

# Whole of Syria Earthquake Response: Situation Report

Reporting period: 13 – 19 March 2023

This Whole of Syria Situation Report reflects the collective information and operations implemented from WHO's office in the Syrian Arab Republic, and from cross-border operations via WHO's office in Gaziantep, Türkiye.

To support WHO's response efforts, please visit:

[WHO flash appeal: Earthquake response in Türkiye and Whole of Syria](#)

For the latest data/information on the earthquakes, please see:

[Syria Earthquake response](#)

[WHO Earthquake Dashboard for Syria](#)

WHO Earthquake Response [Dashboard](#) and [Data Portal](#) for Northwest Syria

[Health Cluster Cholera Response Tracking Dashboard](#)

[Health Cluster for Northwest Syria Mental Health and Psychosocial Support \(MHPSS\) dashboard](#)

## 1. EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



*All figures are estimates, data sources include Syria Ministry of Health, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs (UNOCHA), Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster*

### Priority needs and concerns

- **Medicines:** The urgent need for essential medicines for the treatment of communicable and noncommunicable diseases in primary health care (PHC) centres and hospitals remains a serious concern.
- **Medical evacuation:** Despite ongoing negotiations, referrals from Northwest Syria to Türkiye for critically ill oncology and cardiology patients are largely suspended.
- **Mental health services:** The earthquakes have increased the need for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) among the affected population, and services are not available on the necessary scale. Although a growing number of health facilities provide MHPSS services - 51, up from 30 last week - gaps persist. WHO estimates that close to one million people in Northwest Syria have mental health conditions and approximately 230 000 have severe mental health conditions.
- **WASH:** Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services were heavily impacted by the earthquakes and are strained. The risk of waterborne diseases is considerable and has been exacerbated by heavy storms and floods. There is a need to strengthen WASH facilities and infection prevention and control activities to reduce and prevent disease transmission. Access to safe drinking water remains a concern in emergency shelters, especially in Aleppo and Hama.

**Cholera and Measles:** WHO is concerned about a sudden increase in the number of cholera and measles cases in Northwest Syria (21.2% and 18.7% respectively) in comparison with last week. There has also been an increase in measles cases in Aleppo, further highlighting the need to bolster testing and preventive measures across all of Syria. Immunization and risk communication campaigns are underway to respond to this issue.



*Abdul-Hay being treated for cholera at a treatment centre in northern Idleb, run by Al Sham Humanitarian Foundation, a WHO partner. ©WHO/Khalil Ashawi*

### Priority actions

- WHO is leading the health component of a multi-sectoral post-disaster needs assessment known as the Syria Earthquake Rapid Needs Assessment (SERNA) which aims to bring together multiple assessments to estimate the impact – including damage and losses – of the recent series of earthquakes.
- The vaccination campaign against cholera in Northwest Syria reached more than 1.6 million people – or 95% of the campaign target.
- WHO has deployed 29 mobile medical teams (MMTs) to Aleppo (13) and Hama (16) governorates. They provided 4841 outpatient consultations in 71 shelters.
- Since the earthquakes, WHO partners have provided over 140 000 mental health activities in different forms, from psychological education to psychiatric care and awareness sessions.
- Last week, seven WHO trucks carrying essential medicines and trauma supplies crossed the border into Northwest Syria through the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salama gates.

### Public health concerns

Please see [previous sitreps](#) for more detail on public health concerns.

Hospitals are overwhelmed and accessibility issues have been registered for disabled and elderly people. There are reported shortages of services at the secondary health care level.

- Waterborne diseases and WASH:** An ongoing cholera outbreak, together with crowded conditions and inadequate WASH facilities in emergency shelters, mean the risk of cholera cases and deaths remains high. Access to safe drinking water and WASH services remains a concern. Contamination has been observed at the household level (mainly in jerry cans and water tanks), heightening the risk of waterborne disease. Both risk communication activity to prevent the use of contaminated water and interventions to improve access to safe drinking water are required. In earthquake-affected areas, surveillance systems have reported a slight decrease in influenza-like illness (ILI), acute diarrhoea and leishmaniasis in Aleppo and Latakia. However, cases of lice and scabies have increased in Aleppo and Hama. Disease trends underscore the need for improvement of WASH services in order to prevent transmission. Lack of sufficient WASH facilities also contributes to other critical health concerns, including reproductive and urinary tract infections. Many women lack access to water, privacy, or supplies for menstrual hygiene management.
- MHPSS:** Cases of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and panic attacks have been reported. [It is estimated](#) that at least one million people are in need of mental health support in Northwest Syria. The mental health of first responders and others who are experiencing burnout and distress due to continued response efforts also remains a key concern.
- Vaccine preventable diseases:** The risk of wound infection and tetanus remains high due to difficulties in provision of immediate health care, access to health facilities and delayed admission to hospitals for acute injuries. Measles cases have been reported.

