic manner that is victim-, survivor- and family-centric.

73. The United Nations continues to do everything in its power to scale up cross-line assistance to people in need in order to complement the cross-border response. Receiving the necessary and timely security guarantees from parties to the conflict remains critical for ensuring the safe passage of cross-line convoys and their personnel. While cross-line operations remain essential, they cannot currently replace the size or scope of the United Nations cross-border programme.

74. In its resolution [2642 \(2022\)](#), the Security Council extended the authorization for the United Nations critical cross-border operation that provides life-saving support for an average of 2.7 million people in need each month. In its resolution [2672 \(2023\)](#), the Council confirmed the extension of the authorization for an additional six months until 10 July 2023. Cross-border assistance remains an essential part of the operation of the United Nations and its partners aimed at reaching all people in need.

75. Today in the region, 4.1 million people, 80 per cent of them women and children, rely on United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance to meet their most basic needs. Predictable access allows the Organization and its partners to reach millions

of people in need each month with food assistance, vaccines and medical treatments and support for basic water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure. Protection services help the most vulnerable to preserve a basic dignity. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism provides essential transparency and accountability. The renewal by the Security Council of the cross-border mechanism for 12 months is critical. It remains a moral and humanitarian imperative.

76. I remain concerned at the low level of funding of the humanitarian response plan for the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations and its partners require greater support to respond to growing needs, in particular following the earthquakes on 6 February. I call for greater solidarity and increased humanitarian funding, including for early recovery and livelihood programmes.

77. I reiterate the importance of providing clear reassurances that no unilateral sanctions will interfere with relief operations benefiting the Syrian population. I welcome, in this regard, the introduction of earthquake-related standing exemptions in several unilateral sanctions regimes. I encourage relevant Member States and humanitarian actors to continue their technical dialogue regarding sanctions and humanitarian operations in the Syrian Arab Republic to find ways to address the challenges that several humanitarian actors in the country face in ensuring adequate and reliable access to financial services.

78. The unintended impact of sanctions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and access to essential services (health, education, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, and food security and agriculture) affects two main areas. First, with regard to procurement, humanitarian organizations are experiencing a decrease in the number of bidders, increases in prices and delays in the delivery of goods due to higher compliance and operational costs. Second, with regard to payments, the compliance departments of banks have been refusing or delaying financial transactions until compliance assessments have been completed. The United Nations will continue to engage bilaterally with relevant actors on these issues to identify measures for overcoming operational hurdles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in response to the growing needs.

79. Despite facing a complex set of challenges, the United Nations and its partners continue to have broad visibility of all humanitarian operations. A thorough understanding of humanitarian needs underpins deliveries of humanitarian assistance. Greater physical access to people in need, humanitarian partners and affected areas in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic have enhanced all facets of cross-border humanitarian programming. Authorization for the United Nations to use Bab al-Salam and Al-Ra'ee has allowed for more direct and efficient access to affected populations in northern Aleppo. Oversight is maintained with regard to what is being delivered and where the assistance is going. The risk management systems in place further facilitate the transparency of operations by providing a clear assessment of common challenges, mitigating measures and residual risk.

80. I remain convinced that the further expansion of early recovery activities is critical to the continued success of the humanitarian response in the Syrian Arab Republic and to the future of the Syrian people. Growing needs continue to outpace the humanitarian community's ability to respond with limited resources. A more sustainable response is needed to avoid more people being unable to meet their basic needs. Increasing support for electricity, where essential to restore access to basic services, is an important component of this work. Strengthening resilience through early recovery is key to addressing the rising needs. It will be critical for donors to continue to engage and work with humanitarian partners, including by expanding financial support for early recovery work.



81. Nothing would do more to alleviate suffering in the Syrian Arab Republic and stem the tide of humanitarian needs than an inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable political solution to end the conflict in line with Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#).

---