

UNHCR Successfully Tests New Innovative Shelter Solution

With the displacement of 7.6 million people in Syria, the shelter needs are massive with classical shelter interventions no longer able to meet all the shelter needs of the displaced population. As a result of this, UNHCR has had to 'think outside the box' conceptualizing, designing and launching additional types of shelter assistance, stressing community empowerment and utilizing its capacity.

A number of pilot shelter projects have been launched recently for assistance through cash for work programmes and supported access to essential building materials. One of the most innovative examples is the earth-bag house construction system which is a simple tool which utilizes Cash for Work in the construction of an emergency shelter.

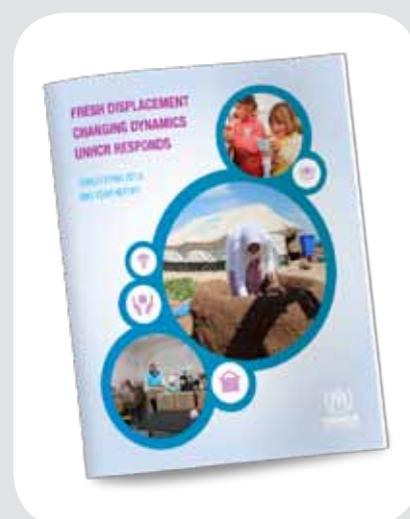


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UNHCR has recently concluded a fifteen day appraisal in Qamishli of this earth-bag house construction system and found that the construction of the earth-bag house is an efficient way to solve requirements encountered when people have to be provided with a basic home within a short period of time. Furthermore, the construction does not need a profound knowledge so that it can be built by the beneficiaries themselves. Compared to tents the earth-bag built house has many advantages without being a permanent construction and can easily be dismantled and the material can be reused. In addition this system gives beneficiaries the opportunity to work and earn income as well as stimulating small business opportunities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- New Innovative Shelter Solution Launched
- Airlift in Preparation of Harsh Winter
- Life Skills Training - Improving Lives



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The testing of this system has proved very successful with the main findings being:

- Their construction is easy to learn and user-friendly making them easy to build by unskilled people or communities
- An earth-bag wall is extremely strong, owing to its thickness and weight, thus is considerably more resistant to high winds or other destructive forces (earthquake, flood, etc.)
- They are very adaptable, as it is easy to alter the position of wall openings during construction, or to dismantle an incorrectly placed wall and subsequently rebuild it with the very same material. Also the house can be easily divided into rooms using curtains or light partitions and the extension of walls can also allow future expansion. In addition plumbing and electrical fittings can easily be fixed to the earth-bag walls.
- Increased safety, as there are no piles of bricks on site that may be subject to theft, just the bags, which are easily secured, and a pile of earth, which has no value. Furthermore, the earth-bag house offers excellent fire resistance and extra protection from bullets, compared to tents.
- Their suitability for remote locations as it is only mainly the bags that need to be transported to the site so an earth-bag building can be utilized quickly at remote sites in emergency situations.



Because of its successful testing of this pilot project UNHCR is now planning to expand the earth-bag house shelter solution to other areas in cooperation with its implementing partners.



UNHCR Airlifts Winter Clothing in Preparation for Harsh Winter

The winter conditions in Syria are extremely harsh causing great hardship and suffering to many Syrians, especially remote and hard-to reach areas. For example January 2015 temperatures fell as low as minus 13 degrees centigrade in many areas in the country. In addition, the snowstorm Salam which hit Syria on 07 January 2015 caused chaos and further hardship for Syrians throughout the country with roads impassable, intermittent communications, electricity and fuel shortages resulting in many people being unable to heat their homes or themselves. UNHCR began planning for the cold weather throughout Syria in mid-2014 and as a result, close to 1.5 million individuals were protected by UNHCR's winterized package for which distribution started in November 2014.



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The Hassakeh governorate is a remote location in Syria, inaccessible by road, which suffers from an extremely harsh and cold winter. As part of its preparation and planning for the forthcoming winter, on 16 September UNHCR airlifted nearly five thousand winter clothing kits, four rub halls as well as 2,600 winter sweaters from Damascus to Qamishly. The items were dispatched to both the UNHCR warehouse in Qamishly as well as to Newroz refugee camp.

This is another of a series of airlifts which started in 2013 through which UNHCR succeeded in providing CRIs and life-saving medical equipment and supplies to vulnerable people as well as dispatching vaccines against polio for hundreds of thousands of children.



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Life Skills Training - Improving lives



The loss of livelihoods for internally displaced people (IDPs) negatively affects the psychological well-being of people and often leads to protection concerns. Generating income during displacement not only improves people's quality of life but also helps avoid protracted dependency and protects people from abuse. UNHCR therefore provides life skills training courses to respond to prevailing protection risks such as dropping out of school, child labor as well as sexual and gender based violence. These trainings also provide women heading households with a safe space to learn a profession and initiate their own business.

During September, UNHCR with its implementing partner, the International Medical Corps (IMC) started a number of life skills training courses in Damascus. These courses included hairdressing, makeup and beauty care, handicrafts, computer maintenance, mobile maintenance and secretarial studies and benefited 150 IDPs from nine different shelters as well as people from the host community.

One of the attendees of these courses in tailoring was Reem Yousef, a 29 year old woman displaced from Al Yarmouk camp in Damascus to a collective shelter in Mashroaa Dummar. Reem was delighted to attend the course as it took into consideration the difficult situation of not only her but of the IDP attendees. Reem for example was allowed to bring her seven year old child with her to the training.

In order to assist her after the training was finished Reem was provided with a tailoring kit for clothing design and knitting. She has now started tailoring clothes not only for her children and herself but also for the displaced people residing in the shelter and is now establishing her own small business.



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