

Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation

Humanitarian Strategy 2022 - 2023

Syrian Crisis



Spanish
Cooperation

HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT STRATEGY 2022-2023

Syrian Crisis

The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation (MAEUEC), is the principal management body of Spanish Cooperation. Humanitarian action is a major priority for this Agency in its efforts to combat poverty and promote sustainable development within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

The AECID Humanitarian Action Office, created in 2007, is responsible for managing and implementing Spain's official humanitarian action, based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. The Office follows guidelines set out in the current Spanish Cooperation Master Plan and in the Spanish Cooperation Humanitarian Action Strategy for 2019-2026. This Strategy is the cornerstone of Spain's humanitarian action, following an approach based on the following priorities:

- rights, gender, age, and diversity
- disaster risk prevention, reduction, and reporting
- resilience, the do-no-harm principle, and conflict sensitivity
- concern for the environment

The Humanitarian Action Office also works within the framework of the National Strategy for Humanitarian Diplomacy, the guiding document for the principles and lines of action that govern Spanish humanitarian action at the national level.

Furthermore, AECID has undertaken different commitments regarding the quality of assistance, following the World Humanitarian Summit of 2016 and in accordance with the Grand Bargain adopted the same year.

Along these lines, to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian response provided by AECID to major crises, humanitarian strategies have been established for priority geographical contexts, aligned with United Nations and European Union humanitarian response plans and complementary to the Country Partnership Frameworks in force, where appropriate.

Thus, this Humanitarian Action Strategy, which draws on the lessons learned from AECID humanitarian response planning in the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 periods, seeks to address the main needs identified in this context by targeting specific sectors.

In addition, almost two years after Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic, and as we still find ourselves dealing with uncertainties that undoubtedly affect donors and recipients, it is clear that the effects of the pandemic have exacerbated global humanitarian needs while exponentially increasing the challenges that humanitarian actors must face in their daily work. The response to the pandemic and its impact on humanitarian contexts will undoubtedly continue to represent a significant proportion of the contributions channelled through international agencies and non-

governmental organizations. In everything that we do, we will act in line with the Spanish Cooperation Joint Response Strategy for the Covid-19 Crisis, which is based on the following priorities, always placing people at the heart of our actions:

- saving lives and strengthening health systems
- protecting and recovering rights and livelihoods and engaging in capacity-building for vulnerable people
- preserving and transforming socio-economic systems, rebuilding the production system, and strengthening democratic governance

This increasingly troubling humanitarian landscape, with its ever-growing needs, is further complicated by the alarming impact of the war in Ukraine on other humanitarian situations, especially in the area of food security and nutrition, owing to rising fuel and food prices and to the trade restrictions of the world's two main cereal producers (Russia and Ukraine).

The gender-, age- and diversity-based approach adopted in the Humanitarian Action Strategy must be mainstreamed into AECID actions. Therefore, the Agency will strive to ensure that in the projects it supports, the assistance, resources and services provided reach the entire target population, according to their specific needs, roles and capacities, paying special attention to women and children. Another priority will be that of preventing and responding to gender-based violence during humanitarian crises.

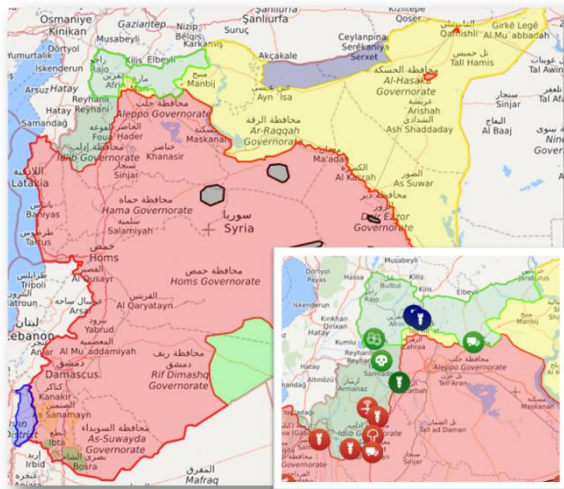
In this regard, AECID will support projects tagged with the code 3 and code 4 gender markers of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)¹ and mark 2 of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission (DG ECHO).²

As regards other horizontal priorities and approaches adopted by Spanish Cooperation, priority will be given to actions that feature an inclusive approach and results-based management, together with the effective mainstreaming of environmental sustainability, cultural diversity and human rights. The provision of cash assistance and vouchers will also be incorporated into humanitarian action as a key response element, and non-earmarked aid and support for local actors will be promoted as far as possible.