## 2. SITUATION UPDATE

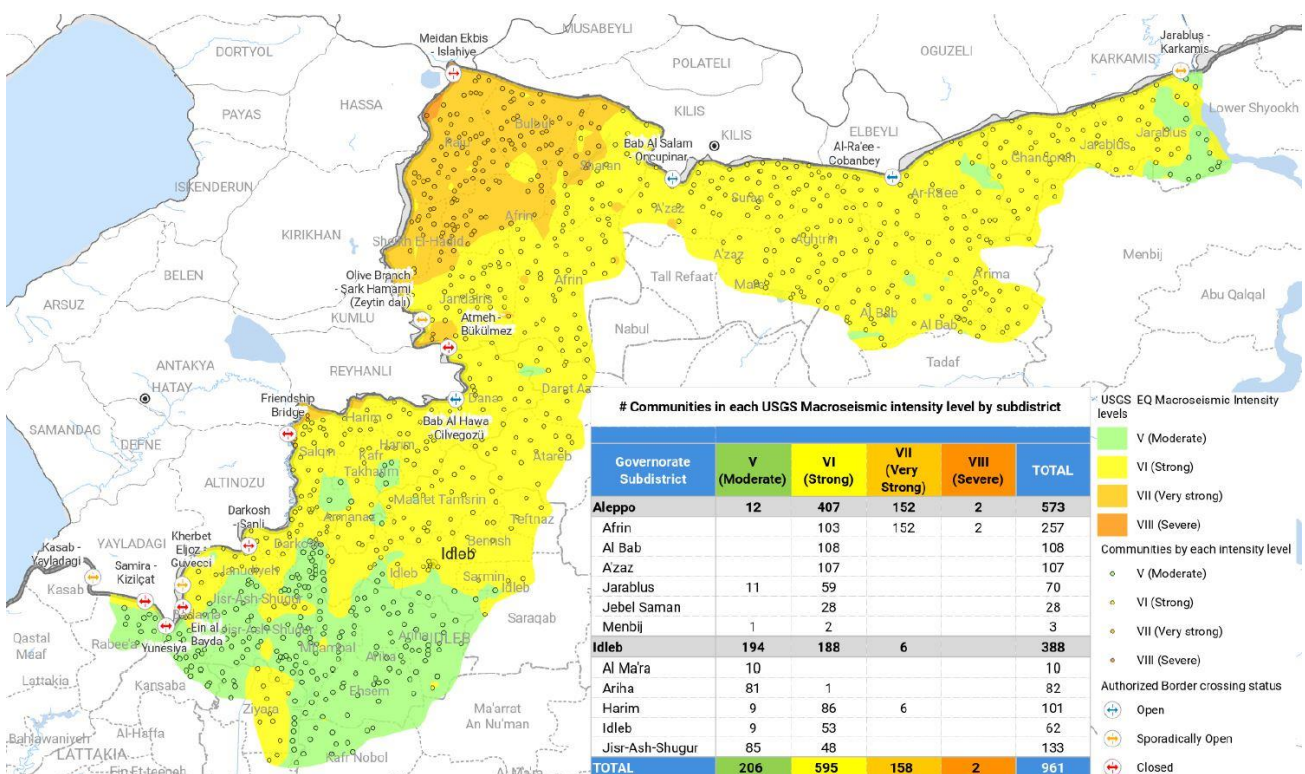


Figure 1: Earthquake-affected communities and border crossings ©OCHA

Heavy snowfall and storms caused floods in at least 54 sites for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northern Idlib and Northern Aleppo governorates last week. Over 600 tents were destroyed and 900 tents damaged. The urgent needs of those affected are for food, shelter and non-food items (NFIs) such as bed linen and

blankets, stoves, and personal hygiene items. The humanitarian community is working continuously to improve access to IDP sites through: road clearance, assisted relocation of IDPs, procurement of heating to prevent hypothermia, and provision of tents, food and NFIs.

