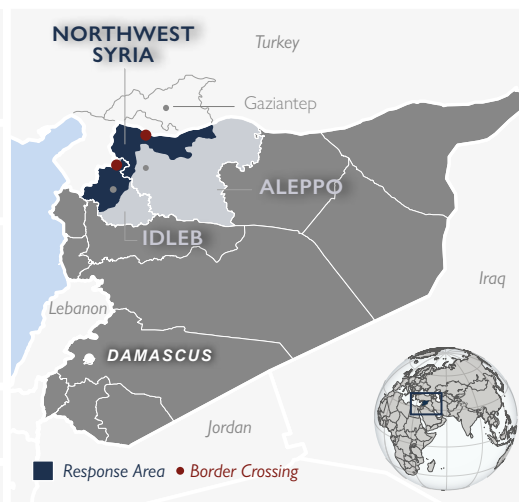


OVERVIEW

NW SYRIAN ARAB REP. 2014–2020 / SYRIAN CRISIS

CRISIS	Syrian Crisis - Northwest Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) - Cross-border Operations based in Gaziantep, Turkey
PEOPLE DISPLACED	5.6 million people within Syria 2.7 million people within Northwest Syria*
HOMES DAMAGED/ DESTROYED	15% damage to the shelters in which people are living 11% of returnees report damage to their shelters 1.5% of residents report damages to their property (Lack of access prevents accurate estimation)*
PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS	5.6 million people within Syria*
LOCATION	Northwest Syria – Aleppo, Idlib and Hama governorates, sub-districts not under Government Control of Syria (Coordination based in Gaziantep, Turkey)
PEOPLE SUPPORTED IN THE RESPONSE	1.8 million people assisted with NFIs 1.1 million people reached with Shelter assistance**
RESPONSE OUTPUTS	123,394 tents installed. 320,124 people supported with infrastructure improvements 163,117 people supported with shelter rehabilitation 292,264 NFI kits distributed Training: Warehouse Management Training, Shelter rehabilitation training, Shelter Solutions Workshop, Site Planning Training and Tutorials, Shelter Modalities, Good Distribution. 2 rounds of assessments on conditions in Collective Shelters Technical Working Group on concrete block shelters COVID-19 and Shelter Response in NW Syria: 2 guidelines updated**



SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSE

In 2015, the Whole of Syria approach was established to ensure that areas not under government control in Syria were receiving assistance. In the Northwest (NW) part of Syria, actors are largely based in South-eastern Turkey, while the Shelter/NFI Cluster is based in Gaziantep, Turkey. Humanitarian partners deliver Shelter and NFI assistance across the border with teams based in Syria and in NW Syria. The entire response is managed remotely, with no access to field locations by international teams. The Cluster, and operational organizations have had to developed tools to work in such an environment.

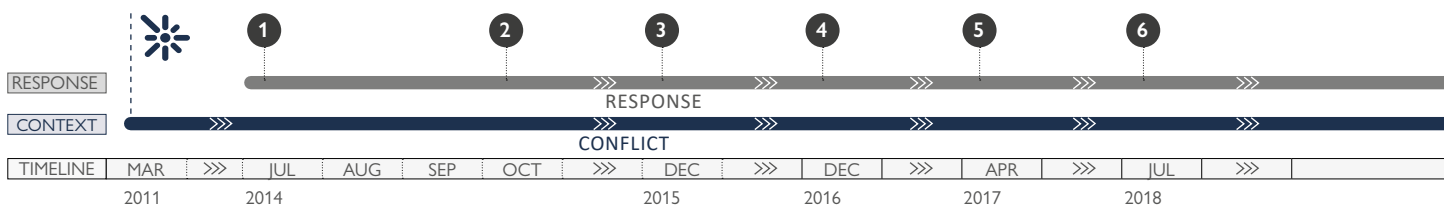
This Response Overview focuses specifically on the NW Syria - Cross-Border Operations response.