¹ IASC, Gender with Age Marker Information Sheet. Available at:
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc-gam-information-sheet.pdf>.

² DG ECHO, Gender-Age Marker Toolkit. Available at:
https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender_age_marker_toolkit.pdf.

1. BACKGROUND



Syria. Evolution of the war and outlook for the future

In March 2022, the Syrian conflict will enter its eleventh year, after a period marked by the consolidation of areas under the control of the different parties involved in the conflict, with the entire central and southern parts of the country controlled by forces allied with the Damascus Government. Large-scale hostilities have decreased overall, but continue to take place and the region remains insecure, particularly in areas of mixed or contested control and close to the front line.

Explosive ordnance contamination is estimated to affect one third of populated communities, with areas that experience intense hostilities being particularly affected, including Aleppo, Idlib, and the governorates of Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, rural Damascus and Deraa.

Globally, Syria was the scene of the forced displacement of 215,800 people during the first nine months of 2021,³ while 109,0004 people chose to return to their homes (93% of them internally displaced persons, with only 8,028 Syrian refugees reportedly returning from January to September). Not only does UNHCR maintain that conditions for a dignified, safe and sustainable return to Syria are not in place, but since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic there have been additional restrictions on mobility and the borders have even been closed for extended periods. The vast majority of Syrian refugees have no intention of returning within the next 12 months.

On the political agenda, no tangible progress has been made by the Constitutional Committee, whose work is facilitated by the UN Special Envoy for Syria within the framework of UNSC Resolution 2254, nor in the UN-backed Geneva process. Also noteworthy is the EU's organization of the Brussels V Conference for Syria and the region in 2021.

Exhausted by years of conflict and poverty, Syrians are worse off now than at any time since 2011, when the conflict began. 90% of the population now live below the poverty line, up from 80% a year ago, with two million people living in extreme poverty. In addition, the civilian population continues to face a protracted protection crisis due to territorial control mechanisms and disputes between the warring parties. The situation has been exacerbated since late 2019 by the economic crisis⁵ resulting from the Lebanese financial crisis, the social and economic effects of preventive measures to control the Covid-19 pandemic, and increasing shortages and lack of access to basic services as a result of prolonged sanctions and the deterioration of major infrastructure, with women and children being particularly affected.

³ Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme. Mobility and needs monitoring - September overview.

⁴ Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme. Third returnee overview for 2021 - January to September

⁵ According to the World Bank, since the start of the war, Syria's GDP has plunged by 55-67%, depending on the exchange rate used (official or market). The market exchange rate has been devalued by 70 times its original value over the same period, with extreme depreciation since 2019, coinciding with the onset of the financial crisis in Lebanon. After stabilizing to a certain degree during the summer, at the end of August the exchange rate once again began to depreciate. Syria is suffering from hyperinflation that caused consumer prices to skyrocket between mid-2019 and mid-2020, with the price of the basic food basket up by 236% on the previous year, and with a further 55% increase during the first eight months of 2021. The public sector is one of the main generators of employment in Syria, and therefore the loss of purchasing power of public employees, whose current average salary is below the global income poverty line, is highly telling of the current economic situation.

NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES⁶

The Syrian conflict continues to drive one of the world's largest refugee crises. More than 10 million people, including more than 5.6 million registered Syrian refugees, according to UNHCR, and some 4.8 million affected host community members, are in need of support. This is the largest number of people in need of some form of assistance in this crisis in nearly a decade. Of the 5.66 million Syrian refugees registered by UNHCR in October 2021, 97% are distributed among neighbouring countries: Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

As the record number of people in need increases, the living conditions of the Syrian refugee population in neighbouring countries continue to deteriorate. There are five key underlying circumstances that are driving this deterioration: the effects of large-scale protracted displacement, macroeconomic forecasts, socio-economic conditions, demographic pressures, and Covid-19, which exacerbates socio-economic challenges in host countries. The presence of refugees overburdens existing infrastructure and already limited resources, which in turn generates social tensions between refugee and host communities.