The floods did not impact health facilities, but have raised public health concerns due to fear of water source contamination. Damaged roads and disrupted pathways within sites have hindered access to health services for those living in affected areas. Emergency shelters are overcrowded.

The humanitarian situation after the earthquakes remains critical. In many areas of Syria, the main priorities are to promote safe drinking water practices and monitor water quality. Sustaining essential health services through MMTs and strengthening PHC centres to provide services remains of high importance. This includes the provision of mental health services.

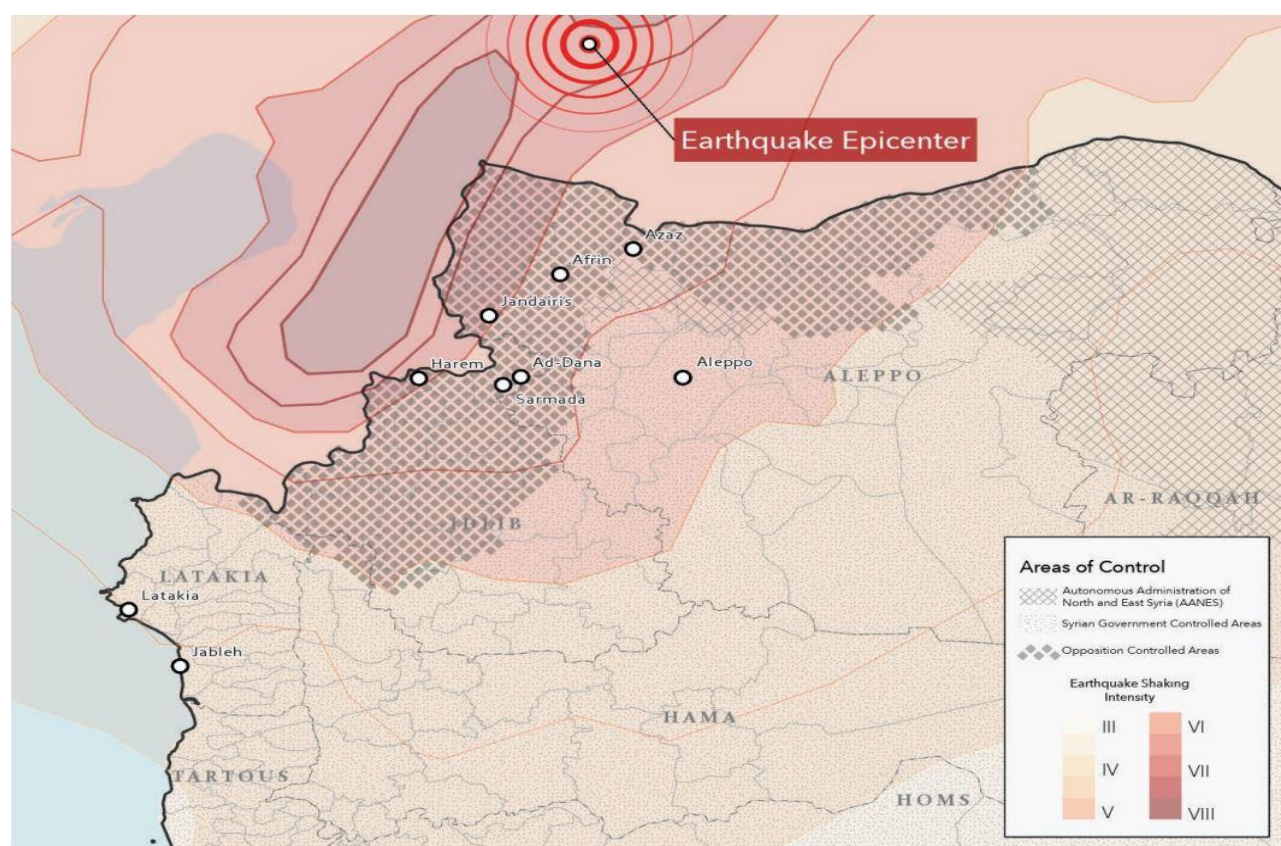


Figure 2: Earthquake intensity and areas of control. ©World Bank

UNOSAT has provided a [comprehensive satellite-derived damage assessment of buildings](#) in Northwest Syria, finding that some 67 health facilities were damaged by the earthquakes and aftershocks, of which six were completely destroyed.

