

# SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

S I X M O N T H S O N

“ THE NIGHT OF THE EARTHQUAKE ENCAPSULATED TWELVE YEARS OF CONFLICT. AMIDST THE TREMORS, I HAD FLASHBACKS TO ALL THE LONG YEARS OF SUFFERING, VIOLENCE, AND DESTRUCTION.

— A doctor working in a UNFPA-supported facility in Aleppo governorate that was severely affected by the earthquake

## SITUATION OVERVIEW

Six months after the devastating earthquake that struck Syria in February, the humanitarian situation throughout the country remains volatile, with 2023 shaping up to be one of the worst years of a crisis that has now entered its thirteenth year.

In the worst impacted regions of the north-west, the situation is more dire than it has been in years, particularly for the 4.1 million people who rely on cross-border operations for assistance. Out of the area's 4.5 million population, 2.9 million are internally displaced, and 2 million live in camps or informal settlements. The quake's impact, along with extreme heat in July causing over 40 fire incidents, has worsened living conditions for affected communities.

Amidst this storm of converging challenges, the situation nationwide continues to take a toll on essential services like SRH and GBV response. The devaluation of the Syrian Pound and surging inflation have thrust the vast majority of Syrians into uncertainty, exacerbating the already precarious conditions for various vulnerable populations. Moreover, as chronic fuel

shortages persist, transportation costs soar, and the cost of daily living rises, the ability of UNFPA Syria's partners to provide critical services is increasingly hampered. The struggle to secure and retain qualified staff, particularly in GBV roles, is an ongoing challenge due to the mounting difficulties associated with the economic downturn. Even the attempt to compensate for the energy shortages using generators falls short, with many service delivery points experiencing daily electricity shortages due to the scarcity of fuel.

Moreover, the domino effect of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc on international procurement, adding further complications with supply chain disruptions, soaring freight expenses, and limited shipping capacity, all of which are compounded by trade sanctions on Syria. The war in Ukraine is also placing additional pressure on the already disrupted global market for lifesaving SRH and maternal care commodities.

Meanwhile, security remains fragile, with Aleppo, Dara'a, Hama, Homs, Idlib, and Lattakia being the epicentres of tension and uncertainty. The threat of violence looms over the population,

hindering access to services and further complicating the struggles of those already grappling with dire circumstances.

Despite these challenges, UN agencies and partners have made progress in restoring service delivery points, including safe spaces and health clinics, to provide critical services such as GBV assistance and healthcare. Some referral hospitals damaged by the earthquake have resumed services, reducing pressure on temporary facilities.

## FUNDING UPDATE

Out of the **\$24.8 million** total appeal for the Whole of Syria earthquake response, **only \$9.6 million (around 38.6 percent)** has been received to date.





**98,079** individuals reached with SRH services  
**86,540** individuals reached with GBV services  
**86,023** individuals reached with dignity and maternity kits  
**11** health facilities supported  
**14** safe spaces supported

**Sexual and Reproductive Health**

In the country's northern region, the earthquakes caused widespread destruction and severely impacted the healthcare infrastructure, particularly in terms of access to reproductive health services. Since the onset of the emergency, UNFPA has worked with its partners to ensure continuity of critical SRH service provision, including through direct support to 11 health facilities. UNFPA also scaled up its mobile teams to further improve access to critical services in the most affected communities, including hard-to-reach areas, newly-established reception centres, and informal settlements and camps.

Meanwhile, in addition to transshipping 844 Inter-Agency Reproductive Health (IARH) kits, UNFPA supported the whole network of health facilities in north-west Syria by distributing 619 kits and 2,176,445 bulk items to 182 health facilities. These critical medicines and supplies have ensured access to lifesaving health services for an estimated 157,133 people and have equipped 90 midwives to perform normal deliveries during the emergency.

In June 2023, the cross-border referral mechanism for cancer patients from north-west Syria to Türkiye was reactivated. This was a benefit to at least 4,300 active cases, including breast and cervical cancer patients, who were identified and referred through UN-supported programs. This achievement was made possible through joint advocacy efforts led by the Health Cluster and other UN agencies, including UNFPA.

**Protection / Response to GBV**

Since the onset of the crisis, UNFPA has been providing critical GBV services to women and girls at risk, including case management, psychological first aid (PFA), and vocational training. A total of 14 safe spaces and 17 mobile outreach teams were supported to deliver essential services to survivors and those at risk of GBV. UNFPA has also distributed 86,023 dignity kits to women and girls, using them as an entry point to educate and refer those at risk of GBV to specialised service providers.

