



Earthquake in Syria

Rapid assessment report- Latakia, Aleppo and Homs

16th February 2023

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the findings of a rapid assessment which has been conducted in the immediate aftermath of the massive earthquakes that took place in Syria and Turkiye on Monday 6th February. A multisectoral team travelled to the affected areas (Latakia, Jableh, Aleppo and Hama) between the 7th and 12th February and collected information from UNRWA staff, beneficiaries, government and other stakeholder representatives.

1.2 Background

In the early hours of Monday morning 6th February, two major earthquakes struck south-western Turkiye and northern Syria, with hundreds of subsequent aftershocks. These have resulted in extensive damage across the affected region with the death toll now exceeding over 40,000 and continuing to rise.

The earthquake has impacted thousands of Palestine refugees who are living in four camps that were directly impacted by the earthquakes and aftershocks in Aleppo, Latakia, and Hama. Whilst it is difficult at this stage to precisely establish the number of People in Need (PIN), over 500 houses to date have been confirmed as having been either partially, severely or completely destroyed, forcing hundreds of families to seek alternative accommodation, either in emergency collective shelters or with relatives. Accordingly, UNRWA's approach has been to consider all 12,847 families (43,044 individuals) that are living in the affected areas as having been impacted whether directly (through physical harm and displacement due to material damage to their buildings) or indirectly (due to loss of earning or the need to support affected relatives).

As of 16 February, 1,414 deaths have been reported by the Syrian Ministry of Health, which includes 3 Palestine refugees in Neirab, 8 in Latakia and 9 in Jableh. 2,349 injuries have also been reported to date, including 9 Palestine refugees in Latakia and 2 in Neirab.

20 houses have been completely destroyed, 54 partially damaged and 194 with cracks in Latakia and Jableh, 14 are severely and 168 partially damaged in Neirab, 50 partially damaged in Aleppo city, 3 in Ein el-Tal Camp and 5 severely and 7 partially damaged in Hama. 13 UNRWA installations have been reported as damaged across the north (including 3 schools and 1 library, 1 Training Centre, 1 CBO, 1 Health Centre, 1 Clinic, 1 RSSP Office, 1 Distribution Centre and 2 Microfinance Offices). On 15th February, UNRWA's Engineering Department completed its detailed assessment of all the Agency's installations that were affected and is preparing the Bills of Quantities in order to commence with repairs.

1.2 Response

In the immediate aftermath, hundreds of Palestine refugees (together with several hundred Syrians) took shelter in the Al Khairiyeh School in Latakia, with upwards of 1,000 attending for breakfast and hot dinners on a daily basis during the first week. At the beginning of the second week, all were relocated to government-owned schools in the vicinity where they will remain until they can return safely to their homes, and UNRWA provided these collective shelters with blankets, mattresses, mats, cleaning tools as well as continuing with hot meals. Temporary accommodation was also made available in an UNRWA school in Neirab where families (mainly women and children) sheltered for fear of their homes collapsing during the night.

UNRWA immediately mobilized its response, providing NFIs from its (albeit limited) available stocks, food assistance (with help from local NGOs) to displaced families across the areas, together with medical and relief services from the installations which could still operate normally. PSS and other paramedical supports are also being offered, together with recreational activities for children and young people where possible.

UNRWA teams have also been closely involved in damage assessments for refugee houses (working with Engineering Syndicates, who are authorized to do so), as well as identifying other needs through beneficiary outreach. The UNRWA health centers have been operational since the 7th Feb. UNRWA response across all programmes and fields have been evolving in line with the needs of the refugees.

1.3 Funding

As the scale and extent of the disaster quickly became evident, a flash appeal for an initial amount of US\$ 2.7m covering 3 months of needs, was finalized and shared with OCHA on 7th February for inclusion as part of the wider resource mobilization effort. As an initial measure, available funds of USD 0.5 million from SFO's EA were made available to support UNRWA's immediate responses in the affected areas.

1.4 Recommended Responses

The number of Palestine refugees in need of assistance can be summarized as follows:

- 7,734 families (26,680 individuals) in Aleppo
- 3,095 families (9,451 individuals) in Latakia and Jableh; and
- 2,018 families (6,913 individuals) in Hama

The key responses which should be treated as a priority by the Agency include the following:

1.4.1 Repairs to Shelters and UNRWA installations

1. Assessment of the affected buildings (partially damaged/ with cracks etc.) to determine the resources needed for repairs (in coordination with the Engineering Syndicates)
2. Allocation of cash supports (house rent cash subsidies, and shelter repair grants) for families to support them to cover rental, repair costs
3. Detailed assessment of partially damaged UNRWA installations and allocation of resources to expedite their rehabilitation

1.4.2 Health

1. Provision of counselling and therapeutic support by health care professionals to individuals and families
2. Procurement and (re-)stocking of medications
3. Coverage for the cost of hospital referrals and patient subsidies (as needed) to affected individuals
4. Hygiene audits and health promotion campaigns to mitigate outbreak risks (especially cholera)

1.4.3 Education

1. Convening of PTA meetings in all affected schools to engage and share information
2. Provision of counselling sessions for children and assessment of children with heightened stress/ trauma symptoms for referral for health supports as needed
3. Development of printed education materials for dissemination if schools remain closed on a prolonged basis
4. Development and implementation of strategies to promote learning recovery
5. Delivery of hygiene awareness programmes for those living in temporary shelters, in coordination with other agencies

1.4.4 RSSP

1. Provision of once-off cash assistance of USD 64 per month per family in the affected areas for a period of three months (in line with the recommendation of the Cash Working Group for Syria)

