

# Syrian Arab Republic

April 2023

The Syria crisis entered its thirteenth year in March 2023. The UN estimates that **15.3 million** people need humanitarian assistance across the country, a 5 per cent increase from 2022.

The February earthquakes further exacerbated the situation in Syria. An estimated **8.8 million** people in Syria were affected by the earthquakes, and UNHCR has been responding to this emergency.

UNHCR also continues to provide protection and assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people, returnees, stateless people, and host community members based on identified needs and vulnerabilities.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### 156,000

People affected by the earthquakes have been supported by UNHCR with protection services

### 169,600

People affected by the earthquakes received core relief items from UNHCR as of end-April

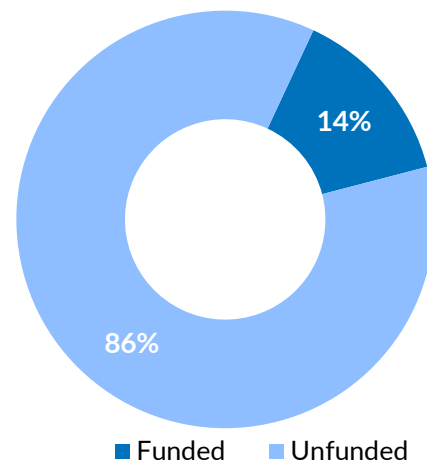
### 1,729

Solar streetlights installed by UNHCR so far in 2023 in five Governorates (Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, Latakia and Quneitra) to enhance the protection of people, particularly women and girls

## FUNDING (AS OF 27 APRIL 2023)

### USD 504.3 million

requested for the Syria Operation in 2023



## PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DISPLACEMENT IN THE WHOLE OF SYRIA



First distribution of emergency cash assistance to people affected by the earthquakes in Aleppo on 15 April. ©UNHCR/H.Maarouf

Internally displaced people*	6.8M
IDP returnees**	102,300
Refugee returnees ***	10,092
Refugees & asylum-seekers****	18,700

\* Source: 2023 HNO

\*\* Source: OCHA, October 2022

\*\*\*Source: UNHCR verified returns in 2023 as of 30 April

\*\*\*\* Source: UNHCR, April 2023

## Operational Context

The [2023 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview \(HNO\)](#) estimates that over 15.3 million people need humanitarian assistance in Syria. This is the highest number of people in need since the beginning of the crisis. Syria also has the largest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world with 6.8 million people internally displaced. The 2023 HNO states that humanitarian and economic indicators in the country continue to deteriorate, and many basic services have collapsed. The February earthquakes have further compounded existing needs in a country exacerbated by over 12 years of crisis.

UNHCR supports refugees, IDPs and returnees (refugees and IDPs who have returned to their home areas) by providing assistance to those most in need using a [community-based and area-based approach](#). UNHCR's [community-based approach](#) focuses on community mobilization and building self-reliance. It aims to reduce vulnerabilities and protection risks by providing services through community-based structures and networks. UNHCR's [area-based approach](#) entails working with partners to enhance support in geographic areas where the needs are greatest.

In 2023, UNHCR is working with 29 partners including international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national NGOs.

## Operational Updates

### Earthquake emergency response

A major earthquake of magnitude 7.8 struck south-east Türkiye and northern Syria on 6 February. Another magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck the Türkiye-Syria border on 20 February. The UN estimates that around [8.8 million](#) people in Syria have been affected by the earthquakes. The most affected Governorates are Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Latakia and Tartous.

#### Protection

UNHCR, in partnership with 15 national NGOs, has so far provided 156,000 protection interventions to people in need. This includes 97,600 interventions related to child protection and over 6,800 interventions related to gender-based violence. UNHCR also supports the affected people through psychosocial support, psychological first aid, and legal assistance, among others.

A UN earthquake rapid needs assessment was conducted by enumerators supported by UNHCR and UNICEF in March-April 2023. The results of the assessment highlight that at least 189

communities/neighbourhoods in Aleppo Governorate reported receiving over 500,000 IDPs due to the earthquakes. The assessment also reports that an estimated 69,100 people in assessed communities lost their civil status documentation due to the earthquakes; around 169,600 people are missing housing, land and property (HLP) documentation; 18 per cent of respondents reported HLP concerns such as evictions; 53 per cent reported that women and girls have no access to private spaces in their communities; and 89 per cent reported that their communities had no specialized services for persons with disabilities. These findings will help inform the UN's protection response in these areas.