Additionally, UNFPA focused on enhancing community-based and trauma-informed mental health and psychosocial interventions to build resilience and protect well-being. This approach is integrated across GBV interventions and includes PFA, counselling, trauma-informed referrals, psychoeducation, life skills building, and recreational activities. These critical activities started approximately 72 hours after the earthquake and, six months later, have reached around 19,000 women and girls

Over the past six months, GBV prevention and response services reached a total of 30,896 individuals, with 64 percent being women, 13 percent girls, 13 percent men, and 9 percent boys. In outreach efforts, UNFPA's partners integrated the messages included in Awareness Raising Toolkit developed by the GBV Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR), with new messages tailored to needs that emerged after the earthquake. This contributed to enhancing the consistency and collective impact of GBV prevention efforts led by all GBV AoR members in the framework of the earthquake response.

Dignity kits remain strategic entry points identifying of women and girls at risk of GBV and referring them to specialised service providers. In addition to meeting basic hygiene needs, dignity kits can also include other essential items such as a flashlight, a blanket, and a whistle, which can aid women's safety and security in emergency situations. Immediately after the earthquake, UNFPA distributed more than 23,500 dignity kits in most affected communities reaching women in camps, newly established reception centres, informal settlements and service delivery points, while more than 37,000 customised dignity kits were transshipped to north-west Syria containing critical hygiene and safety items for women above age of ten. Within the first six months of the response, more than 86,000 kits have been distributed.

Meanwhile, UNFPA reached more than 4,000 adolescents through targeted initiatives. Among these, the Adolescent Mothers Against All Odds (AMAL) initiative has been pivotal to delivering a positive impact on the lives of pregnant adolescents and first-time mothers. The initiative sets out to raise awareness on core topics like family planning, early marriage, dangers of early pregnancy, among others, all of

which are tackled at three intersecting levels – individual/family, health sector, and community.

**Other updates**

As part of UNFPA's earthquake response, partners increased cash and voucher (CVA) support both within and outside case management. Unconditional individual protection assistance was provided in the form of cash disbursements to more than 5,900 vulnerable women and girls who were displaced due to the natural disaster, most of whom lived in newly established reception centres, camps, or informal settlements, with their homes destroyed or uninhabitable. The cash assistance has been vital in addressing immediate protection needs, reducing overall risks, and empowering women and girls in heavily affected areas.

Additionally, the SRH Technical Working Group, led by UNFPA, assessed the critical needs of health facilities to ensure sustained operations. Based on the findings, UNFPA recognized the urgent need for generators, fuel, and medical equipment, particularly reproductive health services in north-west Syria. Over the past six months, UNFPA has procured and distributed essential medical and non-medical supplies, enhancing the health system's resilience and preparedness to tackle emerging challenges effectively.

As the lead of the GBV Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) in north-west Syria, UNFPA maintained close coordination with all response actors to mitigate protection risks for women and girls. The AoR is currently developing a series of products to enhance the coordination response, including key messages on GBV, a guide for non-GBV actors on providing PFA and safe referrals, and an observation tool to identify GBV risks in temporary shelters.

Moreover, since the onset of the emergency, the GBV AoR contributed to a wide range of protection-focused activities, including a mapping of functional safe spaces and specialised GBV services; a protection-specific needs assessment; coordinating the availability and distribution of dignity kits; emphasising GBV risk mitigation across sectors; engaging GBV field workers; and ensuring that the needs of women and girls are reported in a safe environment over the coming days.





# UPDATES FROM DAMASCUS

**107,464** individuals reached with SRH services  
**76,398** individuals reached with GBV services  
**46,374** individuals reached with dignity and maternity kits  
**59** health facilities supported  
**5** safe spaces supported

## Sexual and Reproductive Health

UNFPA Syria and its partners continued to support access to essential SRH services for the most vulnerable women and girls in earthquake-affected areas. The focus has been on family planning, maternal health services, and emergency obstetric care. A total of 107,464 individuals (83 percent of whom are women, 14 percent girls) were reached with SRH services.

A total of 59 service delivery points were supported, including 17 static health clinics and 42 integrated mobile teams (IMTs), covering 280 communities in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Lattakia, and Tartous governorates. Generous donor support allowed the establishment of new IMTs to enhance the availability of SRH services in earthquake-affected areas. Additionally, UNFPA Syria fully supported two midwifery networks in Aleppo and Deir Ez-Zor governorates and partially supported one public hospital in Aleppo governorate with SRH commodities. The SRH services provided encompassed antenatal care, postnatal care, neonatal care, family planning counselling and methods, treatment for sexually transmitted infections, early detection services for breast and cervical cancer, and referral to advanced maternal health services at the secondary and tertiary level.

