



27th February to 18th March

# North West Syria Situation Report No. 5

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## Situation Overview

- On 5th and 6th March UNICEF Executive Director, Ms. Henrietta Fore came on a mission to Turkey and to the Cross-Border Operation from Gaziantep, as the last leg of her visit to the UNICEF Syria operation, advocating for the rights of children of Syria. ED Fore's mission was accompanied by the Regional Directors of MENARO and ECARO, Mr. Ted Chaiban and Ms. Afshan Khan. During her visit, ED Fore met with Government Officials from Turkey, humanitarian actors, the UN Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator, and attended trans-shipment operations from Turkey to North West Syria (NWS) from Bab Al Hawa.
- On 3rd March, at the border with Syria, in Turkey, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock provided a briefing on the latest developments in northwest Syria to a delegation from the United States including US Ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft, US Special Envoy for Syria James Jeffrey and US Ambassador to Turkey David Satterfield, as well as Turkey's UN Envoy Feridun Sinirlioglu. The USG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator highlighted the priority needs of the estimated 2.8 million people requiring humanitarian assistance in north-west Syria and reiterated the commitment of the UN to stand by the people of Syria. UNICEF also briefed the delegation on trans-shipments of nutrition supplies and the situation in NW Syria. During the same visit, the US Ambassador to the UN announced that the US will provide an additional US\$ 108 million in humanitarian aid for the people in Syria.
- Following months of escalations in hostilities and conflict in southern Idlib, southern and western Aleppo, the Governments of Turkey and Russia reached a ceasefire agreement on 5th March. The ceasefire as led to a significant reduction of violence and hostilities on the ground. The agreement stipulated the establishment of a security corridor north and south of the M4 highway. It further agreed on joint Russian and Turkish patrols along the M4. The overall situation in Idlib and surrounding areas remained relatively calm, limited and intermittent armed clashes between Government forces and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) have been reported in front lines areas in eastern rural Idlib and western rural Aleppo. No reports of civilian casualties or impact on civilian lives and infrastructure.
- On 15th March, the first joint patrol of Russian and Turkish forces along the M4 highway in southern Idlib governorate was reportedly unable to proceed beyond Tromba, shortly after the patrol departed Saraqab heading west. This was reportedly due to the presence of obstructions along the route, including a civilian sit-in demonstration against the presence of Russian forces on the M4 that reportedly began on 13 March.

- Displacement in NWS:** Between 1st December 2019 and 8th March 2020, a total of **186,458** families/**959,258** individuals- 80% children and women- has been displaced in NWS. The majority of the displaced have moved to Dana, Azaz, Maaret Tamsrin, Afrin and Salqin sub-districts. Nearly 400,000 individuals displaced to camps, and collective centres, while 23,000 IDPs sought shelter in schools.
- COVID-19:** The Government of Turkey has confirmed the first death on 17th evening with 98 confirmed cases, according to media and government sources. Movement of commercial and relief transshipments from Turkey into Syria continued. Further, educational services were suspended for a period of one week beginning 15th March, in Idleb, Aleppo, Hama, and Lattakia governorates by their respective Educational Directorates. In addition, on 15th March, the Menbij Religion Office issued a circular suspending until further notice Friday prayers and congregational prayers in all mosques, all religious gatherings and social events, and all religious lessons and Quran lessons in mosques. Further, on 18th March, all individual crossings at the Bab Al-Salam border crossing were suspended until further notice. This includes all individuals including traders, journalists and Syrian nationals who wanted to cross into Syria for the Ramadan period. Commercial and humanitarian transshipments are not affected by the suspension and will continue as planned.
- COVID-19 Preparedness:** The medical sector in parts of NWS (Health Directorates in Idlib and Aleppo) reportedly introduced a precautionary early-warning system to detect possible cases of COVID-19, coordinated between all hospitals and medical centres in northwest Syria. Reportedly, one COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) virus detection kit is available in Idleb city, and a doctor has been trained on its use. The response plan for COVID-19 containment in NWS reportedly further includes the preparation of three hospitals to receive and treat patients suspected of being infected with COVID-19, in Idleb city and Salqin in Idleb governorate and Daret Azza in western Aleppo governorate. Reportedly, the Idleb Health Directorate announced that all medical centres in northwest Syria will prepare quarantine rooms for suspected cases of COVID-19.
- WHO** is reportedly planning to start coronavirus testing in areas not controlled by GoS, as it raised concern about the spread of the pandemic to NWS, where the health system has been devastated by the conflict. A multi-sectoral plan for COVID-19 led by WHO is currently under development. UNICEF and partners continue to respond to the displacements in northern Idlib and northern Aleppo despite all the challenges including insecurity presented by the presence of unexploded ordinance and Corona virus.



## Programme Response

### WASH

**Response:** Since December 2019 to date, UNICEFWASH response has reached **680,487** people in host communities and **630,637** internally displaced people.