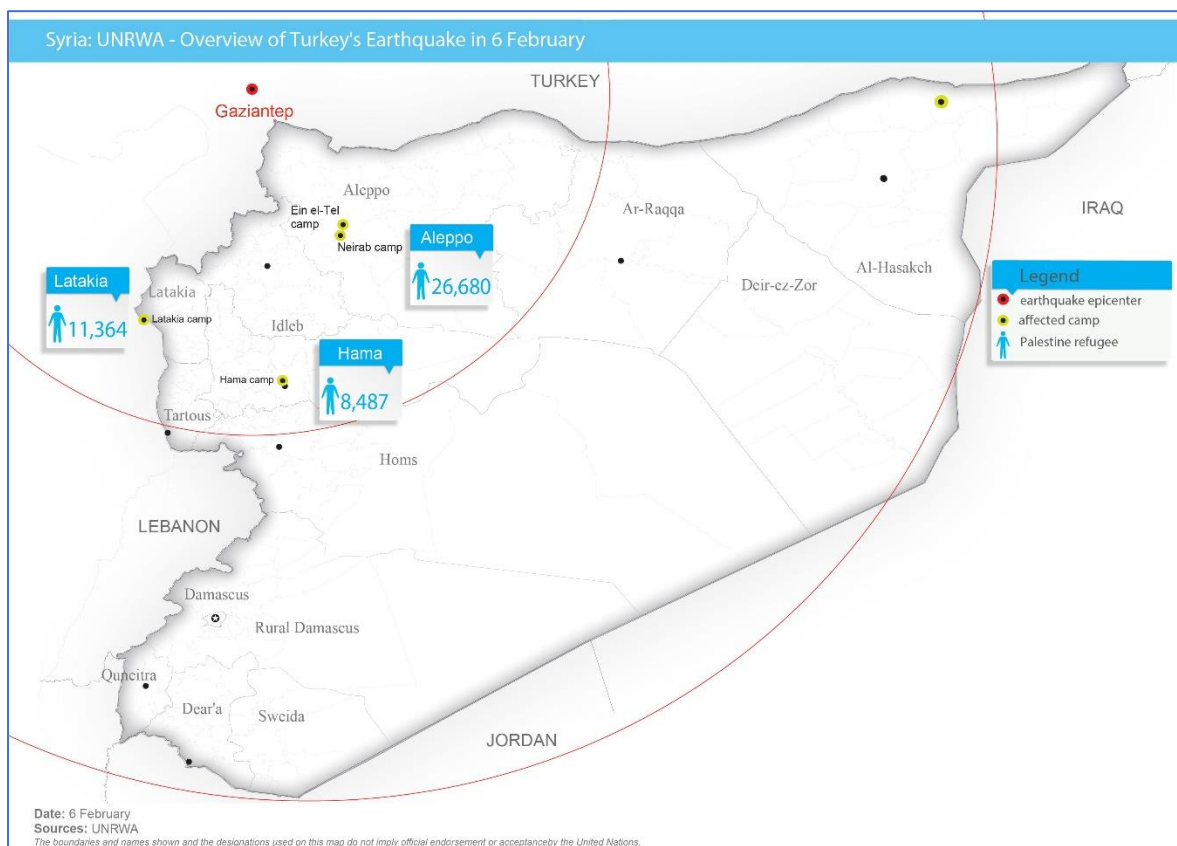
2. Expedite distribution of food assistance (as part of the emergency appeal) to families in the affected areas

1.4.5 Protection

1. Continuous monitoring of protection environment, involving Area Protection Committees and those representing vulnerable groups. Work with other agencies to assess conditions in the temporary shelters
2. Internal and external referrals for protection cases between programmes and specialist organisations as needed
3. Updating records for families (due to loss of documentation) and ensuring beneficiaries are not denied services owing to lack of documentation
4. Focused support to orphaned children
5. Promotion of PSEA messages in UNRWA installations being used as emergency shelters
6. Risk communication around earthquakes to the communities, including for school children

1.4.6 Psychosocial Support for UNRWA Staff

1. Activate peer counselling support
2. Identify staff counsellors and share their contact details with the staff in the affected areas. These Counsellors will be identified from the education programme
3. Facilitate group feedback and therapy sessions for the staff in all three locations



2. Background and current context

- Several parts of Syria (north, central and coastal areas) and Türkiye experienced earthquakes on the 6th February 2023 and the areas continued to experience aftershocks in the immediate aftermath and days after. As per the assessment of the HCT, Syria, it is estimated that at least 7.2 million people have been affected in the country¹. This includes communities in the most affected governorates of Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, and Idleb, as well as some of the other communities.
- As of 10th Feb 2022, Govt of Syria has announced that “the affected areas in the governorates of Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Idleb as a result of the earthquake that hit them are considered disaster areas, and the consequent effects of that.”. Later that week, the Government of Syria also announced facilitated entry of goods and international experts into the country, to support earthquake response.
- No UNRWA staff has been killed or physically injured. Some of the staff have lost their close family members or relatives, both inside Syria as well as living in Turkey.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-humanitarian-country-team-hct-coordinated-response-flash-update-8-earthquake-13-february-2023>