Moreover, 168 inter-agency reproductive health (IARH) kits were distributed containing essential SRH commodities such as family planning and contraceptive methods, medical supplies for safe childbirth, post-rape treatment, and medicines for sexually transmitted infections. These kits were designed to facilitate the provision of SRH services in areas where health facilities were disrupted due to the crisis.

## Protection / Response to GBV

UNFPA Syria and its partners continued to support access to GBV prevention and response services, catering to GBV survivors and women and girls at risk of GBV. A total of 76,398 individuals (74 percent of whom were women, 14 percent girls) were reached with GBV services.

A total of 47 service delivery points were supported, including 42 IMTs and five safe spaces covering 276 communities across the earthquake-affected areas of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Lattakia, and Tartous governorates. Generous donor support allowed the establishment of new IMTs and safe spaces

to enhance the availability of GBV services in earthquake-affected areas. The GBV services provided encompassed awareness-raising sessions, case management, individual and group psychosocial support (PSS) counselling, safe referrals, recreational activities, and vocational training.

Four training sessions on GBV core concepts were conducted for 106 service providers from 12 implementing partners in Aleppo and Lattakia governorates. Additionally, 11 PSS service providers were deployed to work with the IMTs in Aleppo, Hama, and Lattakia governorates, offering individual and group PSS counselling, and linking GBV survivors and women and girls at risk of GBV with GBV case workers when necessary.

Moreover, 46,374 dignity kits were distributed to women, girls, men and boys in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Lattakia, and Tartous governorates, containing essential items like soap, underwear, toothbrushes, toothpaste, sanitary napkins, and flashlights. To promote menstrual hygiene management and safeguard dignity during the emergency, awareness-raising sessions were conducted for 68,732 women and adolescent girls, and 206,196 sanitary napkins (packs of 10 pads each) were distributed to women and girls.

## Other updates

### Empowering Women through Cash & Voucher Assistance (CVA)

UNFPA Syria continued to support essential CVA programming targeting poor, vulnerable, and food insecure women to enable them to access lifesaving SRH and GBV services and purchase nutritious food and basic hygiene items. Through a joint initiative with World Food Programme (WFP), a total of 10,954 pregnant and lactating women in Aleppo, Hama and Lattakia governorates were reached with CVA through 11,176 monthly multi-purpose electronic vouchers (e-vouchers). The assistance was provided to eligible pregnant and lactating women who were already receiving support under WFP's General Food Assistance Programme.

Over the past six months, the transfer value of the e-vouchers was increased to respond to rising inflation and better meet the needs of pregnant and lactating women in earthquake-affected areas. Additionally, pregnant women living in temporary collective shelters in Aleppo

were reached with CVA through 220 vouchers for licenced transportation providers to enable them to utilise affordable transportation to access lifesaving SRH services in primary health care centres and hospitals, including emergency obstetric care. All women supported with CVA were also able to access integrated SRH and GBV services provided in UNFPA-supported service delivery points.

## Engaging the Young

Meanwhile, UNFPA Syria continued to respond to the priorities and needs of youth, particularly adolescent girls, and enhance their resilience, through the integration of dedicated youth engagement activities within SRH and GBV services. A total of 7,929 youth (99 percent of whom were female) were reached with youth engagement activities in the earthquake-affected areas of Aleppo, Homs, Lattakia, and Rural Damascus governorates.

A total of four youth-friendly spaces (YFS) and four outreach teams were supported in Aleppo, Homs, Lattakia, and Rural Damascus governorates to deliver youth engagement activities, including awareness-raising sessions, capacity strengthening opportunities, income generation, and livelihood opportunities; as well as providing small grants to support start-up businesses and community-based initiatives (CBIs), and conducting individual and group PSS counselling. A network of 22 youth volunteers (68 percent of whom were female) was also established in Aleppo and Lattakia governorates, to empower youth to disseminate key messages and raise awareness on SRH and GBV topics among vulnerable adolescent girls living in temporary collective shelters and through the YFS.

A total of 221 awareness-raising sessions were provided for 5,847 youth (99 percent of whom were female) on topics including SRH, GBV, puberty, family planning, early marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), domestic violence, cholera, and lice, healthy lifestyles, menstrual hygiene management, safe digital communications,

electronic harassment, earthquake safety, bullying, and stress management. Moreover, individual and group PSS counselling sessions and access to recreational activities were provided to 1,580 youth (99 percent of whom were female) to contribute to their recovery from adverse experiences of the earthquake.

