

UNHCR SYRIA 2023 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



Participants of the Girl Shine programme smile for a group photo. The Girl Shine programme aims to teach teenage girls how to recognize different forms of gender-based violence and get help when needed. It also builds a stronger relationship between girls and their caregivers. ©UNHCR/Ola Kabalan.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

After twelve years of crisis, Syria plunged into further despair in 2023, as the country was hit by a series of earthquakes on the 6th and 20th of February. The earthquakes claimed the lives of 5,900 people and injured another 12,800, causing further displacement and damage to infrastructure that was already affected by years of conflict. Households lost their source of income, increasing the vulnerability of millions already unable to meet their most basic needs.

The conflict, economic turmoil, and natural disasters have led to widespread poverty, malnutrition, and reliance on aid, the cost of which has increased due to sharp inflation. The ongoing conflict and insecurity in some parts of the country resulted in 454 deaths of civilians including women and children between January and October 2023, displacement of whole communities, damage to civilian infrastructure, and obstruction of humanitarian access. The Gaza situation compounded even further Syria's intractable humanitarian, security and political situation.

In Syria, an estimated 90 per cent of the population lives in poverty, 12.9 million are food insecure. **16.7 million** people were estimated to need humanitarian assistance at the end of 2023, the highest number of people in need since the beginning of the crisis and an increase of 1.4 million from 2022. The country continues to host one of the largest numbers of internally displaced people in the world, with 7.25 million people.

During 2023, UNHCR verified or monitored the return of more than 38,000 refugees from neighbouring countries, a decrease of 25 per cent compared to 2022. According to OCHA, almost 155,000 internally displaced people returned to their place of origin between January and July 2023.

To address the increasing needs in the context of dwindling resources and in response to the earthquakes, in 2023, the operation strengthened its core activities (protection, shelter and non-food items) and scaled up cash-based intervention

More information on UNHCR's operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, including north-west Syria, is available on [Global Focus](#).

2023 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



More than **1,000,000** people received services at UNHCR-supported community centres.



685,946 people including **204,100** individuals affected by the 2023 February earthquakes received core relief items.



471,268 people received legal assistance, including civil documentation.



Over **6,900** damaged houses, **60** public infrastructures, and **9** collective shelters for earthquake-affected people were repaired.



9,488 people received livelihood support including business start-up training and agricultural support.



100,588 people including **64,525** affected by the earthquakes benefitted from cash assistance.



Protection

UNHCR provided protection services such as **child protection** activities, **psychosocial support (PSS)**, and support to prevent and respond to **gender-based violence (GBV)**. UNHCR and partners also provided legal assistance, for instance, to obtain civil documentation and register vital events like births and marriages.

The services were provided at UNHCR-supported community centres based on assessed needs. Refugees and asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees (refugees and internally displaced people who have returned to their home areas), and host communities benefitted from these services. Currently, there are **117 UNHCR-supported community centres** across the country.

These centres are supported by a network of outreach volunteers (ORVs) selected from the IDP and affected communities, who are the first responders and assist those in need in a timely manner. The ORVs enhance UNHCR's outreach to vulnerable communities where they establish and maintain regular contact, monitor situations, understand needs and concerns and identify the most vulnerable amongst the communities. A total of **2,551 ORVs** (out of which 1,278 are females) supported UNHCR and its partners in 2023.

Child Protection

In 2023, a total of **12,161 children** (5,458 girls and 6,703 boys) received case management services. These include sessions to assess their needs and risks and referrals to education classes, medical services and PSS.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

UNHCR continued to provide a basic package of health services to nearly **18,000 refugees and asylum-seekers**, encompassing some 23,000 healthcare services and 700 specialized MHPSS services.

As part of UNHCR's Persons with Specific Needs programme (targeting older persons and persons with disabilities), MHPSS services reached **10,100 Syrians**, with 23% referred to specialized mental health services. Additionally, individual and group counselling sessions were provided to **4,436 people**.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

UNHCR supported **7,643 individuals** with GBV response services (3,009 IDPs, 2,824 returnees, 157 refugees and asylum-seekers, and 1,653 host community members) in 14 Governorates.