#### Core relief items

Since the beginning of the emergency, UNHCR has distributed approximately 35,300 core relief item kits (around 505,000 relief items) reaching over 169,600 affected individuals in Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Hama and south Idlib Governorates. The distributed items are high-thermal blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets, plastic sheeting, jerry cans, solar lamps, sleeping mats in addition to winter jackets, winter clothing kits, rubber boots and adult diapers.

#### Shelter

Many temporary collective shelters have closed as families started to return to their homes. Families who still require shelter support are gradually being relocated to mid-term shelters, in line with directives from the local Operations Rooms. UNHCR and partners continue providing support to the affected population in mid-term shelters and in the host community, while aiming to ensure a safe, voluntary and dignified relocation following the closure of temporary shelters.

In Aleppo Governorate, only two temporary collective shelters remained active at the end April and are expected to close in the next weeks. Meanwhile, six mid-term collective shelters had opened with four of them accommodating 152 families. In Latakia Governorate, the number of collective shelters reduced to 12 during the month of April, hosting 1,290 families. A total of 15 collective shelters hosting 475 families and two shelters with 22 families remained operational in Homs and Hama, respectively.

Over the last months, UNHCR and partners have been supporting the adaptation of both the temporary collective shelters and mid-term shelters (two in Latakia and three in Aleppo as of end-April). The adaptation works include installing partitions, lighting, gender-segregated toilets and WASH facilities for privacy, safety and personal hygiene.

In Latakia Governorate, UNHCR completed the delivery of five out of eight Rubb halls in four schools, currently being used as collective shelters. The Rubb halls are

installed in the school yards and will be used as temporary classrooms for children. The installation of the remaining Rubb halls is ongoing.



Installation of a Rubb hall in Latakia to be used as a temporary classroom for children. ©UNHCR/E.Kabbas

### Cash assistance

Emergency cash assistance to affected people by the earthquakes in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama Governorates is provided in line with the recommendations of the Cash Working Group. Disbursements to affected families started in March, and as of the end of April, 314 households (1,575 individuals) out of 7,000 households (35,000 people) in Hama, Latakia and Aleppo had received their cash entitlements while the eligibility of additional families was still being verified for assistance. Priority is given to people residing in the most affected neighbourhoods by the earthquakes with available buildings safety assessment data, while avoiding duplication of assistance with other humanitarian actors.

## Regular response



### Protection

- In line with its community-based protection approach, as of end-April, UNHCR was supporting 114 [community/satellite centres](#) and 107 mobile units across the country. UNHCR also engaged over 2,400 community outreach volunteers in all 14 governorates.
- UNHCR re-opened Al-Ashrafia community centre in Aleppo city which was temporarily closed for repairs following the earthquakes. Out of 31 community centres in Aleppo Governorate, 28 of them are active as of beginning of May (from 27 as of end-March).
- UNHCR also received approval to establish a new community centre in Abu-Kamal, rural Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. This will bring the total number of UNHCR-supported community centres in Deir-ez-Zor Governorate to three.

- In Rural Damascus Governorate, UNHCR's partner is conducting awareness-raising sessions on earthquake hazards for women from the returnee and displaced communities in Beit Saber sub-district.



### Shelter

- Since January, UNHCR has provided and installed a total of 1,729 solar streetlights in underserved communities in five governorates (Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, Latakia and Quneitra) to enhance the protection of those living there.
- UNHCR and its partner started working on the repair of a sewage network in Adra Al-Balad, a high return area in Rural Damascus Governorate. The project, which was identified as an urgent need for returnees, is expected to be completed by July and will benefit over 5,000 people in the community.
- In north-east Syria, UNHCR replaced and installed 7,506 tents in eight different camps between January and April 2023. These tents will support more than 35,000 people living in camps in the north-east.