Lebanon. Facing severe social and economic instability, this country hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world: 0.84 million registered Syrians (or 1.5 million according to government estimates). In late 2019, a severe crisis in the financial sector led to major social unrest, which brought the country to a standstill for a few weeks. It also led to an unprecedented deterioration of the population's economic situation arising from an increasingly devalued currency, restrictions on the use of dollars, rampant inflation and growing shortages of fuel and of basic goods and services. The explosion of a warehouse containing highly flammable products on 4 August 2020 in the port of Beirut added unprecedented material devastation to this panorama. An estimated 218 people died, more than 7,000 were injured, and 300,000 suffered material damage to their homes, businesses and property. In the midst of this situation, the Covid-19 pandemic has also impacted the country in health and socio-economic terms.

In 2021, 55% of the Lebanese population was estimated to be living below the poverty line, more than double the figure for 2019 (23%) and 89% of the Syrian refugee population was estimated to be living in extreme poverty, with a 34% increase since 2019. Moreover, in 2021, 50% of the refugee population was rated food insecure, only 20% of individuals over the age of 15 were legal residents, 25% of girls aged 15-19 were married, and 18% of households were headed by women. This situation resulted in increased tensions and conflict between refugees and the local population, as it heightened perceptions of competition for scarce resources and aid.

Against this backdrop, the UN is adapting its humanitarian response and coordination model in the country to respond to a complex humanitarian crisis whose scope extends beyond the Syrian refugee crisis.

⁶ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response - Inter-agency information sharing portal available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> 18.11.2021; 3RP Regional Strategic Overview 2021-2022 - Regional Refugee Resilience Plan/Regional Needs Overview 2021; Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2021 (2021 update); Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2020-2022.

Jordan. The recorded Syrian refugee population in Jordan stands at 672,000, a figure that has remained fairly stable since 2016, when the border was closed. 80% of the Syrian refugee population remains outside refugee camps, with a significant concentration in the northern regions bordering Syria, and in Amman. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the refugee and local communities in Jordan. According to the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, there has been a sharp increase in unemployment rates, levels of food insecurity, risk of eviction, gender-based violence and access to basic health and education services. Approximately three-quarters of the resident population—locals and refugees—in Jordan claim to have difficulties in meeting their basic food and rent needs. The number of refugees who report insufficient access to food has risen from 14% to 24% within a single year, and the percentage of Jordanians who have had to reduce their food intake and have adopted negative coping strategies has risen from 33% to 55% in the same period. The number of children going to work instead of attending school increased from 1% to 13% between 2019 and 2020. Much of this is attributed to the loss of income and employment opportunities. Until the advent of the crisis, Jordan had made progress in issuing work permits to Syrian refugees, most of them in the agriculture and construction sectors. Additionally, Jordan has made an effort, together with UNHCR, to regularize Syrian refugees in urban areas, although there are still refugees without access to legal documentation.

Türkiye. UNHCR reports that in 2021 there were 3.74 million Syrian refugees in the country, of whom fewer than 10% lived in refugee camps. Since the start of the Syrian crisis, Türkiye's stance has been to facilitate refugee protection and assistance, allowing refugees access to education, health services and the job market. In October 2019, Türkiye launched a military operation in northeast Syria seeking, among other objectives, to establish a self-styled "safe zone". On the other hand, the offensive in the Idlib region between 2019 and 2020 did not result in a massive new surge of refugees to eastern Türkiye. Despite the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic, Türkiye has continued to provide temporary protection to Syrian refugees and to ensure their access to basic services.

Iraq. As at 2021, there were still 250,419 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq, mostly ethnic Kurds. The attitude towards Syrian refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan remains favourable, with local authorities and communities facilitating their stay, but the absence of an effective legal framework for refugee protection in Iraq continues to limit their long-term rights in terms of residency and social benefits. Lack of access to employment and livelihood opportunities remain the main causes of vulnerability and challenges to protection among this group. Covid-19 has only exacerbated these vulnerabilities. Additionally, tens of thousands of Iraqis continue to reside in camps for displaced persons in northeast Syria.