- d. On 9th Feb 2023, Office of the Foreign Assets Control (Govt of USA) has exempted donations and transfer of funds to Syria from sanctions. This is expected to help support humanitarian assistance, especially from private entities. However, it is to be seen how this will help facilitate immediate response interventions². Several donors have stated positions around not supporting rehabilitation interventions in Syria and it is to be seen whether this will impact on funding.
- e. Palestine refugees living in Central and North areas have been affected. UNRWA has operational presence in the North and Central areas through offices in Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Latakia, and providing services to refugees living in camps in the affected areas (Latakia, Neirab, Ein el Tal, and Hama camps) as well as those living in the neighboring areas (Aleppo city, Rural Neirab areas in North and, Jableh and Tartous towns in the central area).
- f. Other areas also affected. For example, collapse of a 4-story building in the Harasta location in Damascus on the 8th February, killing two individuals. Similarly, while not visible in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake on the 6th Feb, cracks have been noticed in several UNRWA installations across the Syria field in the subsequent days. Many families in the camps are reporting seeing cracks on their houses several days after the initial quake.
- g. As of 16th Feb, and as per available information, the total number of Palestine refugees who have lost their lives is 20 (3 male adults, 7 female adults, 6 boys and 4 girls).
- h. Government of Syria has been undertaking search and rescue efforts and these have been happening round the clock. Survivors are sometimes being pulled out (as it happened on the 8th Feb, when a Palestine refugee girl was brought out, and who is currently receiving treatment in a UNRWA contracted hospital in Latakia).
- i. Local markets in Aleppo and Latakia seem to be functioning at same level as before the earthquake. Basic commodities such as food, water, clothes etc. are available, although price of some items such as blankets, hygiene materials etc. has gone up. One shopkeeper shared 'we increase prices so we can support our workers whose houses are damaged and also so as to provide charity to others at these difficult times'. It is to be noted that Syria has been experiencing shortage of various items (building materials, electrical appliances, fuel etc.) for the last several years, purportedly owing to sanctions.
- j. The acute crisis in Syria with the earthquake is on top of multiplicity of other crisis that the country and Palestine refugees are currently facing. The population has already been reeling under a 12-year long conflict, severely depleted public infrastructure, severe economic conditions, low household earning, lack of fuel and other essential commodities and skyrocketing prices. Dependence on UNRWA has been increasing significantly and this will continue to rise.
- k. Business continuity capability of UNRWA in the affected has not been severely affected. Agency offices are functioning, except in an instance in Aleppo where RSS and health staff are without office space, owing to partial damage of the building. Banking systems that the agency uses (as well as that of partners who support in cash distribution such as Al Haram

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/node/104258>

and Bemo bank) are not affected. There is no immediate escalation of security incidences in the affected areas.

- i. The table below provides estimated distribution of Palestine refugees in the North and Central areas of Syria, and as served by UNRWA. The agency doesn't have accurate information related to the situation and number of refugees living in Idleb and other earthquake affected areas. From the initial estimates, the total number of Palestine refugees who are directly affected due to the earthquake are 25% of the population living in the area. This number is likely to change based on subsequent detailed assessments or in the event of major aftershocks.

Location	Total Families	Total Persons	Total Male	Total Female
Neirab Camp	4,893	18,008	8,708	9,300
Ein el Tal Camp	186	640	323	317
Aleppo City	2,288	6,719	2,206	3,579
Rural Neirab	367	1,313	638	675
Sub-total	7,734	26,680	11,875	13,871
Latakia camp	2,711	8,314	3,924	4,390
Jableh ³	384	1,137	556	581
Hama camp	2,018	6,913	3,326	3,587
Sub-total	5,113	16,364	7,806	8,558
Total –All Areas	12,847	43,044	19,681	22,429

3. Assessment Team and methodology

UNRWA sent a multisectoral assessment team to Latakia and Aleppo starting from 7th Feb 2023 till 12th February for rapid assessment, starting with Latakia, followed by a visit of two team members (Safwan and Prafulla) to Aleppo and Hama. Various colleagues at field office Damascus as well as in the respective areas, led by the Chief Area Officers, as well as Chiefs of various UNRWA programmes and PLD have supported in collection of information for the assessment.

- i. **Dr. Hussein Shehabi**, Deputy Chief for health programme: focused on areas of primary health, medical assistance to those injured in referral hospitals, trauma counselling, care for vulnerable groups (pregnant women, persons with existing psychiatrist needs, NCD patients, hygiene)
- ii. **Ms. Muna Dahbour**, Associate Area Support Officer, Central area: focused on issues of general protection, gender, disability, GBV, child protection.
- iii. **Ms. Nadeen Jbara**, Social Services Officer, SFO: focused on issues of gender, disability, registration, SSN cases, PSS, child protection.

³ These numbers are estimates only, based on address records with UNRWA

- iv. **Mr. Safwan Abuluweid**, Programme Chief, Education: focused on issues of education, PSS for school children, continuation of education for the students.
- v. **Mr. Mohammad Abushaban**, Humanitarian Response Officer: focused on issues of NFI, management of the temporary shelter in UNRWA school and distribution of various assistance, including hot-meal for families sheltered in UNRWA school, technical input to response ideas.
- vi. **Mr. Prafulla Mishra** (Team leader), Deputy Director of Programmes: focused on operational contexts, support by other agencies and meeting with them, coordination with Govt (GAPAR), identifying immediate areas of UNRWA response, coordination on fundraising, discussion with the camp representatives, communications.

The rapid assessment team collected information through visits to different locations. Information was collected from the UNRWA teams in Latakia, Aleppo and Hama, who had already gathered information. and who reported have also provided working with other partners such as Engineering Syndicates of Aleppo and Latakia, meetings with specific groups including women, camp leaderships, and meetings with some of the external actors, including Government and other organisations (Palestine Red Crescent Society, local hospitals, SARC, ICRC, UNFPA, UNHCR/Area Humanitarian Coordinator in Aleppo, WHO etc.) as well as Information from other sources, mainly, assessments and recommendations from the various clusters were also considered.

It is to be noted that the recommendations provided are based on rapid assessment carried out during the first week of the emergency. These needs and recommendations are likely to change based on various internal and external factors. As such, there is a need for continued and systematic collection of information from the affected areas for the next few weeks, independently as UNRWA (so as to provided targeted assistance to some of the beneficiaries) and also jointly with other cluster partners.