* Source: HNAP (Sep 2020) Population Assessment

** Source: Shelter Cluster factsheet (Oct 2020). These figures refer to the period of Jan - Oct 2020




By October 2020, approximately 1.5 million displaced people were living in 1,214 sites in Northwest Syria.



 **Mar 2011:** Syrian Crisis began.

- 1 14 Jul 2014:** Activation of the Shelter/NFI Cluster for Cross Border Operations.
- 2 Oct 2014 :** Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund Pool established.
- 3 Dec 2015 :** Shelter/NFI Cluster has 27 agencies.
- 4 Dec 2016 :** Shelter/NFI Cluster has 45 agencies.
- 5 Apr 2017:** Loss of access to coverage east of Euphrates River in North Syria due to change of control and the military actions in Northeast Syria.
- 6 Jul 2017:** HLP Cross Border Due Diligence Guidelines published.
- 7 Oct 2018:** Shelter Repair and Rehabilitation Guidelines published.
- 8 Dec 2018:** Shelter/NFI Cluster has 71 partners reporting activities despite decreasing areas of intervention.
- 9 Sep 2019:** Shelter/NFI Cluster and (HNAP) Situational Overview of Shelter Conditions in NW Syria.

 **Dec 2019-Feb 2020 :** December 2019 Escalation of Hostilities

BACKGROUND

Following conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), the Whole of Syria approach was approved by the UN Security Council in 2014. It was established to ensure that much needed humanitarian assistance would reach the areas of Syria not under the control of the government.

Partners working in shelter established teams based in several cities around Gaziantep in southeastern Turkey and within Syria. In order to improve coordination, a Shelter/NFI Cluster team was established in Gaziantep, Turkey. The Shelter/NFI Cluster's activities are conducted remotely making coordination a complex task.

Geographically, Northwest Syria is known for its agriculture and for being the principal wheat production zone of the country. Many informally settled IDP sites are now on lands which were previously agricultural. Consistent with the surrounding regions of Turkey and Syria, the geography includes desert-like conditions and rolling hills. The highest point in the area stands at over 1,200m. Temperatures fall below zero in winter.

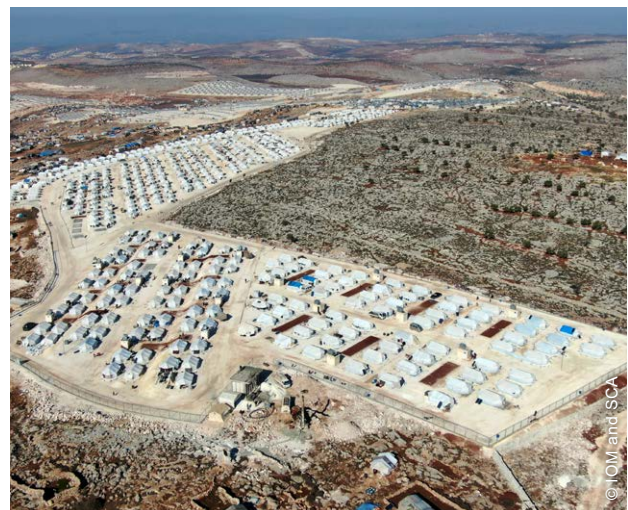
TEN YEARS LATER

After ten years of conflict and forced displacement, as of summer 2021, there were more than 2.7 million people internally displaced in Northwest Syria, including more than one million people newly displaced between January and February 2020. Due to the ever-decreasing geographical area lived in by displaced people, it is difficult to find sustainable shelter solutions for displaced people. When the Shelter/NFI Cluster was first activated, Shelter/NFI Cluster partners operated in 12 governorates inside Syria.