Syrian population		17.5 million [1]	
Total number of people in humanitarian need in Syria and countries in the region: 19 million	Syrian population inside the country in urgent need of various forms of humanitarian assistance: 13.4 million ⁷	Internally displaced people: 6.7 million	
		Displaced population in sites of last resort: 0.9 million	
		Spontaneous returnees in 2020: 368,000 ⁸	
		Population residing in hard-to-reach areas: 1.1 million	
	Registered Syrian refugee population in countries in the region: 5.6 million, ⁹ with an estimated 9.5% in refugee camps	Maghreb: 42,578	
		Egypt: 135,239	
		Jordan: 672,023	
		Lebanon: 844,056	
		Iraq: 250,419	
	Türkiye: 3,735,807		
People classified as being in catastrophic and extreme need living in areas of Syria: 6 million			
	Syria	Lebanon	
Human Development Index [2]	0.567 (151 st place)	0.744 (92 nd place)	
INFORM risk index [3]	7.1 out of 10	4.9 out of 10	
Conflict Index [4]	9.7 out of 10	5.53 out of 103	
Global Crisis Severity Index [5]	4.9 out of 5	3.7 out of 5	
<p>[1] World Bank data at 2020. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL</p> <p>[2] UNDP. 2020: Human Development Report 2020</p> <p>[3] INFORM 2022: Inform risk index - INFORM (October 2022)</p> <p>[4] ECHO. SYR. Humanitarian Implementation Plan 2022</p> <p>[5] ECHO. SYR. Humanitarian Implementation Plan 2022</p>			

2. POPULATIONS IN A SITUATION OF VULNERABILITY

According to the OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO),¹⁰ the 13.4 million people in need in Syria fall into five groups, according to the severity of their needs: catastrophic (1.48 million - 11.1%), extreme (4.51 million - 33.7%), severe (6.76 million - 50.5%), stress (0.62 million - 4.6%), and minimal (0.01 million - 0.1%).

Among these groups, there are population profiles or subgroups that are exposed to greater vulnerability and require special considerations: children; adolescents and youth; women and girls; persons with disabilities; older persons; and the Palestinian refugee population in Syria and Lebanon.

In neighbouring countries in general, and especially in Lebanon, the humanitarian response is based on vulnerability criteria, given both the catastrophic effects of the complex crisis and of the pandemic on the population as a whole, and the chronification of the Syrian crisis and the

⁷ This figure is that included in the Syria March 2021 HNO.

⁸ RETURNÉE OVERVIEW | ANNUAL REPORT | JANUARY - DECEMBER. Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme.

⁹ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response - Inter-agency information sharing portal available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> 18.11.2021

¹⁰ HNO OCHA - Syria March 2021

permanence of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, together with the corresponding impact on host communities.

3. MAIN HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

SYRIA AND HOST COUNTRIES

There are 13.4 million people in Syria who need various forms of humanitarian aid, of whom 51.3% are women, 46% are minors and 24.9% are disabled.¹¹ 6.7 million people have been forcibly displaced within the country's borders - 2.7 million in the northwest, 0.65 million in the north-east, and 3.35 million in government-controlled areas - making it the country with the highest internal displacement in the world.¹² The number of food insecure people has soared since 2019 and is currently estimated at 12.4 million, of which 1.3 million are severely food insecure. In addition, 0.6 million children are chronically malnourished and 90,000 are acutely malnourished.

The Palestinian refugee population in Syria is 438,000,¹³ 87% of whom live in poverty. The Iraqi refugee population in Syria is around 300,000.

Within Syria, according to the World Bank, 90% of the population lives below the poverty line and 82% of households report an inability to meet their basic needs. Average incomes are 20% below the average expenditure for Syrian households, who spend 51% of their income on food alone, as the national average price of the basic food basket increased by 236% in 2020, and by a further 55% in the first eight months of 2021.¹⁴ Additionally, half of the households report difficulties in accessing basic services in their communities. The priority needs of Syrian households are food and nutritional support (71%) and livelihood assistance (50%). The deterioration of mental health among the population, in the face of the worsening socio-economic situation and the duration of the conflict, is a factor of growing concern among humanitarian actors on the ground.