4. Detailed findings and recommendations

The interventions proposed below are in line work of the agency and within the framework of the programmes. Most of the interventions are expected to be completed within 6 months. However, some of the interventions (repair/ rehab of damaged refugee houses) will likely to take longer. There is also a need for prioritization of the recommended interventions, based on the urgency of need and availability of resources.

4.1 Shelters and displacement

- a) UNRWA teams in Aleppo have partnered with the Engineering Syndicate of Aleppo and GAPAR and have completed assessment of all houses in Neirab and Ein el Tal camp (who reported cracks/ damages) and initial assessment of the damaged UNRWA installations. Reports for the assessments are being finalized. UNRWA team in Hama have worked with the GAPAR and a group of volunteer Engineers from the community and the Government

to undertake assessment of the houses that have reported cracks, and have finalized reports and provided advice to evacuate to about 5 families based on the assessments. UNRWA Relief Workers in Latakia have visited many of the houses who have reported cracks and have started maintaining a record, and these houses are currently being technically assessed by joint teams from GAPAR, UNRWA and Engineering Syndicate of Latakia.

- b) A total number of appx 20 houses, owned by Palestine refugees have been completely destroyed across the three areas (12 in Latakia camp, 5 in Jableh city and 3 in Rural Hama). In the Aleppo city, most of the Palestine refugees lived in rented premises and information is being gathered on their status.
- c) Approximately 300 families in Latakia have contacted the UNRWA office reporting cracks to their houses. Engineering Syndicate of Latakia has started assessment of individual houses in the Latakia camp.
- d) Displaced people in the Latakia city are in a total of 45 collective shelters, run by the Government and other organisations, including mosques. In the Aleppo city, the number of collective shelters is 170. There are 5 collective shelters in Hama. Many of the displaced are also staying with relatives and friends. UNRWA has so far not been involved in provision of assistance to the collective shelters in the Aleppo city or Hama.
- e) The shelters are run in schools, mosques, churches and other public institutions, and supported by the Government, NGOs and UN agencies. Government has identified individuals/ volunteers who will be responsible for coordination at these shelters.
- f) Availability of toilets, water for bathing is reported to be limited in the collective shelters. There are also no gender segregated latrines in most places. The risk of resurgence of cholera is high, owing to crowded living conditions.
- g) The reason why people have left their homes (in Aleppo city and Latakia) is owing to fear about the safety of their buildings, and while they wait for technical assessments to be completed. Widespread rumours about another earthquake in the coming weeks is also creating fear.
- h) In Latakia, most of the Palestine refugees stayed at UNRWA's Al Khairiar school in Latakia (appx 350 individuals, mainly women and children) and a mosque (appx 90 families). Some are also staying in a stadium that is run by the Government.
- i) In Latakia, the UNRWA school that was temporarily used as a shelter (from 7th till 11th Feb), the agency provided hot meals (to the 350 individuals who are sheltered as well as other vulnerable individuals, numbering appx 1100 every evening), part of the NFIs, and WASH facilities. The class rooms were also heated during night. Other charities brought in support such as meals, clothes, drinking water bottles, sanitary napkins etc. Palestine Red Crescent has organised health check-up campaigns. Refugees from the UNRWA school have moved to two other collective shelters (run by the Government) and UNRWA supported these centers with NFIs, hot meal etc. It is expected that most of the families will return back to their homes in the coming days once damage assessment has been completed for their houses.

- j) At least 75 families who were renting houses in the Aleppo city have been displaced to the Ein el Tal camp, mostly staying with their relatives, and about 25 families staying at a temporary shelter (prefab rooms) that were put up by UNICEF. Information is being collected regarding the number of families who are staying in the collective shelters in the Aleppo city and most are likely to be in the *Midan, Ashrafiyeh Bustan Basa and Salahuddin* neighborhoods. It is to be noted that many of the refugees who were living in the Aleppo city were initial residents of the Ein el Tal camp, and were displaced as a result of the conflict.
- k) Based on preliminary information, the GoS is preparing to move the refugees currently living in temporary shelters to *Jibrin/ Sheikh a Sayed* locality (appx 15 km from Aleppo city).
- l) Based on the confirmation from local community leaders, there are no damaged houses in rural Neirab. The total number of Palestinian refugees estimated to be living in this area is 1,313.
- m) About 39 houses in Hama camp have cracks in the walls of the house as a result of the earthquake, 3 houses are unsafe as per the report from the committee that assessed the houses. The houses of 3 families from Skilibeh in rural Hama are also destroyed and the houses of 2 families (MNR Families) from Salamiyeh are also reported to be unsafe. There are no Palestine refugees in Hama who are staying at collective shelters.
- n) Sanitation services (provided by UNRWA staff in Neirab and private contractor in Latakia) has continued. There is a possibility of increased solid waste in the camps in the coming weeks/ months with household repairs and need for discussion with the Government and community on disposal of these waste.
- o) Public services (drinking water, sewage system etc.) in the Latakia, Ein el Tal, Neirab and Hama camps are not affected.

4.1.1 Recommendations

- I. Need for supporting displaced Palestine refugees living in collective shelters, mainly through food and NFIs, and possibly counselling support. Coordinating interventions with the relief committees that have been set up by the Governments, and handing over available assistance to the center (for all, rather than targeting Palestine refugees alone).
- II. UNRWA teams to visit targeted collective shelters in Aleppo city and assess the situation and identify areas of support. For example, if the shelters need health staff, we can look at deploying our staff for a short period. Similarly, need for PSS, especially children, could be organised.
- III. Complete technical assessment of individual houses that are reported by the families as partially damaged (Aleppo city and Latakia). These assessments are led by the local Engineering Syndicates, who also provide formal letters to the residents.
- IV. Targeting of individual houses to be repaired (criteria of selection to be coordinated with the shelter cluster) and using self-help approach. Based on the damage assessment reports, need to agree on criteria (either looking at extent of damage, e.g.