There were demonstrations across Northwest Syria on 15 March, the 12-year anniversary of the Syrian conflict. The UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators issued a joint statement renewing the humanitarian community's commitment to support those most in need. One woman was reportedly injured last week by military operations on the ground.

### 3. ACTIONS TO DATE

WHO's goal is to save lives in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, mitigate longer-term health consequences, and rapidly restore essential health services across all earthquake-affected populations.

#### Leadership and coordination

- WHO, along with partners, is leading the health component of the Syria Earthquake Recovery Needs Assessment (SERNA). Initial results have estimated the cost of the health sector damage and losses caused by the earthquakes at over US\$ 1.18 billion.
- In Aleppo, two intersectoral missions were conducted to assess the impact and aftermath of the earthquakes in hard-to-reach areas in Fafin/Tall Refaat enclave and Sheikh Maqsood neighbourhood.
- On 16 March, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), Health, and Food Security Clusters conducted an interagency mission to three emergency shelters in Northwest Syria<sup>1</sup> to verify water quality, understand the services being provided by mobile clinics, and identify priority needs and gaps. The delegation, co-led by the Health Cluster coordinator, identified gaps in psychosocial services for children and other traumatized groups.
- WHO is leading negotiations with Turkish authorities to secure access to Northwest Syria for two emergency medical teams, provided by UK Med and Save the Children.
- As UN agencies scale up their operational presence in Northwest Syria, the UN is conducting a programme criticality exercise to ensure that activities are balanced against UN personnel security risks<sup>2</sup>.
- WHO participated in a joint donor field visit to Latakia organized by OCHA from 19 to 21 March. The purpose was to directly observe the impact of supported projects and to observe the wider humanitarian response to the earthquakes. Donor delegations from Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway and Spain took part in the mission.
- Between 13 and 19 March, two national public health officers joined the WHO teams in Latakia and Homs, along with one member of programme support staff in Latakia.

#### Health information and planning

##### Surveillance

- 381 out of 461 (83%) Early Warning, Alert and Response System (EWARS) reporting sites in Aleppo, Hama and Latakia reported between 13 and 19 March.
- 41 rapid response teams (RRTs) are deployed in Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia to verify and investigate alerts reported. Between 13 and 19 March, 22 alerts were reported and are under verification or investigation at the time of writing.
- The concerns detected by EWARS with the most notable increases in comparison with the previous week were in Aleppo – lice (85% increase) and scabies (33% increase).
- Notable decreases were observed in Latakia in comparison with the previous week: lice (50% decrease), scabies (49% decrease) and acute jaundice syndrome (66% decrease).
- WHO has scaled up the capacity of public surveillance officers and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on EWARS reporting. Since 6 Feb:
  - WHO has trained 111 NGO health workers, from Aleppo (66) and Latakia (45) – deployed as part of (MMTs) – to report to EWARS;
  - Four training workshops have been carried out for 130 newly-deployed RRTs on disease case definitions, thresholds, and investigation of water- and foodborne diseases.
- WHO and partners have re-established EWARN surveillance reporting in Aleppo and Idlib, achieving a completeness rate close to pre-earthquake levels (98% and 94% respectively).

<sup>1</sup> Alzyara camp in Jandar, Alsaqiah camp (near Alsaqiah Almahmoudiah) in Afrin, and Azaz central reception centre

<sup>2</sup> The Programme Criticality (PC) Framework is a common UN system policy for decision-making on acceptable risk. It puts in place guiding principles and a systematic structured approach to ensure that activities involving UN personnel can be balanced against security risks.

- Between 13 and 19 March, 2796 new suspected cholera cases were reported in Northwest Syria, raising the total number to 57 947. WHO and the Health Cluster regularly update [data on cholera detection](#) and response to improve coordination. The number of reported cholera cases has increased by 18.7% and the number of measles cases by 21.2% compared to the previous week.
- No new cases of cholera were reported in Aleppo, Hama or Homs, nor was there an increase in cases of acute watery diarrhoea. However, there has been an increase of acute (general) diarrhoea cases, which merits further investigation. Preventive measures are essential, as well as a change to routine testing of diarrhoea cases. During the reporting period, confirmed measles cases were reported from Aleppo (34) and Latakia (5).
- During the reporting period, two training workshops were held for 60 RRTs which have been deployed in earthquake-affected areas, covering disease case definitions, alert thresholds, and the investigation of water- and foodborne diseases.