Recently restored water stations are supporting **680,487** host communities and **408,637** IDPs in Armanaz, Dana, Kafar Nubul, Sarmada, Jisr Al-Shaghor and Ma'arrat Tamasrin in Idlib governorate; and in Afrin, Atareb and Azaz districts in Aleppo governorate.

A total of **78,119** internally displaced people (IDPs) received water trucking and solid waste management services. Over **85,409** newly IDPs benefited from the construction/installation of new latrines, as most of the existing public/community latrines are overcrowded. Further, about **276,673** people benefited from the desludging, maintenance and repair of latrines.

**325,061** people served with solid waste management interventions including collection and disposal of waste. Water quality improvement and provision of water purifying agents such as aqua-tabs and HTH served **409,746** people. In addition; over **123,870** people received hygiene kits and jerry cans for house-hold water storage.

### COVID-19 NWS Response Plan

Under the auspices of the Health Cluster/World Health Organization Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Preparedness and Response Plan for Northwest Syria (NWS), and under the second pillar of the plan - Risk Communication and Community Engagement - UNICEF has taken practical actions at programme implementation and cluster levels, noting that its crucial to ensure that people in need in North West Syria are well informed at community and household levels on the prevention and mitigation measures.

#### UNICEF Programmatic/Cluster Measures for COVID-19

- Development and finalization of Communication for Development (C4D) and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material (available in English and Arabic for the use inside Syria).
- Development of **35,000** leaflets, **5,000** Stickers, 5,000 posters. Material is expected to be trans-shipped on 20th March to NWS and distributed among WASH partners for further dissemination to beneficiaries during the next distribution of 20,000 hygiene kits in IDP camps.
- A video has been developed/produced and translated in Arabic. It will shortly be shared with partners for further dissemination inside NWS.
- Raising the awareness on the disease among Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) and mobile teams
- RRTs will be used as a Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) element in the communities they are covering particularly for nutrition and health.



Further, on the way forward, the Child Protection programme in line with the Child Protection Sub Cluster is looking at modalities of implementation in the activity areas that will be possible while maintaining/upholding prevention and mitigation measures including the following:

- Trainings and meetings that had been foreseen for this period will take place via web-ex and online also within Syria (e.g. upcoming MRM training).
- **Partners are taking considerations for implementing in smaller groups**, reaching beneficiaries in households, and minimizing gatherings and delivery through centres.
- **Possibilities of delivering certain interventions online**. Internet subscriptions for families with children to enable them to continue certain structured interventions and complete cycles to be considered by implementing partners.
- **Psychosocial support and case management** preparing to develop targeted interventions towards the effects and implications of COVID-19 amongst children and their parents/caregivers.
- Humanitarian Funding including the Third Reserve Allocation allowed for key CP partners to distribute CP supplies. Building on this possibility, the CP section has marked Psychosocial Support (PSS) kits as one of the priority items as it provides for safer contribution to the wellbeing of children. further this item allows suitability to the current restrictive environment.
- Hygiene items and IEC materials to be provided to community centers, Women and Girls Safety Spaces and Child Friendly Spaces.
- **Child Protection Awareness sessions with focus on prevention of COVID-19 as well as issues related to social stigma and isolation.**

## Nutrition

**Response:** Since 1 December, overall lifesaving nutrition reached **123,382** pregnant, lactating mother and children under the age of five years, which represents **46%** of the targeted scale up for nutrition programme until July. This represents **8%** increase in coverage compared to the week of 11th March. UNICEF managed to reach **90,000** mothers and children through its **10** partners. UNICEF is supporting **52** integrated Rapid Response teams (RRTs) out of the functional **65** Rapid Response teams. The organization has boosted the response with additional **40** RRTs starting from next week. This will increase the reach to **364,000** children and mothers.

Out of the total **1,883** children between **6-59** months screened; **85,485** children were found to be acutely malnourished, and potential mortality was averted among **418** severely malnourished children due to timely detection and referral to appropriate treatment facility. UNICEF further treated **973** children out of the identified **1,465** moderately malnourished children using simplified guidelines for humanitarian situations. A total of **37,897** pregnant and lactating mothers screened for acute malnutrition with potential morbidities reversed among **2,724**.

A total of **15,487** newly displaced children between the age of **6-59** months, pregnant and lactating mothers were prevented from becoming acutely malnourished with the provision of High Energy Biscuits (HEB). Additional **84,272** mothers and children were equally prevented from becoming acutely malnourished through the distribution of Lipid Based Nutrients (LNS) and micronutrient supplementation.

Promotion of optimal infant feeding and caring practices reached **23,782** mothers. There is a slight decrease in the activities that requires intimate contact with mothers and children likely because of COVID-19 precautions. All UNICEF partners were given guidance based on WHO recommendations for protecting themselves and their beneficiaries from any potential disease transmission.

## Health

**Response:** Since 1st December to date, UNICEF under the routine immunization programme, provided services to a total of **30,933** children under 1 year of age received BCG, **28,199** received DTP1, **24,778** received DTP3, **27,956** received IPV1 and **29,085** received first dose of Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine.