30% and above, or vulnerability criteria of the family). Three categories of houses affected:

Category 1: buildings that are totally destroyed. Need to assess ownership of the building (especially as these are multistoried). Need for rental subsidy for these families

Category 2: houses that are damaged and inhabitable without repairs. Support the families with rental subsidy for a period of 3-6 months, and subsequently, with full or partial funding for repairs, based on assessments and funding.

Category 3: houses that are damaged, and need repairs but are habitable. Support the families with self help repair support.

- V. Need for additional sanitation laborers for the next few months, to support disposal of building repair waste. Close engagement with the camp local development committees to ensure solid waste is not piled on the roads, that might create obstacles in movement, water logging etc.
- VI. Ensure the implementation of the Environment and Social Framework guidelines of UNRWA.
- VII. Need for 'risk communication' to the refugees, through various approaches so as to provide the affected population with accurate information.

4.2 UNRWA Installations (including rented premises)

As per reports as of 12th Feb 2023, the following UNRWA installations have been affected, and assessments are continuing.

- a) Neirab camp: Jaffa school. A mosque next to the school has fallen and leading to damage to the entire boundary wall.
- b) Neirab camp: Aleppo Training Center. There are damages to the pillar, several walls, as well as ceiling.
- c) Neirab camp: Food and NFI Distribution center. The boundary wall is damaged. Gap between the walls and the ceiling.
- d) Neirab camp: CBO building (old structure). Severe damages. Wall, ceiling, column, tiles have been damaged
- e) Neirab camp: Library inside the Acre school. The kitchen and toilets have cracks. The school boundary wall has minor damages
- f) Aleppo city: Health center (rented installation on the Baron Street). Inside wall has been damaged. A four-story building across the street has completely collapsed, raising concerns with the safety of the buildings nearby
- g) Latakia: Al Jabeh school. There are cracks on the walls on the ground, first and second floors, roof slabs and lintels, parapets. The installation is close to the sea, and already has existing maintenance needs, including damage to plasters, discolouring, peeling pillars (with the steel rods exposed in a few places) etc.
- h) Tartous and Latakia: Microfinance offices (rented buildings)- cracks on the walls

- i) Hama: Samakh Atleet School. Cracks on the walls. The school for boys is working in two shifts targeting Grades 1 – 9
- j) Damascus: CBO in Sbeineh camp. Cracks on the wall
- k) Damascus: Khan Danoun camp. Cracks on the elevated tank

4.2.1 Recommendations

- I. Detailed damage assessment to be undertaken for all the installations that are impacted, including rented installations. Repair/ rehabilitation works to be implemented in order of priority. Importance of focusing on installations that will affect implementation of services.
- II. For rented premises (eg. Baron clinic) and that are considered unsafe, consider identifying other premises. Identify other temporary locations to continue services from in the meantime.
- III. Ensure safety audits for all installations across SFO in the coming months, which is already ongoing as per the review of Humanitarian Principles.
- IV. Wherever possible, look at opportunities for 'Building Back Better', for the damaged installations, e. g. use of alternative building materials, application of energy saving approaches, addressing accessibility issues etc.
- V. There is a neighboring building in Neirab school that is deemed unsafe and it would require measures to safeguard our installation from falling bricks and other debris.

4.3 Health

- a) UNRWA has health centers in Neirab, Aleppo city, Latakia and Hama. The Ein el Tal camp is supported with mobile health visits twice a week, and during the visits, the health team work from a house in the camp, that is offered by a refugee.
- b) UNRWA health centers in the Latakia, Neirab and Hama camps were closed for a day (6th Feb) and have opened since then.
- c) UNRWA's health center in the rented premises in Aleppo city is closed, as a building next door has collapsed (also damaging a wall of the clinic). Currently, UNRWA is operating its clinic from two rooms at a Government school in Aleppo city, that is also a collective shelter.
- d) Most of the visitors to the health centers in the affected areas since the earthquake are presenting themselves with cases of cold and cough (as many have been spending time outside, scared of going inside buildings). The Medical Officer shared, 'many of the patients coming in to the clinic are interested to talk regarding their experiences with the earthquake and have little or no sickness'. This signals stress and trauma experienced by the refugees. In the temporary clinic in Aleppo city (which is run in a school collective shelter), the health center is also visited by Syrian families.
- e) There have not been any cases of patients visiting UNRWA health centers with trauma wounds. There is currently no information available in relation to the number of refugees are admitted in contracted hospitals.

- f) The health programme has started contacting over phone with patients with existing psychiatric cases, vulnerable groups (pregnant women, those with NCDs, older persons, persons with disability).
- g) UNRWA has six contracted hospitals in Aleppo, one contracted hospital in Latakia and two contracted hospitals in Hama.
- h) Given the risk of cholera outbreak, it will be important to conduct hygiene awareness sessions across all the UNRWA health centers in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama.