Training on entrepreneurship and start-up projects were also given to 15 youth (53 percent of whom were female) who lost their homes in the earthquake to support their access to livelihood opportunities, and seven grants were provided for start-up projects. Furthermore, 124 youth (93 percent female) were supported in implementing nine CBIs to promote the meaningful engagement and participation of women and youth in their communities.

## Coordination

UNFPA Syria co-chairs the Health Sector's Reproductive Health Working Group (RHWG) with the World Health Organization (WHO). Regular meetings were held to coordinate SRH services in earthquake-affected areas. UNFPA Syria also leads the Protection Sector's GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR). In March 2023, the GBV AoR organised a national coordination meeting where humanitarian actors shared updates on the earthquake response and the priority needs of affected communities. The GBV AoR re-activated sub-national working groups in Aleppo and Lattakia governorates to enhance coordination for the earthquake response.

Over the last six months, 37 humanitarian actors reported to the GBV 4Ws for the Syria Hub, and 15 GBV AoR coordination meetings were held at national and sub-national levels. A total of 332 communities were supported with at least one type of GBV response service for GBV survivors and/or at-risk women and girls. Additionally, 55 humanitarian actors received training on GBV risk mitigation through the GBV coordination mechanism.

The GBV AoR developed key messages for humanitarian actors to ensure the integration of GBV interventions during the earthquake response, focusing on awareness-raising and prevention, access to services, and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). The AoR also established a 24/7 helpline providing

PSS services, legal consultations, referrals for health services and temporary shelter, and responses to reports of SEA. Updated GBV referral pathways, with a special focus on the earthquake-affected areas, were shared with all humanitarian actors.

Moreover, the GBV AoR coordinated with other sectors (Education, Health, Protection, Shelter, and WASH) to integrate risk mitigation measures in their programming and raise awareness of GBV referral pathways.

In coordination with the Child Protection AoR, a two-day workshop was conducted for humanitarian actors on the GBV Case Management Capacity Building Initiative. Trainers provided technical support to GBV case workers, including those in earthquake-affected areas. A field mission was also conducted in Aleppo, Hama, and Lattakia governorates to deliver technical support to the GBV AoR and PSEA sub-national working groups, engage with sub-national coordination actors, conduct GBV risk mitigation assessments inside and outside temporary collective shelters, and monitor partners' GBV earthquake response.

FOR MOST PEOPLE  
 IN SYRIA, LIFE TODAY  
 CARRIES VERY FEW  
 PROSPECTS FOR A  
 BETTER FUTURE.

— RIMA, a young woman from Aleppo



# BRICK BY BRICK: HOW ONE SYRIAN EARTHQUAKE SURVIVOR REBUILT HER LIFE

"My suffering started with the crisis in Syria, then the economic situation got worse, and the last straw was the earthquake."

Najwa Bikdash, 52, is from the Bustan Al Zahra neighbourhood in Aleppo. After 20 years of marriage, her husband abandoned her and their four daughters, leaving the family to fend for themselves financially. But years of marital emotional abuse had left Ms. Bikdash's self-esteem in tatters; she couldn't see how she would be able to survive alone.

Determined to take care of her daughters, she discovered a training course and counselling services at a local safe space for women and girls, supported by UNFPA. Slowly, she began piecing her life back together.

"I've been visiting the safe space for five years now, and I'm learning handicrafts and baking skills at the women's support centre," she told UNFPA. "I've come to realise there is nothing wrong with me as a divorced woman. On the contrary – I can achieve a lot."

But the destruction of her home and rippling insecurity from February's catastrophic earthquakes pushed Ms. Bikdash to the edge. Fear and anxiety took hold as she was forced to move from one overcrowded shelter to the next, with scarce assistance available.

Her only refuge was the safe space, where psychosocial support sessions gave her back a sense of security she felt she'd lost with the disaster. "Counselling helped rebuild my confidence brick by brick," explained Ms. Bikdash. "Now I plan to set up my own business to finance the repairs to my house."

## A space to heal – and to learn

Every day, more than 50 women visit the UNFPA-supported safe space in Bustan Al Zahra, which is one of five operating in earthquake-affected areas of Syria. The spaces offer counselling, gender-based violence response and recovery services, reproductive health support and the chance to learn livelihood skills so women can become financially independent.

Following the earthquakes, the safe space also provided shelter and emergency first aid training tailored to women and girls caught up in crises. This

helped Ms. Bikdash to better deal with the condition of her daughter, who suffers from convulsive seizures, and introduced her to best practices in the event of an earthquake.