The regions with the largest number of people in humanitarian need are: Aleppo (2.7 million), Idlib (2.2 million), rural Damascus (2.0 million), Damascus (1.1 million) and Hama, Homs and Al-Hassake (0.8 million); and the regions with the highest proportion of people in acute need are: Raqqa (100%), Idlib (86%) Deir ez-Zor (83%) and Al-Hassake (62%).

Humanitarian actors in Syria agree that there is an urgent need for the early and preventive rehabilitation of infrastructure and equipment to ensure the most basic services—electricity, water and sanitation networks, schools and health centres—as a sine qua non condition for a general improvement in people's living conditions, and to lay the foundations for the future return of displaced individuals and refugees to their homes. The gradual and complete failure of strategic national infrastructure to ensure the supply of energy, safe drinking water and basic sanitation services is becoming increasingly evident.

In response to the Syrian crisis, the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) envisages providing humanitarian assistance to 4.8 million people by 2021 in neighbouring and regional countries that bear the greatest burden of hosting Syrian refugees. The UN has appealed for USD 5.85 billion to cover these humanitarian needs.

The main **sector-based**¹⁵ humanitarian needs in Syria and bordering countries are:

¹¹ HNO Syria March 2021.

¹² UNHCR. GLOBAL TRENDS FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN 2020, OCHA – HNO Syria March 2021

¹³ UNRWA. Humanitarian Appeal Syria 2021.

¹⁴ World Bank, Syria Economic Update, Whole of Syria Strategic Steering Group, 6 Oct 2021

¹⁵ The sectors in this document have been taken from the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria 2021.

- **Protection**

In Syria, 13.1 million people need protection (6.3 million men and 6.7 million women, 6 million minors, 0.6 million older people and 3.2 million people with disabilities), and are in various situations of vulnerability.

The lack or loss of civil documentation and legal issues associated with land ownership and housing are widespread protection problems, especially among returnees and displaced persons: 61% of communities consider the issue of documentation to be a problem, 65% of communities report restrictions on free mobility, and 50% face difficulties in terms of legal ownership.

Negative coping mechanisms are recurrent in Syria, with 50% of communities resorting to illegal activities, 32% relying on humanitarian aid, and 24% for which begging is recurrent.

Gender-based violence continues to undermine the rights of women and girls in Syria and in host countries, especially those of adolescent girls, both inside and outside their homes. In 62% of communities in Syria, early marriage is prevalent.

The risks associated with the protection of children are multiple: exposure to violence, poverty, lack of access to basic services, serious violations of their rights. Child labour is present in 67% of all communities in Syria, preventing children from attending school.

- **Early recovery and livelihoods**

In Syria, 11.6 million people—5.2 million of whom are children—have needs in this sector.

It is estimated that 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line and only half of the potential labour force has access to sustained employment. The pandemic is also estimated to have destroyed 0.3 million jobs. and 50% of households in Syria require livelihood assistance, currently the second highest need after food assistance.

Half of all Syrian households live in areas where access to basic services is limited due to poorly functioning infrastructure, a problem compounded by the population's limited ability to purchase these services.

In addition, despite improvements regarding work permits in Türkiye and Jordan, Syrian refugees in these countries have limited access to employment and in some cases to essential basic services such as health care. In Lebanon, access to employment for Syrian refugees is restricted to certain sectors only.

Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the economic downturn by further reducing already scarce opportunities for income generation in a context where 50% of the working-age population is now estimated to be unemployed. Covid-19 preventive measures have reduced people's movement and restricted access to formal and informal labour markets. A UN assessment, completed in August 2020, of the inter-agency socio-economic impact of Covid-19 found that 15% of businesses had closed permanently, 40% had stopped trading, and 30% had reduced their activity.

- **Health and Covid-19**

In Syria, 12.4 million people are in need of humanitarian health assistance (6.4 million of them are women and 5.6 million are children).