#### *Health service information*

- The updated health facilities damage assessment for Northwest Syria now shows that 61 health facilities have been partially damaged, and six completely destroyed due to the earthquakes.
- The Health Cluster in Northwest Syria has finalized the mapping of mobile clinics and teams available at emergency shelters and is coordinating with partners to ensure broad coverage of services.
- After the earthquakes, mental health care is available at nearly 130 health facilities across Northwest Syria while only 17 provide physical rehabilitation services, as the [Health Cluster dashboard](#) shows.
- WHO completed a rapid HeRAMS<sup>3</sup> assessment of the impact of the earthquakes on health facility functionality and service availability. Out of 34 hospitals assessed, 19 hospitals reported damage, including structural and nonstructural cracks. One hospital had a partially collapsed section. Five hospitals had only minor damage. Seven reported no damage. Three hospitals were not functioning prior to the earthquakes and did not report into the assessment. Of 673 primary health care centres that were assessed, 133 reported damage. Six health centres are reported to be fully damaged and have gone out of service. Forty-seven health centres were classified as partially damaged.

### **Health operations and technical expertise**

#### *Health care*

- WHO has deployed 29 mobile medical teams to Aleppo (13) and Hama (16) governorates. They have provided 4841 outpatient consultations in 71 shelters.
- A total of 5140 consultations for integrated management of childhood illness were given by 43 national mobile teams at targeted shelters in Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Idlib; 14 cases were referred to hospitals.
- WHO provides technical support to over 150 mobile clinics in Northwest Syria and operational support to 33 mobile clinics in northern Aleppo and Idlib. These clinics provide over 40 000 consultations per week.
- Four TB centres in Northwest Syria receive technical support and medicines from WHO. During the reporting week, WHO started providing operational support to three TB centres in Albab, Azaz and Afrin with a catchment area of more than three million people.
- As part of sustaining essential health services and trauma care, WHO has delivered medication and supplies to cover more than 90 000 treatments to 15 health facilities in affected areas. This includes life-saving and essential medicines and 12 different types of noncommunicable disease kits.
- Work is ongoing to coordinate the distribution of 70 000 dialysis kits procured by WHO partner [Islamic Relief Worldwide](#) through the Syria Cross Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF).
- WHO supported the training of 25 health workers in Damascus on prosthetics and orthotics.
- Patient referral networks within Northwest Syria have resumed their functions, adapting operations to the impact of recent flooding. International referrals from Northwest Syria remain largely suspended.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/initiatives/herams>

### Vaccines and immunizations

- Under the coordination of the Syria Immunization Group (SIG), 1470 teams vaccinated over 1.6 million individuals (aged over 1 year) in a 10-day house-to-house campaign concluding 18 March. The campaign reached 95% of the target coverage in Sarmada, Maaret Tamsrin, Dana, and Atmeh districts in Idlib and A'zaz district in Northern Aleppo. Further details are available at [SIG's Oral Cholera Vaccine campaign dashboard](#).