### Livelihoods

- UNHCR and partners started assessments of the impact of the earthquakes on the income-generating activities of returnees, IDPs and host communities, who received UNHCR's livelihoods assistance before the earthquakes. Initial assessment results indicate that approximately 236 small businesses supported by UNHCR (out of around 500) were affected by the earthquakes in Aleppo, Latakia and Tartous Governorates. The nature of damage includes loss of raw materials and livestock and damage to production equipment, tools and buildings where businesses were set up. UNHCR and partners will continue assessing the situation to support affected families restore their businesses.
- In April, UNHCR and partners delivered entrepreneurship and business training to 100 people in Rural Damascus, Quneitra and Aleppo Governorates. Additional trainings are ongoing. UNHCR plans to support around 2,000 people through these trainings which are mandatory to qualify for the small start-up business support.
- In Aleppo, UNHCR and WFP jointly started restoring the services of a bakery which will serve an estimated 9,500 families.



## Refugee Response

- **Registration:** As of end-April, some 18,700 refugees and asylum-seekers were registered with UNHCR. The majority of the registered refugees are from Iraq and reside primarily in urban areas in Damascus, Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Homs, Tartous and Latakia Governorates. Meanwhile, in April, UNHCR renewed identification cards for more than 300 refugees. The identification cards will protect against *refoulement*, ensure access to basic rights and services, and facilitate freedom of movement.
- **Refugee Status Determination (RSD):** In April, 10 asylum-seeking families comprising 17 individuals were interviewed to determine if they are refugees. During the same period, three families comprising four individuals were recognized as refugees, ensuring that they could be protected from *refoulement* and detention due to irregular stay and could access basic services. UNHCR also provided counselling on the RSD process and individual cases through its hotline. Inquiries received during April were primarily related to the status of individual cases and requests for cash assistance.
- **Cash-Based Assistance:** UNHCR concluded the distribution of its regular multi-purpose cash assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers for the period covering March and April. A total of 5,188 families (15,279 individuals) received multi-purpose cash assistance for these two months.



## Return

- In April, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of 1,388 individual refugees from Türkiye,

Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.<sup>1</sup> This brought the total number of refugee returnees verified or monitored by UNHCR in 2023 to 10,092 – slightly lower than the same reporting period last year (around 12,113 individuals). The impact of the earthquakes on the return trend in 2023 remains to be seen. In total between 2016 and April 2023, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of some 363,886 individual refugees.<sup>2</sup>

## UNHCR Co-led Inter-Agency Sector Updates

- UNHCR leads the inter-agency Protection and Shelter and Non-Food Item (SNFI) Sectors as part of the Syria and Whole of Syria inter-agency response.
- Since the beginning of the earthquake emergency, partners in the Protection Sector have carried out over 749,200 [protection interventions](#) to support people affected by the earthquakes. Protection partners distributed more than 169,400 dignity kits (containing for example soap and sanitary pads). Over 196,900 people attended awareness-raising sessions on protection concerns, 141,250 people benefitted from psychosocial support sessions, and 62,500 people attended psychological first aid sessions. Legal services, including legal counselling, awareness, and legal interventions/assistance have been provided to more than 35,600 people.
- Since the onset of the earthquake response, SNFI Sector partners have [supported](#) more than 276,000 individuals with emergency relief items in different collective shelters and in hosting arrangements, and 169,000 individuals with shelter assistance.

### RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

- [UNHCR Whole of Syria Earthquake Emergency Response – Two-month report](#) (February-March 2023)
- [Response to the main protection concerns in the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes](#) (April 2023)
- [Syria Earthquake Response: Protection Sector Update - Flash Update #15](#) (11 May 2023)
- UNHCR Syria thematic factsheets: [Community Centres](#); [Child Protection](#); [Education](#); [Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response](#); [Legal Assistance](#); [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support](#); [Refugees and Asylum-Seekers](#) (January-December 2022)
- [UNHCR Syria Key Figures & Achievements](#) (January-December 2022)

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**LINKS:** [UNHCR Global Focus](#) | [UNHCR Syria Data Portal](#) | [UNHCR Syria Website](#) | [UNHCR Syria Twitter \(@UNHCRinSYRIA\)](#) | [UNHCR Syria Facebook](#)

<sup>1</sup> Provisional figures pending further verification.

<sup>2</sup> The numbers reported are only those verified or monitored by UNHCR and do not reflect the entire number of returns, which may be significantly higher.