It was training that came in useful sooner than she'd hoped, however, when another earthquake shook Aleppo on 25 July. Ms. Bikdash told UNFPA, "I'm scared because my house is cracked, I fear it may collapse. Six months after the last earthquake, I am tired. I always feel frustrated."

Hundreds of thousands of women and girls who lost their homes in the disaster are still living in unsafe, informal settlements. They have limited access to reproductive health and protection services and little privacy or electricity – with a lack of toilets and hygiene facilities a particular source of distress.

Gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and child and forced marriages are all reported to have increased, along with rising domestic violence by intimate partners. Although mobile protection services, outreach and tent shelters were all ramped up in earthquake-affected areas, prevention and response mechanisms have been severely disrupted and case management has proved challenging as people move almost constantly between shelters and camps.

## Reaching the most vulnerable

From the start of the crisis in Syria more than a decade ago, and even in the aftermath of the destructive earthquake, UNFPA has worked with partners on the ground to ensure reproductive health and protection services reach all women and girls in need, wherever they live.

Since February 2023, UNFPA has reached more than 368,000 people in earthquake-affected areas in Syria with reproductive health and protection services through safe spaces, mobile teams, and one-stop centres. UNFPA is appealing for \$182 million to continue championing the rights of women and girls in Syria and those displaced across the rest of the region.

"In the midst of these difficult events, I came to see that safe space as the best thing that happened to me," said Ms. Bikdash. "I told all the women in my neighbourhood to join, to benefit from the programmes offered... I'm proud of what I have become!"

“IN THE MIDST OF THESE DIFFICULT EVENTS, I CAME TO SEE THAT SAFE SPACE AS THE BEST THING THAT HAPPENED TO ME... I TOLD ALL THE WOMEN IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD TO JOIN, TO BENEFIT FROM THE PROGRAMMES OFFERED... I'M PROUD OF WHAT I HAVE BECOME.”





# DONORS & PARTNERS

THE ESSENTIAL SERVICES BEING DELIVERED TO SYRIANS REGION-WIDE WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

**In Syria:** (MOH) Ministry of Health, (MOHE) Ministry of Higher Education, (Mosaic) for Human Relief & Dev., (ICDA) Ihsan Charity Development Association, (NFRD) Nour Foundation for Relief and Development, (SSSD) Syrian Society for Social Development, (Al Tamayouz) Altamayouz for Orphan Sponsorship, (SFPA) Syrian Family Planning Association, (Yamama) Syria Al-Yamama, (Agha Khan) Agha Khan Foundation, (ASSLS) Amelioration of Sanitary and Social Level Society, (CCA) Circassian Charity Association, (Ghiras) Ghiras Ass. for Development, (PACA) Pan Arminian Charity Association, (Sham) Al-Sham Association for Health, (BSWH) Al Bir & Social Welfare Hama, (SARC) Syrian Arab Red Crescent, (SCFAP) Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population, (MAC) Mar Asia, (PRCS) The Palestine Red Crescent Society, (IECD) European Institute of Cooperation and Development, (Sanad) Sanad team for development, UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, and WFP.

**Türkiye Cross-Border:** Relief International (RI), Shafak, Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), Ihsan for Relief and Development (IhsanRD), and their sub- implementing partners AMAL (Ihsan RD), Women Support Association (IhsanRD), Hope Revival Organization (Ihsan RD), Medina (Shafak), Relief Experts Association- UDER (Relief International) and Syria Relief and Development (Relief International).

## CURRENT DONORS

Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, The European Commission, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), and the US Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BPRM).

**United Nations:** OCHA/CERF, UNDP, SCHF, Syria Humanitarian Fund, and UNFPA Emergency Funds.

DEVELOPED BY THE UNFPA  
REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN HUB  
FOR SYRIA & THE ARAB STATES



“AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE, I DON'T KNOW HOW I MANAGED TO GATHER THE STRENGTH TO GET BACK TO WORK. OUR FACILITY WAS TURNED INTO A SHELTER, SO WE BEGAN OFFERING SERVICES OUTSIDE. WE PROVIDED SUPPORT TO WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CAMPS, RECEPTION CENTRES, AND EVEN ON THE STREETS. IN THOSE EARLY DAYS, JUST HAVING SOMEONE TO LISTEN TO THEM WAS CRUCIAL FOR WOMEN. PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID BECAME THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITY AT THAT TIME, AND EVEN FIVE MONTHS AFTER THE QUAKE, THERE IS STILL A STRONG NEED FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT.”

— a GBV expert working in a facility in Aleppo that was severely affected by the earthquake