Legal Assistance

The UNHCR legal assistance programme on civil documentation and housing, land and property (HLP) rights benefitted over **407,000 people**, 62% of them are women, with legal representation and counselling. As a result of the legal interventions, 31,000 individuals obtained personal ID cards and 5,450 individuals received family booklets. Additionally, 7,000 individuals (mainly women) had their marriages documented by the courts and 3,340 children received birth certificates.

Some 14,800 individuals also obtained documents that allowed them to enjoy their HLP rights. In addition, over 2,400 refugees and asylum-seekers received legal assistance on civil documentation and registration of vital events, including birth registrations. In 2023, UNHCR facilitated birth registration and issuance of birth certificates to 278 refugee children, representing 76% of all refugee children under 5 years registered with UNHCR.



A UNHCR staff speaks to a boy and his family staying at the mosque in Aleppo's Suleiman Al-Halabi neighbourhood, following the 2023 February earthquakes. ©UNHCR/Hameed Maarouf.



Shelter

People in need of shelter support include returnees, newly displaced and those in inadequate collective shelters or tented settlements. To address the diverse shelter needs, UNHCR delivered assistance in different forms, such as physical repair of houses and shelters, provision of construction materials, and cash for shelter repair. In addition, UNHCR distributed tents as a short-term solution in last-resort sites (such as camps in north-east Syria).

An integrated approach was adopted to support UNHCR's housing programme, which included rehabilitation or upgrading of basic communal infrastructure to complement individual shelter assistance, thereby ensuring communities' access to essential services and a safe living environment.

This encompassed sustainable cross-cutting activities such as road repairs, street lighting installation, and support for schools and health centres. In 2023, UNHCR repaired over **6,900 damaged houses** and restored 41 civil registries, 15 schools and 4 irrigation channels.

As part of its emergency response, UNHCR also provided emergency shelter to **104,915 individuals**, including the rehabilitation of 9 collective shelters, provision of **8,381 tents** as well as operation and maintenance of 10 camps in north-east Syria.



Core relief items

The provision of core relief items played a vital role in meeting the basic needs of the population with and for whom UNHCR works.

In 2023, the regular distribution programme reached **476,179 individuals**, while the earthquake emergency responses assisted **204,100 individuals** in affected areas. With its emergency stock, UNHCR was able to provide blankets and winter clothes within eight hours after the earthquakes.

Additionally, cross-line interventions reached 3,870 individuals, while 1,797 internally displaced persons in Deir ez-Zor received assistance.



Cash-based interventions

In 2023, the operation stepped-up its efforts to provide cash assistance to asylum-seekers by integrating them into the bi-monthly multi-purpose cash grant and education grant programmes for refugees.

The bi-monthly cash grants were extended to a total of **5,288 households (15,304 individuals)**. Additionally, **5,952 households (16,687 individuals)**, including asylum-seekers, received cash assistance for winterization.

2023 was the first year for UNHCR to start providing cash assistance to Syrian nationals. Following the February 2023 earthquakes, UNHCR swiftly obtained government approval to implement multi-purpose cash assistance for the earthquake-affected population, reaching **13,718 households (64,525 individuals)**. The cash-based intervention pilot project, monetizing existing in-kind assistance, was approved and implemented in the last quarter of the year, benefiting 896 households (4,072 individuals) in 2023.

UNHCR also provided unconditional education cash grants to 5,712 refugee and asylum-seeker students, aged between 5 and 18 years old.

Livelihoods and economic inclusion

UNHCR livelihoods support targeting vulnerable people aims to increase their self-reliance, reduce their dependency on assistance, and mitigate the risks of engagement in harmful coping strategies.

In 2023, UNHCR provided start-up business training to some **2,800 individuals**. 1,657 refugees, IDPs and returnees were qualified for business start-up support after completion of the training. UNHCR also supported 6,200 IDPs and returnees with agricultural inputs and services in rural communities where farmers and pastoralists/herders are particularly vulnerable. Additionally, 488 IDPs and returnees engaged in apprenticeship and temporary employment schemes.