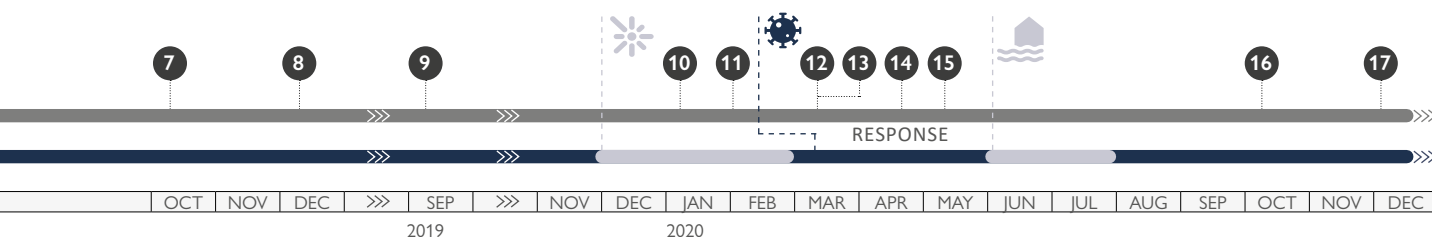
By 2020, this coverage has shrunk to portions of Hama, Latakia, Aleppo and Idlib governorates.

At the beginning of 2020, much of the aid distributed would pass through two critical border crossings from Turkey into Northwest Syria: Bab el Hawa and Bab al Salaam. In July of 2020, the UN Security Council approved the extension of the resolution of Cross Border Humanitarian Assistance only at the Bab el Hawa crossing point.

This has added additional logistic complications to the delivery of humanitarian assistance into Syria and further reduced the geographical coverage of Shelter/NFI Cluster partners. The complexity of the shelter needs has also increased as displacement has become protracted.



A minority of sites have been formally planned, with the majority of IDP sites having been self-settled.



- 10 Jan 2020:** Shelter/NFI Cluster Team works with HNAP to ensure that data on shelter typologies are collected alongside data on population.
- 11 Feb 2020:** Shelter/NFI Cluster starts actively engaging in site planning.
- 11 Mar 2020:** WHO declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.
- 12 Mar 2020:** First publication of COVID-19 Guidelines for Shelter Interventions in NW Syria.
- 13 Mar-Apr 2020:** Gap analysis tool for tent allocation is developed and tested.
- 14 15 Apr 2020:** Syrian Common Humanitarian Fund meeting with partners implementing CCCM, Shelter, and WASH programs in informal settlements.
- 15 May 2020:** Technical Working Group looking at durable shelter solutions particularly on concrete block shelters is established.
- Jun-Jul 2020:** Flooding accelerates the needs of IDPs settled in informal settlements.
- 16 Oct 2020:** Shelter Household Assessment conducted.
- 17 Dec 2020:** Fire Prevention and Response Guidance Note.

By October 2020, in Northwest Syria approximately 1.5 million displaced people were living in 1,214 sites, and 28% of displaced people were living in tents. 12% of the shelters (excluding tents and makeshift shelters) are considered to have some sort of damage and 31% of people in Northwest Syria reported being unable to afford repairs to their shelters. Nearly half of the people (44%) stated that lack of space in shelter was as an issue.¹

Most of the newly displaced people do not manage to take their belongings and necessary items such as mattresses, kitchen equipment and blankets when they move. Many of them have lost their personal documents and IDs and they have no access to the government offices to issue new ones.

DIGNIFIED SHELTER

After years of living in tents and being exposed to flooding, winter cold, and now the COVID-19 pandemic, humanitarian partners and some IDPs themselves have started to construct alternative shelters that are better suited to situations of protracted displacement. The Shelter/NFI Cluster reports that while not officially endorsing this construction, approximately 80% of the largest site, Atmeh Camp (population 33,000 people) is now built up with concrete block houses while about 20% of people are still living in emergency shelter (tents) and makeshift shelters. 6,000 Refugee Housing Units (including wider infrastructure and settlement planning) have also been implemented.