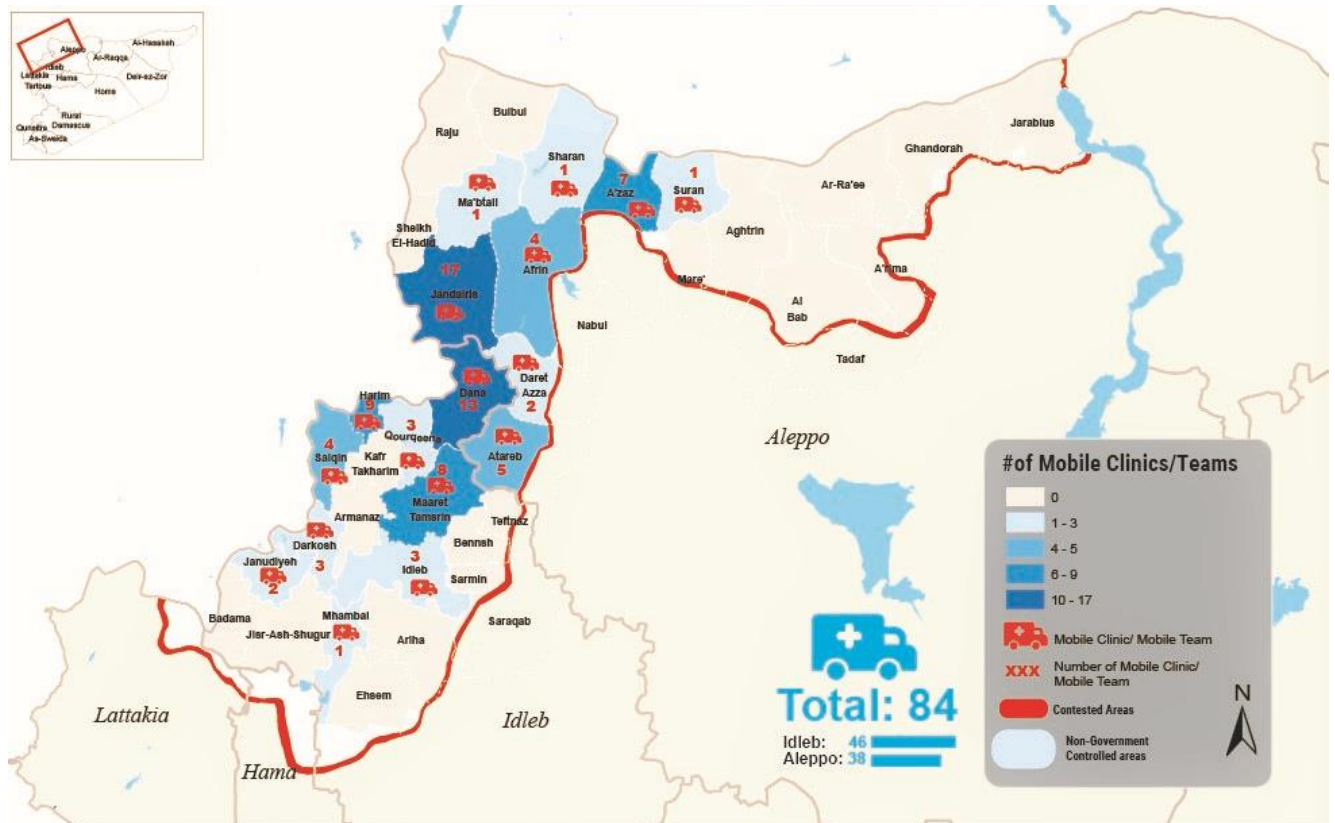


Figure 3: Distribution of mobile clinics deployed for earthquake response in Northwest Syria ©WHO

### WASH

- During the reporting period, WHO-supported WASH monitoring teams conducted water testing in 23 emergency shelters in Aleppo; 8.8% were found to be contaminated by bacteria. In response, WHO distributed 750 water purification tablets to the affected population.
- Additionally, 40 samples were collected in Hama, of which 14 samples (35%) were contaminated, mainly those collected from the water tanks in shelters. Chlorine tablets (10 000) have been delivered by the Syrian Directorate of Health to shelters with contaminated water tanks.

### MHPSS

- WHO continues to co-chair the MHPSS technical working group in Syria while also supporting the operation of 125 MHPSS teams and providing psychotropic medication in Aleppo, Hama and Latakia; the teams have provided over 515 000 mental health services.
- Mental health and psychosocial support services are now available in 215 sites in Northwest Syria, including camps and other emergency shelters. From 13 to 19 March, WHO partners provided over 4000 patients with psychiatric outpatient and inpatient care, and more than 27 000 people were reached through MHPSS group awareness sessions.

## Nutrition

- MMTs: During the reporting period, 35 WHO MMTs screened 4661 children aged under five years in Aleppo, Latakia, Hama and Idlib for malnutrition; 40 acutely malnourished (global acute malnutrition) cases were detected and referred to local health centres for follow up. More than 1300 mothers were provided with counselling on infant and young child feeding.
- National nutrition surveillance programme: The programme has been providing services to the affected population in Syria. It is operational in 284 health centres in Aleppo (55), Hama (130), Idlib (2) and Latakia (97<sup>4</sup>). Overall, 7335 children aged under 5 years were screened; 139 cases were detected with acute malnutrition and referred for treatment. Of screened cases at facility level, 24 cases of complicated severe acute malnutrition were admitted to stabilization centres and six patients were discharged. Additionally, 2088 mothers were provided with advice on infant and young child feeding.

