



20 March 2023 – Ahead of today’s Donors Conference held in Brussels to raise funds and coordinate relief response in the areas affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, WHO is calling on the international community to support lifesaving health response activities for the 4.9 million people most severely impacted out of the 8.8 million affected in all areas of Syria.

The WHO Flash Appeal estimated that the earthquake immediate response for the Whole of Syria, in the first three months following the earthquake, requires US \$33.7 million. In response, WHO’s Contingency Fund for Emergencies has provided a loan of US \$11.3 million, while the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and US Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) have together provided US \$6.5 million. Further funding is pledged by the Government of the State of Kuwait, King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, and Novo Nordisk Foundation for a total of US\$ 14 million.

Urging for the solidarity of the global community in line with the “Health for All by All” vision of WHO’s Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Regional Director Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari stressed that “Syrians have endured crises and disasters over and over again. Their legendary resilience has been tested like never before by last month’s earthquake; they need urgent assistance to emerge and recover from this latest catastrophe.”

Even before the earthquake, the humanitarian crisis in Syria had been steadily worsening since 2011, with 15.3 million people – or about 70% of the total population – estimated to need humanitarian assistance this year. Ravaged by over a decade of ongoing conflict that has led to major socioeconomic decline, huge population displacements, the erosion of a once-solid health system, COVID-19, and the spread of transmissible diseases such as cholera and measles, Syria was in no way prepared to face a natural disaster of such proportions as the 6 February 2023 earthquake.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been providing health care support on the ground through it all, offering trauma care to victims, preventing and controlling infectious diseases, treating patients with chronic illnesses, providing routine immunizations, maternal and neonatal care, and mental health services, among other life-sustaining support. In the first 24 hours after the earthquake, WHO immediately responded with life-saving supplies and equipment, and has been providing increasing technical and logistical support since.

More than half a million people (over 97,000 households) were displaced by the earthquake, many of them living in overcrowded, unsanitary collective shelters and informal settlements with insufficient services and vulnerable to heightened risk of disease.

Urgent health needs include, but are not limited to, the reinforcement of disease surveillance and response in earthquake-affected areas; the urgent provision of medicines, medical supplies and equipment; support for the management of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and kidney failure; continued care for people with injuries and rapid scale-up of physical rehabilitation services; increased mental health and psychosocial support, especially to older people, children, women, and frontline workers.

The Syrian people have shown remarkable resilience and steadfastness throughout the protracted conflict. They deserve the solidarity of the international community. This crisis is a true litmus test for global generosity, solidarity and diplomacy.

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