Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Armed conflict in northwest Syria continues to impact heavily on civilians who have already endured nine years of crisis, violence, multiple displacements and economic downturn. According to OCHA, four million people live in northwest Syria, including 2.8 million in need of humanitarian assistance—some 80% of whom are women and children.

Since the escalation of armed conflict began in December 2019, the humanitarian situation has deteriorated dramatically in Idlib and Aleppo and indiscriminate attacks on civilians continue—resulting in massive population movements and an acute child protection crisis. According to the CCCM Cluster over 800,000 people—including more than 500,000 (60%) children—were displaced between 1 December and 9 February. Most have suffered from multiple displacements and are increasingly desperate, squeezed into an ever-smaller pocket of territory with no means of escape. Tens of thousands of children and their families are living in tents, public buildings and in the open air amid very cold weather and rains, with limited or non-existent access to basic services.

Since mid-January, Government of Syria (GoS) forces and their allies have advanced into southern and eastern Idlib and western Aleppo, taking full control of the strategic M5 highway, parts of the M4 highway and at least 100 villages and towns. As a result, some 350,000 people fled for urban centres and IDP camps in NW Idlib (such as Dana and Maaret Tamsrin) while tens of thousands more reportedly moved to areas such as Afrin, A’zaz and Al-Bab in northern Aleppo near the Turkish border. However, civilians remain unsafe in some destination areas, vulnerable to improvised explosive devices and other unexploded ordinances.

UNICEF, sister UN agencies and other humanitarian partners continue to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to people in need in NWS (including newly accessible areas) despite the ongoing hostilities, access challenges and risks for front-line responders. Nevertheless, many partners have been forced to suspend their activities in southern Idlib and northern Hama and relocate to safer locations to the north.

Efforts are also ongoing to scale up activities across all sectors to reach and meet the rapidly growing needs of IDPs and host community populations. However, due to the rapid pace of continued displacement, combined with the already enormous needs on the ground, UNICEF urgently requires additional funding and support to reach the most vulnerable children and families in northwest Syria.

Summary Analysis of UNICEF Response

Nutrition

UNICEF works with 13 partners in 56 sub-districts to assist pregnant and lactating mothers and children under 5 (U5). In January, a total of 55,381 mothers and children U5 received nutrition screenings, of whom 120 children were found to be severely malnourished and referred to appropriate treatment. 5,692 children U5, pregnant and lactating mothers also received age-appropriate micronutrient supplementation—nutrition surveillances indicate that without this intervention, at least 5 per cent of beneficiaries could suffer life-threatening micronutrient deficiency and anaemia. A further 11,433 pregnant/lactating mothers and caregivers received education and proper counselling on optimal infant feeding and caring practices, which could contribute to reducing stunting and U5 mortality by at least 19% (Lancet 2013).
UNICEF also continued supporting community- and facility-based nutrition surveillance over 56 subdistricts and scaled up its life-saving rapid response mechanism to 54 Rapid Response Teams (RRTs).

**Health**
UNICEF works with five partners to reach vulnerable communities with essential services through health centres and mobile clinics. In January, 13,8931 pregnant/lactating mothers and children received outpatient consultations, while 9,632 children under 12 months benefitted from immunisation services (74% of the monthly target). A further 36,040 care-givers received awareness raising sessions on different health issues and health promotion messages.

**WASH**
Together with three partners, UNICEF made progress in restoring essential, life-saving water supplies and sanitation services for both IDPs and host communities. In January, over 330,000 people benefitted from WASH interventions including hygiene promotion, improved water supply, sanitation facilities, essential supplies (such as hygiene kits, jerry cans and purifying tablets) and WASH in institutions (i.e. child friendly spaces, schools and health care facilities). Of these, an estimated 55,000 people benefitted from improved water supply, 167,000 people were served with improved sanitation and 4,500 children were reached in schools. In several high-severity locations, safe drinking water was provided (via chlorination) for 210,000 people and over 250,000 people in informal camps/settlements received emergency services such as water trucking, community latrines and solid waste management.

**Education**
Despite the ongoing conflict, UNICEF and five partners worked to ensure education services for children in NWS Syria. In January, UNICEF provided formal education services to nearly 6,500 children2 and non-formal education services to over 5003 out-of-school children, while almost 6,500 children4 benefitted from heating in schools. In addition, 36 children and youth5 between the ages of 5-24 received life-skills and citizenship education in formal and non-formal settings and 31 children in schools received psychosocial support. To increase awareness on the importance of education, UNICEF conducted outreach campaigns reaching 56,985 children (48% girls) and 2,013 adults (48% women). In addition, 89 teachers and education personnel were trained in January.

**Child Protection**
In January, UNICEF worked through eight partners to provide essential child protection and psychosocial support services to over 21,700 men, women and children in 22 sub-districts of Idlib and Aleppo.6

**NFIs**
To help vulnerable displaced families survive the life-threatening bitter cold and freezing rains, in January UNICEF and partners assisted 37,277 children7 under the age of 14 with essential supplies such as winter clothing and high-thermal blankets. As the crisis unfolds, UNICEF will continue to respond to the critical NFI needs of displaced children for the next two months.

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1 5,747 children (2,706 boys, 3,041 girls) and 8,146 women.
2 3,393 girls, 3,089 boys.
3 202 girls, 320 boys.
4 3,380 girls, 3,086 boys.
5 17 girls, 19 boys.
6 5,873 girls, 6,127 boys; 5,525 women, 4,205 men
7 18,966 girls, 18,311 boys.

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