4.3.1 Recommendations

- I. Continue contact with vulnerable individuals and identify individuals requiring health care.
- II. Ensure counselling through psychiatrist through regular visits. Ensure a longer-term mental support/ health check-up plan for individuals who have lost family members
- III. Identify locally based psychiatrist (at least for 6 months) in Aleppo and Latakia to support the affected individuals with support.
- IV. Undertake hygiene audits and awareness campaigns in the collective shelters, in coordination with other agencies. This issue is particularly concerning given the challenge of cholera outbreak that Syria has experienced over the last few months
- V. Support injured refugees with hospitalization services in north and central areas (95 % reimbursement). Continue close follow up with the contracted hospitals to ensure there is good quality of care for persons who have been admitted with injuries.
- VI. Procurement and stocking of additional medicines for pediatric use, cold/ cough, NCD patients etc.
- VII. Assess safety of the rented health center in the Aleppo city and possibly look at another rented premise. As such, the current building has issues of access (high stairs and no lifts).
- VIII. Identify additional staffing needs for the response and hire/ deploy staff for the same.

4.4 Education

- a) Ministry of Education, Government of Syria has announced closure of schools across the country since 6th February 2023. Based on the information available as of 10th Feb, the schools in the 4 areas that are disaster affected will continue to be closed.
- b) UNRWA has 7 schools in the North area (including one run in a government school) with a total of 436 students, 223 boys and 213 girls). In Latakia, UNRWA has 4 schools (1,144 students, 584 boys and 560 girls) and 3 schools are in Hama (969 students, 482 boys and 487 girls).
- c) Education of the students has been affected due to school closures. Given the nature of the crisis, there were no preparedness related to self-learning materials etc.
- d) PSS across the areas have tried to be in touch with the students mainly through WhatsApp groups, although the response back engagement has not been good, possibly due to

preoccupation of the students with the situation and also due to lack of access to internet bundles.

- e) In Latakia and Aleppo, PSS Counsellors, working together with Counsellor volunteers at the CBOs have started group counselling sessions for the children in the collective shelters as well as in UNRWA schools. This will continue.
- f) There is a risk of increased drop-out rates, even after schools open, especially for those families whose houses are partially destroyed and uninhabitable, and they are living with relatives or in collective shelters.
- g) Students in the affected areas may require catch up classes during summer 2023 and this should be looked at to compensate for the losses.

4.4.1 Recommendations

- I. Organise PTA meetings in all schools, immediately, at least twice in a week, to engage and share information and request their support in various plans that the agency is putting in place.
- II. Undertake in person group counselling sessions for students in the schools. Identify children showing heightened levels of stress and follow up/ refer to health as necessary.
- III. Develop education materials for the students and provide print outs of the same should the schools remain closed beyond
- IV. Discuss and develop plans for 'learning recovery' of the students, in line with guidelines/ recommendations provided by the Education in Emergencies interventions
- V. There is a need for monitoring students who don't come back, establish the reasons, and discuss on support that can be provided to these students.
- VI. For students who seek admissions in schools, but may have lost documentation, use alternative verification methods and coordinate with RSS and GoS on the same.
- VII. Work with the health programme to conduct basic hygiene education programmes (combined with the counselling sessions), especially as many may continue to stay in temporary shelters.
- VIII. Discuss with the education cluster and mobilise risk communication materials for school students/ parents.

4.5 Relief assistance

- a) Many refugees (those displaced as well as others) reported a sharp increase in household spending over the last week, mainly towards purchase of food, NFIs, drinking water and personal hygiene products. Despite the constrained household income, many families were seen to be supporting others with food and many are also sheltering relatives and other family members who are displaced.
- b) UNRWA's last round of cash assistance was completed in Nov 2022 and food assistance for majority of the population in Aug/ Sept 2022. Communities demanded and requested that they should be immediately provided with food baskets and cash assistance and at a higher level.

4.5.1 Recommendations

- I. UNRWA planned emergency cash assistance is due to start latest by 26th Feb 2023.
- II. In addition, it is recommended that communities in the North area, Latakia (and Jableh) and Hama (appx 15500) are supported with a 'one-off' cash assistance of USD 60 per family and in two installments. This will help in partially alleviating impact of the earthquake. It will cost a total USD 930,000 for 20,269 families. UNRWA's ability to organise the cash assistance rapidly will be an added advantage.
- III. Organise distribution of next round of blanket food assistance for the refugees in the coming months.

4.6 WASH and NFIs

- a) The WASH infrastructure in the camps do not seem to have been affected due to the earthquake. Water supply to the UNRWA installations in Latakia continue (from the city water supply line).
- b) Sanitation laborers in all the camps (private contractor in Latakia) continue to dispose off solid waste. There is additional waste on some of the camp lanes in Latakia arising from the earthquake (plaster of buildings, broken paver blocks from boundary walls etc.). However, these are not significant
- c) UNRWA had carried out a winterization assistance for persons with disability during Dec 2022 (each family were provided with USD 117). Other than this, there has not been a comprehensive NFI distribution in the camp for the last few years.
- d) Lack of mattresses, blankets as well as mats was seen in the collective shelters in Latakia and Aleppo.
- e) Women living in the collective shelters requested for additional sanitary napkins, as the costs are high in the local market.
- f) Weather forecast for Aleppo indicates 6-16 degrees diurnal temperature through the month of February (Source: AcuWeather) and therefore, is a need and demand for NFIs.
- g) Lack of adequate water (for bathing) and cold weather, as well as crowded conditions in collective shelters presents risks for various diseases.
- h) Risk of Cholera outbreak in the camps remains a risk in the affected areas, and will depend on continued availability of potable drinking water (as well as water to cleanse/wash) to the camps as well as collective shelters.
- i) It was seen that availability of various NFIs are constrained in Damascus and suppliers are asking for longer lead time. Need for constant monitoring of markets and undertake bulk procurement and store. If necessary, procure internationally.