## Risk communication and social mobilization

- In Northwest Syria, group awareness sessions reaching over 10 000 people were carried out from 13 to 19 March at 20 emergency centres. Awareness sessions focused on MHPSS and communicable diseases (especially cholera, measles, scabies, and COVID-19). Since the onset of the earthquakes, over 69 000 people have been reached by awareness sessions.
- Between 13 and 19 March, WHO RCCE partners, in collaboration with a UNICEF partner, conducted 462 group awareness sessions in schools in 33 subdistricts in Northwest Syria. These sessions catered to 10 679 students and 350 teachers. In addition, 40 mobile vans with loudspeakers were used for public service announcements on health and hygiene, focusing particularly on cholera.
- WHO risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) partners reported awareness and referral activities in nine sub-districts in earthquake-affected areas in Northwest Syria during the reporting period.
- Community health workers delivered over 1400 hygiene kits in Northwest Syria, and facilitated 347 referrals for further medical assistance.
- WHO, in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), conducted a two-day training of trainers course for 35 SARC volunteers from governorates across Syria to roll out a community health outreach package.
- Eight new messaging and communication products on fire prevention and burn management have been developed in Arabic and English in response to emerging health issues. They are to be used in shelters and earthquake-affected communities in Aleppo, Latakia and Hama.
- WHO continues to conduct weekly social listening to detect emerging issues, needs and concerns coming from online digital platforms, including social media, mass media and online search platforms.



*A community health worker advising on cholera prevention in camps in northern Idlib ©WHO/Khalil Ashawi*

## Supplies and logistics

- Between 13 and 19 March, medical supplies valued at US\$ 103 000 and weighing 13 metric tonnes were delivered to 15 health facilities in Aleppo, Latakia, and Homs. Since 6 February, WHO has delivered over

<sup>4</sup> In Latakia there are 97 functional sites, of which 45 are struggling to provide services due to earthquake damage. The number of facilities is reduced from an original 103 facilities, due to major damage to six facilities that are subsequently out of service.



350 metric tonnes of medicines, medical supplies, and equipment, valued at over US \$2 million and accounting for over 103 000 treatment courses, to Aleppo, Latakia, Tartous, Hama and Homs.

- During the reporting week, WHO procurement has focused on medication for scabies and on liposomal amphotericin B medication, which is used to treat life-threatening fungal infections such as leishmaniasis and cryptococcal meningitis.
- Between 13 and 19 March, seven WHO trucks containing WHO-procured medical supplies for the response crossed the border to Northwest Syria, providing approximately 215 000 treatments. This included treatment for 22 000 trauma cases. Since 6 February, WHO has delivered 32 trucks cross-border from Türkiye to Northwest Syria, containing emergency supplies and medicines worth US\$ 3.1 million, with a weight of 2952 metric tonnes. These supplies are sufficient for over 4.7 million treatments and 35 200 trauma cases.
- Since 6 February, four charter flights containing medical supplies worth US\$ 7.5 million and weighing 96 tonnes have arrived in Türkiye for dispatch to Northwest Syria.
- Between 13 and 19 March, WHO distributed essential medicines for leishmaniasis and TB to support 37 health care facilities and provide over 20 000 treatment courses. Since 6 February, WHO has distributed medicines, medical supplies and equipment to support 207 hospitals and healthcare facilities and provided three million treatment courses in this region.

#### Resource mobilization

- The WHO Flash Appeal estimated that the immediate response for the Whole of Syria in the first three months following the earthquakes would require US \$33.7 million.
- In response, WHO's Contingency Fund for Emergencies provided a loan of US \$11.3 million.
- The UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), the US Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), the Government of the State of Kuwait and Novo Nordisk Foundation have together provided over US\$ 15 million.
- Further funding is pledged by King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, to a total of US\$ 10.7 million.

## 4. KEY NEXT STEPS

WHO is focused on the following priorities:

- The launch on 8 April 2023 of a measles and polio vaccination campaign targeting over 750 000 children under the coordination of the Syria Immunization Group;
- Plans for a further cholera vaccination campaign targeting an additional 1.1 million people;
- The implementation of a mental health action plan to reach 600 000 people in Northwest Syria over a period of three months;
- Improving disease prevention, early detection, and rapid response to public health alerts and suspected outbreaks in emergency shelters;
- Ensuring access to safe and sufficient WASH amid concerns of damage to water systems and an ongoing cholera outbreak.