The findings from Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) reports also indicate that IDPs found these longer-lasting alternatives to be appropriate options. The PDM reports

¹ Shelter Conditions in Syria (Oct 2020)

suggest that this solution allows for flexibility of use, efficiency of design, and could better withstand hazards. Moreover, having two separate rooms and private toilets/showers help to mitigate the risk of GBV. It is considered as a very cost-effective solution considering the lifespan and the flexibility of the design that could be adapted to meet family needs. Materials used in these shelters could be incorporated into longer term recovery shelter options, or easily removed.

WINTER

In winter stoves, fuel, blankets, winter clothing, and basic insulation are among the primary needs of the displaced. During the escalation of displacement during December 2019 - March 2020, news media reported deaths due to winter-related incidents including fires in tents and hypothermia. In the absence of access to and affordability of fuel, partners have reported that households resort to burning old clothes and trash in order to keep themselves warm during the winter. These coping mechanisms create additional risks to IDPs such as fires in informal settlements and respiratory harm.

LIMITATIONS ON SPACE

With the ever-shrinking geography where the Shelter/NFI Cluster is coordinating, there is not enough land available to accommodate IDPs. Many IDPs shelter in public buildings and with friends or relatives due to the limited shelter solutions and resources available to cover the significant multi-sectoral needs. Overcrowding and lack of basic infrastructure services such as essential water and sanitation are commonly reported as challenges.

NATIONAL SHELTER(-NFI) STRATEGY

Currently, the Shelter/NFI Cluster strategy in Northwest Syria focuses on several main objectives:

For newly displaced people: Provision of timely, targeted and appropriate shelter assistance and relief items. This includes the provision, distribution or installation of tents and emergency shelter kits or materials to displaced people in temporary sites such as managed camps, and spontaneous sites.

For newly displaced people and host communities: Rehabilitation, repair or upgrade of existing shelters that are below minimum standards in collective shelters, unfinished buildings, damaged building or any other type of emergency shelter space to ensure that shelters meet minimum sphere standards.

For protracted IDPs in camps: Depending on the conditions, Shelter/NFI Cluster partners distribute shelter kits to make shelters weatherproof, replace damaged tents when necessary or upgrade the shelters especially for those staying in tents for extended periods.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Core to the approach of working remotely is the need to build the ability of implementing organizations to deliver. The Shelter/NFI Cluster has delivered several trainings and capacity building events for implementing partner organizations to ensure that the appropriate modalities and standards are used when implementing shelter projects. Settlement planning is such an important issue that at one stage two dedicated planners were seconded to the Shelter/NFI Cluster. A series of trainings were conducted and also are now available for all on the Global Shelter Cluster Youtube channel.² Regular coaching is provided to partners, and a service is offered to remotely review the site plans developed by Shelter/NFI Cluster partner agencies working in the field.

² Dimensioning of drainage SWMM (Youtube video)



Cast iron heating stoves are among other items distributed to support winterization.

CASH

The Shelter/NFI Cluster also worked closely with the Cash Working Group to ensure efficiency of modalities. In April 2020, the results of a Cash Feasibility Assessment for NW Syria were published. In its technical guidance, the Shelter/NFI Cluster published a 'go, no-go' matrix on choices of modalities, and training was organized for partners on shelter modalities in December 2020. Cash has also been used for winterization.

FLOODS AND FIRES IN SITES.

In 2020 the Shelter/NFI Cluster SAG worked on two publications to address floods and fires. The first one was a note on Flood Classification levels and their impact on IDP sites and which actions shelter actors could take to alleviate their conditions.³ The second publication was created jointly with the CCCM Cluster on how to mitigate the risk of fires within IDP settlements. Fires increased in 2020 due to the overcrowded conditions within settlements and lack of awareness about how to respond when cook stove fires became out of control.⁴