4.6.1 Recommendations

- I. There is a need for sustained hygiene campaign with the communities, through various community engagement processes and across various programmes. Hiring of additional community volunteers (through CBOs) to help in community hygiene campaigns

- II. Distribution of NFIs to collective shelters across the areas
- III. Distribution of hygiene materials and dignity kits to collective shelters
- IV. Need for procurement of bulk NFIs from Damascus or neighboring countries, should they not be available in local markets

4.7 Protection and social services

- a) The protection cluster in Syria has identified various protection risks for the populations affected due to the earthquake crisis⁴. Many of these findings and recommendations will be relevant for the Palestine refugees as well.
- b) There are a lot of positive examples for caring and supporting at the level of the community. Many private individuals, shops, companies and local organizations are mobilizing support for the refugees and distributing these to the shelters. Local community have been working closely with the rescue workers round the clock.
- c) Impairment of regular UNRWA interventions is also exacerbating the protection concerns. For example, the health center in Aleppo city is currently operating from a two-room collective shelter in a school, in crowded conditions and with little privacy for the refugees. Also, the constrained space doesn't allow for the full range of services that UNRWA health centers provide. Similarly, the CBO in Neirab camp has been damaged and initial assessment by the UNRWA ICIP team has identified that the building is unsafe for operations, without major repairs. This will affect the operations of the full range of services that the CBOs offer, including supporting the most vulnerable individuals.
- d) The TVET programme in Latakia, Hama and Aleppo are currently suspended in line with the Govt directive. There are 67 trainees in Aleppo, 62 in Latakia and 24 in Hama. This is affecting the training of these students.
- e) The microfinance programme is already contacting it's clients to check on their well-being.

⁴ As per the assessment of the Protection Cluster in Syria, 'The current acute crisis, marked by increased displacement, interruption of basic services, inadequate and cramped shelters, and lack of access to basic needs is resulting in a deteriorated community protection environment which severely increases the protection risks faced especially by women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. Initial data collected by humanitarian partners shows that around 90,000 women and children and vulnerable persons are currently sheltered in more than 164 collective shelters³. Schools, mosques, community centres and indoor basketball courts used as shelters have limited basic facilities, including gender-segregated latrines. In some cases, women and men are sheltered in the same space, without any partitions, which compromises the safety and privacy of women and adolescent girls. GBV AoR partners are designing risk mitigation and prevention measures to address the safety concerns of women and girls including advocacy. As per the protection sector highlight, priorities are Thirty-three partners who responded to a survey on priority protection activities in response to the earthquake indicated that, in the first phase of the response (first month), they will prioritise PFA and PSS (88%), distribution of dignity kits (72%), referrals of vulnerable people to relevant services (69%), awareness-raising on protection issues (63%), case management (61%), distribution of medical in-kind assistance for persons with specific needs (53%), recreational activities and life skills (51%), and recreational activities (49%), protection mainstreaming, key messages and advocacy (43%), GBV case management and clinical management of rape (37%), registration and interim care services to separated and unaccompanied children (33%), protection monitoring (31%), mine risk education (27%) and legal assistance (22%).

- f) School going children are already experiencing loss of education, and their prolonged confinement in closed spaces of collective shelters and in crowded conditions, and with strangers may lead to various challenges, if the situation continues for long.
- g) Protection risks/ abuses of the persons residing in collective shelters is high. From visiting two shelters in Latakia (where Palestine refugees are residing), it was seen that women and children constitute almost 90% of the residents in the night. Men were seen to visit the centers only during the day to meet families and also to collect food and other NFI assistance, and go back to sleep at their respective homes in the night. Men who reside in the centers are older persons, some persons with disability. It was seen that men object to their wives talking to other men during the day and a few cases of physical violence was seen. There are no separated toilets for men and women in the school and while signs have been put up, there have been instances of mix up. It was also seen that quarrels and arguments break out at the centers over various issues. Prolonged stay at collective shelters will only exacerbate the situation, creating tensions both as a collective as at the level of families.
- h) Persons with disability and older persons are at heightened risk. Individuals who have apartments in higher building floors are scared of going back to their homes and are likely to stay in collective shelters or with their friends and relatives.
- i) There are reports of movement of refugees from one location to another and this may be experienced more and more in the coming months. There will be a need for updating of records/ addresses in UNRWA registration systems.
- j) Need for understanding the HLP issues that will come up in the immediate and longer term basis.
- k) UNRWA has strong and close presence in the areas of impact near camps in Latakia, Neirab and Ein el Tal. For populations that are living in rural parts of the Neirab camp, Aleppo city and Jableh, the direct contact is only when they visit our health centers or come to receive cash assistance or food distribution points. It will be important to develop a plan how to collect information on housing and other needs of these Palestine refugees.

4.7.1 Recommendations

- I. Constant review of the protection environment in the camp and for different vulnerable groups over the coming months. Importance of the Area Protection Committees (APCs) as well as groups such as older persons, women groups, disabled persons groups etc., in camps. Inclusion of the community representatives in the APCs needs to be ensured.
- II. Identifying short term locations for the health center in Aleppo town and CBO in Neirab camp.
- III. Repair works in other affected buildings to be started immediately, so that beneficiaries continue to feel safe in UNRWA installations.
- IV. Internal referral for protection cases between programmes and work towards faster support systems.

- V. External referral for critical cases with protection risks from the affected population and ensure the updated referral pathway is shared with all programmes within UNRWA.
- VI. Reaching out to the most vulnerable individuals through the CBOs and Family Support Offices and assessing their needs. Home visits should be conducted to the refugee households to support most vulnerable cases requiring support (there is already an agreement last year with the Govt for home visits by RSS and health staff)
- VII. Updating records for families, as necessary, by reaching out to them and supporting them through the process. Persons reporting loss of civil and registration documentation need to be supported.
- VIII. Orphaned children (at least three in Latakia) will require focused support
- IX. Combining efforts between RSS, education and health to assess and provide PSS.
- X. Undertake rapid assessments and supporting persons with disability (and who are displaced) with prosthetic devices, wheelchairs, crutches and walking frames etc.)
- XI. Recommend to the shelter managers to display PSEA key messages in collective shelters
- XII. Need to develop a plan for collecting information about the situation of the refugee populations in Jableh town, rural Neirab and Aleppo city. One idea could be to visit the areas and homes (needs discussion with Govt) as well as making contacts with them over phone and discussing with them when they visit our programmes (health, cash assistance locations etc.).