Only 58% of hospitals and 53% of basic care centres are fully functional. The Covid-19 pandemic put further pressure on health care facilities and the weakened public health system, as well as reducing people's access to emergency and non-emergency care. Existing facilities in many urban centres are

finding it difficult to attend to all suspected cases of Covid-19, suspending non-emergency surgeries and converting wards to accommodate additional Covid-19 patients. Covid-19 is likely to continue to negatively impact the functioning of the health system, and the health of the Syrian population, at least for the foreseeable future. Finally, a major impact of Covid-19 has been an increase in intimate partner and family violence affecting women and girls—which has been referred to globally as the “shadow pandemic”. Lockdown and restrictions on movement have increased the likelihood of women being forced to live with abusive partners or family members, and consequently have increased levels of violence.

Of the affected population, 37% requires sexual and reproductive health, neonatal, and child health services, while 41% of the Syrian adult population requires treatment for one or more non-communicable diseases.

Syria, despite the reduction in attacks, remains a very dangerous country for medical missions, with health facilities and their staff under continuous assault. In 2020, there was a 67% decrease in the number of attacks on health facilities and medical missions compared to the previous year, resulting in 28 attacks, with 13 deaths and 42 wounded.¹⁶

The sustainability of basic health services is a countrywide challenge due to increasing needs and loss of human resources capacity,¹⁷ infrastructure and referral systems. Prenatal, child and maternal care, non-communicable disease care and mental health services are in greatest demand. Physical and mental health services for people with disabilities require particular attention.

In countries within the region, in addition to the lack of primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and of a response to communicable and non-communicable diseases, the Syrian refugees also suffer from mental health and psychosocial problems owing to displacement and war. Access to health services is limited by the capacity of the host countries and the economic capacity of the refugees.

- **Nutrition, food security and agriculture**

With regard to food security and agriculture, people in need number 14.2 million inside Syria (7.2 million women, 2.1 million older adults and 6.4 million children). The alarming deterioration of the situation is due to a combination of factors including currency depreciation with a severe loss of purchasing power, increased food prices, forced displacement, lack of income and livelihoods, and agricultural production losses due to a chronic drought in the Euphrates basin, all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. These factors are compounded by the collateral effects of Covid-19.

Given its structural importance in Syria, the agriculture sector is deemed a priority for combating poverty and improving socio-economic conditions and food and nutrition security in the short term, as well as promoting social cohesion and territorial rootedness within the context of a crisis as complex as that of Syria.

In Syria, 4.9 million people require support services in the nutrition sector, especially in the northwest and northeast of the country. Of these, 3.2 million are under the age of 18, and 3.7 million are mothers and children in need of life-saving nutrition assistance, 0.3 million more than in 2020.

In host countries, unemployment, inflation, lack of livelihoods and environmental degradation continue to worsen the food security of the most vulnerable people. In Lebanon, UNHCR estimates that half of all refugees are food insecure.

¹⁶ HNO OCHA - Syria March 2021

¹⁷ 50% of medical personnel are estimated to have fled Syria

- **Water, sanitation and hygiene**

In Syria, 12.2 million people have needs in this sector: 5.3 million are children and 63% are in acute need, relying almost exclusively on humanitarian assistance (mainly in camps for displaced persons and community shelters). Sufficient access to safe water is limited, and this access has been complicated by the Covid-19 health and healthcare crisis; 70% of wastewater is discharged untreated and 29% of waste is dumped unchecked, increasing the risk of outbreaks of communicable diseases.

Almost half of the population (9.5 million) depends on seven major systems that supply the largest urban concentrations in the country. These systems are in a state of significant deterioration and to a greater or lesser extent are increasingly close to a point of no return in their functionality, because they are supply systems that have no backup in the event of collapse.¹⁸

In host countries, access to water, sanitation and hygiene systems continues to be a problem for refugees in camps, especially in terms of cost and reliability of services.

- **Education**

In Syria, 6.9 million people have educational needs: 6.8 million of them are children aged 3-17.

The UN estimates that 2.4 million children are outside the compulsory education system, with 1.6 million at risk of dropping out. The Covid-19 pandemic closed down face-to-face education as a preventive measure between March and December 2020, therefore increasing the risk of school dropout rates. Moreover, teachers and administrative staff account for almost 60% of all confirmed Covid-19 cases in schools under the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, in 2020, there were 59 attacks on school infrastructure, especially in the northwest, and 31 cases of use of educational facilities for military purposes; 46% of Syria's schools are non-functional, with more than 1,600 schools partially or completely destroyed, and 18% of functioning schools are in need of rehabilitation. So far, 273 schools have been rehabilitated according to UNICEF and Ministry of Education data.