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Government counterparts or authorities in Northwest Syria do not exist. There are multiple so-called local authorities within the locations where shelter partners implement. While coordinating with them, partners frequently seek the guidance of the Shelter/NFI Cluster Team and have to liaise with other Clusters such as Protection, CCCM, WASH, Education, and others depending on the theme to ensure that implementation is in line with humanitarian principles and that it will do no further harm in the recovery of the displaced or returnees.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Remote context: Due to the remote nature of the response and the fact that the Shelter/NFI Cluster is coordinating from Gaziantep, Turkey, there are no opportunities to observe shelter programs in the field. This requires the Cluster to be very dependent on several sources of information shared by Shelter/NFI Cluster partners including photos, post distribution monitoring, third-party monitoring reports, activity reporting, Camp Management and Camp Coordination alerts, and Shelter specific assessments.

Human Resources and Capacity: Given the enormity of the needs, the number of Shelter/NFI Cluster partners, unpredictable nature of emergencies, and the need to be able to quickly identify gaps and ensure non duplication of Shelter coverage, a significant dedicated Cluster coordination team is required.

Overcrowding and lack of land: Due to the ever-shrinking territory in NW Syria, IDPs are faced with very limited options both in urban areas and informal settlements. This

³ Flood Classifications and Effects on IDP Sites in NWS (Aug 2020)

⁴ Fire Prevention and Response Guidance Note (Dec 2020)

has contributed to lack of adequate conditions which has been heightened due to COVID-19. Shelter and CCCM Clusters have worked to put in place due diligence standards to validate land ownership before, during and after an intervention, and organizations are required to ensure as much legal certainty about tenure as possible for IDPs in these sites (the “secure enough” approach).

Uncertainty about future of operations: The Shelter/NFI Cluster was first activated in 2014 when the UN Security Council approved the Whole of Syria approach. This original mandate has been put to annual votes for extensions. The ability to deliver humanitarian aid through the Border Crossings is a critical element for coordination, but there is some uncertainty about the crossings, which require Security Council Resolutions to remain open. As a result many agencies work on 6 months or 1-year planning, assuming that the humanitarian access will be short-lived, this has also translated into difficulties in ensuring predictability in the response.

Need for durable shelter solutions in this unpredictable environment: Given the protracted nature of the conflict and the long period of the crisis, the Shelter/NFI Cluster has recognized that durable shelter solutions are a need for many of these IDPs who have been exposed to the elements. Many shelter solutions that IDPs prefer are beyond the scope of funding of humanitarian donors, while the permanent shelter solutions that IDPs are implementing themselves fall outside of the Shelter/NFI Cluster’s solutions.

Limitation of the funding and capacity requirements create additional burdens on the humanitarian agencies to address the needs completely.

Settlement planning: Many of the sites have been established by the IDPs themselves, so it may be difficult to improve infrastructure situation and develop access to services given the limited resources and available land.

WIDER IMPACTS

Beyond Syria, there are a number of tools that the Cross-Border Shelter/NFI Cluster has created to make the shelter response more efficient in other contexts:

- Tools for assessing the conditions of shelters particularly by non-technical enumerators.
- A gap analysis tool to better coordinate with other partners providing the same type of assistance.
- All sectors were provided with third-party monitoring which provided some feedback on the outcome of programs. This was a useful way to get data on the outcome of Shelter and NFI programming and inform guidance and capacity building of partners.



Infrastructure upgrading (for example to reduce flood risk) in IDP sites improves living conditions for site residents and also reduces the likelihood that access for humanitarian assistance will be disrupted.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Remote coordination requires data and the ability to analyse that data into a coherent response in order to cover the needs.
- Human Resources are a key aspect of ensuring quality shelter coordination.
- In protracted situations, there is a need to ensure up-to-date technical guidance to ensure it matches information and feedback received from affected populations.
- Due to the remote setting, constant capacity building not only about technical shelter aspects, but also for information management tools for reporting is required.
- The long period of crisis in Northwest Syria and the changing context requires more resources to meet the shelter needs.
- A multi-sectoral and integrated approach has to be considered when delivering aid in IDP sites.