In 2023, UNHCR also supported the rehabilitation of six livelihood-related infrastructures, benefiting over 60,000 refugees, IDPs, returnees and host community members. These include the restoration of irrigation systems, an agriculture support extension unit, a bakery and a market.



Lamees trained at UNHCR's community centre and received a small business start-up grant to open her own doughnuts store in As-Sweida city. "My project made my life better. I am now able to earn income and help my husband and my children at school", says Lamees. ©UNHCR Syria.

Refugee and IDP Returns

In 2023, UNHCR continued to actively advocate with the Government of Syria (GoS) on concerns affecting refugee and IDP returns. In October 2023, the GoS delivered a Statement of Intent to refugee returns that formalized a framework for future engagement and dialogue on the protection concerns of returnees that remain.

In late August 2023, the first protection-health border post became operational at the Jdeidet Yabous crossing point (between Syria and Lebanon), providing returnees with essential information on services and assistance available in their areas of intended return.

At the inter-agency level, UNHCR continued to co-lead Pillar 3 of the Strategic Framework and the Technical Working Group of the Return and Reintegration Working Group. Coordination under the Area-based Return Support approach was further decentralized to respective Area Humanitarian Country Teams, accelerating rollout to locations in seven different governorates.

In 2023, UNHCR verified or monitored the return to Syria of 38,257 refugees from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. In total, between 2016 and December 2023, UNHCR has verified or monitored the return to Syria of 392,193 individual refugees.

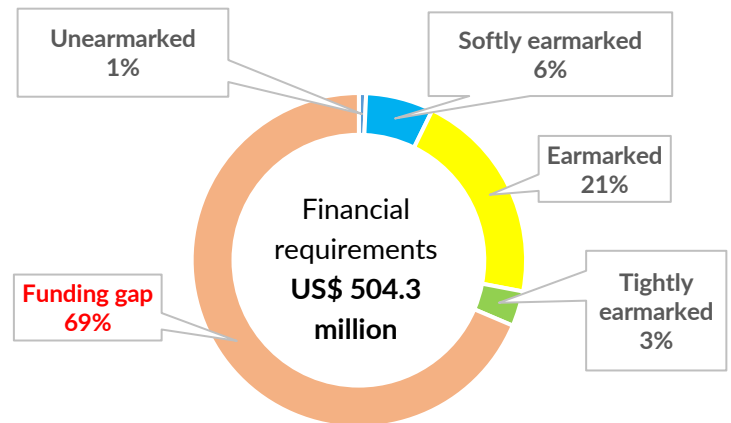
Coordination

UNHCR is the lead agency of the Protection and Shelter & Non-Food Items Sectors in the Humanitarian Country Team, coordinating the **Whole-of-Syria** response. UNHCR-led Sectors included 302 partners. In line with its commitment to develop partners' capacity, strengthen protection expertise and foster localization, the Protection Sector delivered 26 trainings to **1,011 protection staff** on protection mainstreaming, gender-based violence, coordination in emergencies, child protection, disability inclusion, protection risk analysis or identification of persons with specific needs, especially in the context of the earthquake emergency response. UNHCR also participated in all six Area Humanitarian Country Teams, with four UNHCR heads of sub-offices acting as Area Humanitarian Coordinators.

2023 Funding Situation

In 2023, UNHCR Syria received a total of **US\$ 158,344,638** from various government and private sector donors. The generous contributions allowed UNHCR to respond to the evolving needs on the ground, including those of the people affected by the 2023 February earthquakes.

The contributions received was **31%** of the total financial requirements of **US\$ 504,295,122**.



For the first time in nine years, water runs through the irrigation canal repaired by UNHCR and its partner in Aleppo Governorate.

After three years of repair completed in 2023, the 30-kilometre-long canals can irrigate more than 1,100 hectares of land that was abandoned or transformed into rain-fed land during the Syrian crisis.

With the rehabilitated irrigation canal, over 20,000 farmers, mainly returnees, have become able to plant cotton, wheat, sesame, barley and other crops which will support thousands of people and improve food security and livelihoods.

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