



26 January 2022, northwest Syria – As a snowstorm devastated the conflict zone of northwest Syria, WHO and the Health Cluster mobilized efforts to deploy rescue health services to the affected region, home to some 4.4 million people with little to no infrastructure.

On top of COVID-19, a severe snowstorm swept through northwest Syria on the night of 18 January, with temperatures plummeting as low as -15 °C. A lack of fuel and heat, logistical difficulties, and delivery shortages – just some of the area’s daily challenges – were further exacerbated by the dangerously cold weather and the heavy snowfall. More than 59 camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) were damaged, affecting the lives of over 88 000 Syrians.

WHO was particularly concerned with the provision of immediate health services to the affected areas in the Afrin district. “We are receiving reports of extra needs for medicine and more referral services,” said Mahmoud Daher, Head of the WHO Gaziantep Field Presence, adding that reports of the closure of health facilities due to the extreme weather conditions had also been received.

WHO and the Health Cluster took instant action, coordinating with all partners in the Afrin district to come to the aid of the most affected populations. By 21 January, associates in the Health Cluster had already deployed their mobile teams and ambulances to the IDP camps and communities in Sharan, Sheikh Al Hadid, Ma’abatli, and Raju sub-districts.

WHO has recently launched an appeal for the support of the population of Syria. The current crisis confirms the urgent need for such support.

The freezing weather is especially dangerous to pregnant women, chronically-ill patients, and children – who are the most vulnerable. Following the harsh snowfall, doctors are reporting higher numbers of children with respiratory diseases.

WHO and the Health Cluster will continue to deliver extra support and services to the people of northwest Syria throughout this life-threatening season.



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