The polio campaign is planned for the second week of April in all accessible areas of NWS. The Syrian Immunization Group (SIG) Technical Committee is currently working on the micro-planning considering the changes in catchment areas and the targets due to change of territorial control. UNICEF has provided **920,000** doses of oral polio vaccines, which are currently in cold rooms in northwest Syria.

UNICEF, with its partners in NWS, continued to support and reach communities with services through health centers and mobile clinics. A total of **38,130** outpatient consultations were attended to in fixed health facilities and mobile clinics. **17,465** of whom were children and 20,665 Pregnant Lactating mothers (PLWs). Further, a total of **30,192** caregivers were reached with health promotion messages through different community sessions.

## Education

**Response:** During the period from 1st December to end of February **97,343** children were reached with education services.

During the past weeks, at least **9,872** IDPs and Host Communities, **9,540** of whom were children including **4,815** girls were reached with education interventions in Aleppo and Idleb governorates (Aghtrin, Bennsh, Dana, Harim, Idleb, Jandairis, Maaret Tamsrin sub-districts). Further, a total **5,843** IDP children, including **2,977** girls, were provided with access to formal education including bursaries to support 9th and 12th Grades examinations and provision of learning materials.

A total of **2,771** children benefited from Education Supplies including **43** Teacher's Kits, **48** Recreation Kits, **2,729** school bags and **14** Schools-in-a-box. In addition, a total of **592** Children (**296** girls) attended remedial classes. Further, 2190 Children included **1,037** girls were provided with Self-Learning Programmes. A total of **1,011** IDPs and Host Communities including **915** Children were reached with "Back to Learning Campaigns".

**Impact of hostilities /COVID 19 on Education:** Partners reported temporary suspensions of learning activities during February and March in Idleb due to the security situation, following directives from the Education Directorate. Additionally, as a precautionary measure against the spread of **COVID-19**, educational services were suspended for a period of one week beginning 15th March in Idleb and Aleppo governorates based on the decision of the respective Education Directorates. The number of school children impacted by this suspension is **429,593**.

## Child Protection

**Response:** Since the commencement of the escalation of hostilities in December and up to end of February a total of **75, 837** people including **26,800** IDPs and **49,037** host communities were reached with child protection services.

Between 27th February and up to 17th March, a total of **17,338** IDPs and Host Communities were served by UNICEF partners. **12,973** of whom were IDPs and **20,921** were children reached with Child Protection, GBV and Mine Risk Education interventions in Aleppo, Idleb governorates (Afrin, Al Bab, Atareb, A'zaz, Dana, Daret Azza, Darkosh, Haritan, Idleb, Jandairis, Janudiyeh, Jarablus, Jebel Saman, Maaret Tamsrin, Mare', and Courqeena sub-districts).

This period has been characterized by the spread of **COVID-19** and its declaration as a global crisis. Mobile teams have significantly decreased activities and eventually suspending mobile outreach since 16th March. Child Friendly Spaces (CFSs) and Women and Girls Safe Spaces have suspended structured activities that required gatherings of large groups. This included psychosocial support, parenting programmes and community awareness sessions. Individual case management continued to be implemented, however, to a lower rate in most locations. The referral system has been affected as most services in the area including education and health have been severely affected.

**Impact of COVID 19 on Child Protection:** Following the announcement on 15th March by local authorities on a one week suspension of schools and public gatherings, it is estimated that in the last 3 days approximately **1,977** IDPs and Host Communities (1668 children) have been affected by the suspension of activities in Afrin, Jindairis, Atareb and Batbu due to **COVID-19** mitigating measures.

In this reporting period and despite restrictions and need for alternative modalities for implementation, **9,146 IDPs and Host communities (4,868 children)** received awareness raising on child protection issues. Partners have run parallel sessions with smaller groups and included awareness and prevention of COVID-19 in the sessions with practical hygiene examples for children and parents/caregivers be able to replicate habits at homes.

Mine Risk Education reached **2,455** IDPs and Host Communities. Partners resorted to organize their sessions in smaller groups in wider spaces wherever was possible. A total of **4,883** children (**2,419** boys and **2,464** girls) from IDPs and host communities participated in Psychosocial Support activities. Further, **3,574** IDPs and Host Communities (**736** children) provided with GBV activities including awareness raising, Life skills development activities, Vocational training and Psychosocial Support.

A total of **36** field staff (**17** female) trained on risk education, community-based child protection interventions, foundations of child protection and specialized child protection services.

At least **1,154** children have benefited these past two weeks from the distribution of **19** Recreational Kits and Adolescent kits in NWS.

## NFIs

**Response:** Between 1st December 2019 and 17th March 2020; UNICEF and its partners provided winter assistance (winter clothes and warm blankets) to **106,168** girls and boys in Northwest Syria. More than 90% of whom were children who have recently displaced due to the escalation of conflict. By end of February, **93,010** children received necessary winter items to shield them from harsh winter weather. Assistance is currently ongoing with plans to reach 16,842 additional children during March.

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