4.8 Livelihoods

- a) Comprehensive information gathering on the impact on livelihoods of the Palestine refugees has not been possible during the rapid assessment.
- b) During meetings, refugees shared the following
 - Loss of income as they are not able to go to work (especially those who earn on daily wages)
 - Loss of jobs as many of the employers in the informal sector will probably retrench workers or reduce wages
 - Increased household income, including rental costs, which may force people to move to rural areas, and affecting their ability to access UNRWA services
 - Securing debts will be challenging for those who have lost livelihoods, especially as they cannot satisfy guaranteed income

4.8.1 Recommendations

- I. Look at the possibility of expanding the UNRWA TVET programme in the affected areas, and including context specific trainings such as building repairs, electrical wiring, plumbing and sanitary works, furniture making etc. UNRWA has previous experience of running similar training in the Deraa camp, with support of a private contractor.
- II. As part of UNRWA Microfinance programme, look at the possibility of additional loan products, including maintenance/ repair of buildings affected by the earthquake.

- III. Look at the possibility of increase loan ceiling and reduce interest rate/ interest free loans as part of the microfinance programme.

6. Accountability to the Affected Populations

UNRWA conducts meetings with the community leaders (Local Development Committees) regularly and meetings would need to be organised at the earliest for these forums so as to inform them of the agency efforts as well as identifying needs. The LDC meetings needs to include representatives from the most vulnerable groups. As necessary, separate meetings will also be need to be organised with various vulnerable groups.

Complains/ requests are already being received from communities, who are sharing on damaged houses and the relief team are already responding to the same. It will be important to document these requests and also resolutions provided. The AAP team in SFO will work with the teams on this.

UNRWA is already part of the AAP working group in Syria and will ensure experiences with the Palestine refugees are shared in this forum.

7. External coordination- local, UN, donors

SitReps are being prepared daily since 7th Feb. This will continue till 28th Feb and change to twice a week. The SitReps are shared with donors, OCHA and within the agency and clusters. The Director (SFO) has been participating closely with the UNCT and HCT engagements on the earthquake response and briefing on UNRWA response. The cluster systems in Syria are actively engaged with the earthquake response and putting out recommendations and technical advisories. There is a need for active participation of UNRWA at all levels, especially at the level of the Area Humanitarian Coordination Teams.

UNRWA Cluster focal points (at Damascus level) and North and Central areas need to exchange information on key issues relevant to the clusters. UNRWA will contribute to any multisectoral assessments that other UN agencies are planning in the areas. This will help to include needs of the Palestine refugees in the broader assessments of the UN agencies. This rapid assessment report will also be shared with clusters and partners.

Given the scale of the emergency, and also given the various facilitations that the Govt of Syria has already announced since the start of the emergency, it is expected that the affected areas will be visited with donors, international technical teams and others. This will be helpful for UNRWA to draw attention of the visitors to the needs of the refugees and also explain its response interventions. It will be necessary for UNRWA to be well positioned with updates, key talking points and advocacy messages for this purpose.

8. Staff care

UNRWA staff in the affected areas are going through challenging times. Many staff shared on the anxiety that their children are going through and they fear they have and many staff have spent nights in their cars parked on streets, as the children were fearful of going back home. Staff in Latakia office pulled together and worked for very long hours to ensure safety and care for the refugees who were displaced to the UNRWA school, many of them spending nights at the school.

In addition, there is a growing demand from the refugees for various additional support. Teams in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama have jumped straight into action and started various assessments for the affected persons, and identifying ways in which they could be supported. There is an urgent need for identifying ways in which staff could be supported, through group reflection and sharing forums. The peer group mechanism that were formed could be useful in this regard and could be activated.

Additional deployments of team members from the Damascus field office as well as other areas needs to be done, to share the workload and provide support to the teams especially in Latakia and Aleppo. The deployments need to be clear on purpose and support necessary and are to be needs based. The facilitation of visits by staff from HQ programmes and departments will be looked at over the next few weeks for rapid response as well as medium term deployments, to help provide technical advice to the SFO team and also provide support. It would help to have various visits to be coordinated so as to avoid multiple visit schedules.

9. Media and communications

There is a need to develop a plan for communication around the needs and response over the next 2-3 month. As part of this, it will be important to document human interest stories from the affected areas, capturing UNRWA interventions and needs of the refugees. This will inform UNRWA visibility initiatives as well as the needs of relevant donors. Any media requests are to be coordinated with the PIO and DUA for clearance. It is also important to be aware of reputational issues, that may arise from complains raised by dissatisfied refugees or poorly implemented interventions

10. Learning and capacity building of UNRWA teams on the emergency response, including development of an Emergency Response Taskforce to deal with shocks

UNRWA team members have highlighted the need for training/ awareness on evacuation during earthquakes, first aid etc. These need to be considered and measures to be taken. It is also planned to undertake a 'real time assessment/ evaluation' of the emergency response, to be completed by 15th March 2023, with support of DoP and DIOS. As agreed with Dept of Planning, training on 'emergency simulation' will be arranged for the staff of the Syria FMT and other senior staff, to be complete before May 2023.

END