

Preparing for Winter in Syria

September 2023

This winter will be the 13th consecutive winter in displacement for many people in Syria, who continue to face increased food insecurity, cost of living, unemployment, and the impact of the February 2023 earthquakes. Weather conditions in winter in Syria are severe, including bitter cold, snow and violent storms.

According to the [2023 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview](#), the overall number of people in need of core relief items increased in 2023 by over 15 per cent to 5.7 million. Due to the deteriorated economy and severe inflation, 85 per cent of the population cannot afford essential items available in the market.

UNHCR will support people in dire need for the coming winter. The planned interventions will include cash assistance and in-kind assistance, including tents, winter clothes, and blankets.

2.7 million people

in urgent need of winter assistance in Syria*

15,000 tents

needed to protect people living in camps

100%

inflation rate in Syria since beginning of 2023

Operational context

The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. In 2023, 15.3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, **a 4.5 per cent increase since 2022**. The rapid rise in needs is driven by a deepening economic crisis, rapid deterioration of the Syrian currency, cuts on gasoline subsidies, climatic shocks, ongoing displacement, recurring hostilities, and the February earthquakes. Additionally, much of the country's public infrastructure and services have been damaged or destroyed. Chronic electricity and fuel shortages further undermine the functionality of essential services, livelihoods, and delivery of assistance. There are major gaps in the provision of, and access to, essential basic services.



Distribution of winter items to newly returnee families in Belleramon town, northern rural Aleppo. ©UNHCR/ H.Maarouf

Under the circumstances, people are struggling to afford basic items, and it is estimated that **2.7 million people across the country are in urgent need of assistance** to prepare for the harsh winter weather conditions.

* Estimated by Shelter and Non-food item Sectors

UNHCR Syria's winterization interventions

1. Winter cash assistance for refugees and asylum-seekers

Winter cash assistance is a seasonal unconditional cash grant. The grant targets [refugees and asylum-seekers](#) individually registered with UNHCR Syria, a **total of approximately 7,000 households**. Some 6,230 refugee and asylum-seeker families (around 17,700 people) benefited from winter cash assistance during UNHCR's 2022/2023 winterization. The aim of the winterization grant is to help refugee and asylum-seeker families to meet increased needs during the harsh winter period in the context of steep inflation and suspension of the fuel subsidy.

In previous years, UNHCR conducted a market survey of winter items (clothing and fuel/gas) to understand the financial needs of beneficiaries and determine the amount of the cash assistance. However, in 2022 and 2023, due to budgetary constraints, UNHCR Syria had to decide the assistance rate based on the available budget. As a result, assistance in 2023 is critically lower than in 2022 (**an overall reduction of over 80 per cent**). Due to lack of resources, there is a high risk that many refugees and asylum-seekers may not be able to receive winter cash assistance this year.

In 2023, the provision of assistance will start in November, and it will be primarily provided through cash at the counter in bank branches and through its sub-contracted supplier to eligible refugee and asylum-seeker families.

2. Non-food item assistance

Besides regular core relief items such as plastic sheets, mattresses, sleeping mats, blankets, jerry cans and kitchen sets, UNHCR distributes supplementary seasonal items to provide additional protection against extreme and life-threatening weather conditions.

UNHCR's winter assistance targets the most vulnerable people, including the recently displaced, the newly returned, and those living in hard-to-reach or newly accessible areas or in sub-standard shelters, as well as persons with specific needs. The winter non-food items (NFIs) include **extra high thermal blankets, sleeping bags, waterproof floor covers, extra-plastic sheeting, portable heaters, rubber boots, and winter jackets**.



Internally displaced woman in Al-Kam Village, Homs receiving winter jackets, sleeping bags, and plastic sheeting from UNHCR staff. © GOPA

UNHCR's 2022-2023 winterization NFI programme assisted 121,600 Syrian families (close to 562,000 people) in 14 governorates.

The February earthquakes, new displacement, surging economic inflation, fluctuating currency, limited livelihood opportunities, and unpredictable weather patterns have diminished people's purchasing power and increased their vulnerability. Therefore, for this year's winterization NFI programme (September -December 2023), UNHCR is planning to support **over 38,000 vulnerable families (around 190,000 people)**. This represents approximately a **75 per cent** decrease from last winter, due to lack of available funds to cover all those in need.

3. Shelter assistance

UNHCR in Syria provides family tents for those newly displaced or living in camps and supports minor repairs to damaged houses for internally displaced returnee families.

In north-east Syria, UNHCR provides family tents in camps, where **some 28,500 families (approximately 142,500 people)** are living in tents. The weather conditions in north-east Syria are harsh, with temperatures dropping to sub-zero degrees during winter and rising over 40 degrees in summer. A family tent in normal conditions can last between one year and a half and two years. However, given the challenging weather conditions, the tents in north-east Syria tend to get damaged more quickly and should be replaced before even one year of use.



Installation of the new tents to replace damaged ones in Zone 3 in Al-Hol camp, Al-Hasakeh Governorate. ©UNHCR

During the past winter, UNHCR was able to **replace only one-third of the total number of tents that required replacement** due to declining financial resources, resulting in thousands of displaced families living in damaged tents and facing as a result significant risks to their health and well-being.

To respond to the urgent need for tents in the north-east, UNHCR is planning to distribute **15,000 tents benefitting approximately 75,000 people** including new arrivals during the coming winter based on identified needs and UNHCR's capacity.

Challenges

The operational environment in Syria poses various challenges to UNHCR's activities, particularly for winterization assistance. These challenges have caused delays in assistance delivery and impacted people's quality of life:

- **Limited funding:** Due to the challenging global context and multiple competing emergencies, funding from the international community to the Syria operation decreased in 2023. The current funding level (as of 17 September) is 28 per cent against the requirement of US\$ 504 million. UNHCR will be unable to respond to urgent needs this winter unless additional funding is received.
- **High prices of items:** The depreciation of the Syrian currency, global inflation and rising prices of oil and other commodities drastically increased the production and procurement costs of the required winter assistance items.
- **Unpredictable logistics:** The current sanctions only allow a certain number of white-listed containers and operators to transport items to Syria, leading to unpredictability in the supply line.

The total budgetary requirement of
2023-2024 winterization
US\$ 52.3 million

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

USEFUL DOCUMENTS

[UNHCR 2022-2023 Regional Winterization Programme – Final Report](#)
[UNHCR Regional Winterization Assistance Plan 2022-2023](#)

LINKS

[UNHCR Global Focus – Syrian Arab Republic](#)
[UNHCR Syria Data Portal](#)
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[Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023](#)
[Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2023](#)

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