Young people and adolescents have scarce opportunities within their communities and limited access to learning, leading to high rates of youth unemployment. Girls have been forced into negative coping strategies (e.g. early marriage) due to lack of education and employment in Syria and in neighbouring countries.

- **Shelter and non-food aid**

In Syria, 5.9 million people have shelter needs and 4.7 million people require non-food items. The northwest and northeast of the country have the greatest needs, given the large number of individuals and families who reside in camps and places of last resort. People in need include different population groups such as returnees, internally displaced persons, Palestinian refugees and host communities. There has been a significant rise, especially with regard to shelter needs, compared to 2019 and this is due to the high number of displaced persons in 2020 in the Idlib region, who continue to live in formal and informal camps.

In host countries, shelter and non-food aid remain a necessity. In the formal and informal camps that house refugees, living conditions are harsh and their access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation needs to be increased.

¹⁸ ICRC "Too big to fail" report 2021

4. HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

In Syria

Humanitarian assistance in Syria has so far been provided, firstly, through direct routes from Damascus¹⁹ and other centres established in regime-controlled regions; and secondly, through cross-border operations from neighbouring countries, which, since 2019, have only been Türkiye for the UN, and Iraq and Türkiye for international NGOs. The latest UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution regulating the cross-border modality authorizes the UN to use only the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point until July 2022. In the second half of 2021 there was a first World Food Programme (WFP) operation from Damascus to deliver aid via humanitarian convoy to the Idlib area outside the control of the Syrian Arab Army.

The complexity of the response to humanitarian needs in Syria has required the Whole of Syria²⁰ approach launched by the United Nations to integrate the operations of humanitarian actors inside Syria with cross-border operations from Türkiye and Iraq within the same operational framework, thereby ensuring greater transparency and effectiveness. This approach is supplemented by an HNO²¹ document, the Humanitarian Response Plan²² and a UN coordination structure consisting of a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator operating from Amman who coordinates the entire Humanitarian Response Plan; a deputy based in Türkiye who coordinates cross-border assistance from Türkiye; and a Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator for Syria based in Damascus who specifically coordinates the entire humanitarian response delivered from Damascus and areas under Syrian Government control. This approach is considered the most appropriate mechanism for offering a coordinated, sustained, efficient and principled response to the Syrian population.

Operational constraints

Access restrictions and insecurity represent a major challenge to humanitarian organizations operating in Syria from different logistics hubs, both with regard to civilian protection, including humanitarian aid staff, and to meeting humanitarian needs.

Although there are no longer any besieged areas in Syria since 2018, it is increasingly difficult to access Syrian Government-controlled areas from Damascus, with the UN estimating that 402,000 people in need reside in areas with significant humanitarian access problems and 4.7 million in areas with “moderate” access.

Cross-border access has been limited by the continued reduction of border crossing points by the UNSC and, since the beginning of the pandemic, by mobility restrictions at border points with Iraq and Türkiye. Interference by armed non-State actors, especially in the Idlib area, remains a challenge to cross-border humanitarian operations.

For UN agencies, there have been recent improvements in regular access to communities previously considered restricted, including rural Damascus and East Ghouta. The UN has expanded its direct presence in the northeast to a small extent, with several agencies able to open sub-offices in Deir ez-Zoir. It has been able to conduct missions to the Al Mayadeen and Al-Bukamal areas in the northwest, and the number of UN missions to locations that changed control after the last offensive

¹⁹ The UN estimates that there are 8.7 million people in humanitarian need in areas under regime control. Security Council, Adopting Resolution 2449 (2018), Authorizes One-Year Extension of Cross-Border Aid Deliveries Targeting 13 Million in Syria. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13620.doc.htm>

²⁰ Whole of Syria <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria>

²¹ OCHA, Humanitarian_Needs_Overview Syria March 2021

²² *Op cit HNO 2021*

in Idlib has increased.

Insecurity is another challenge facing humanitarian actors in this crisis. This was exemplified by the Turkish incursion on 9 October 2019, which resulted in large-scale displacement and the evacuation of humanitarian staff, and impeded safe humanitarian access. In the northwest, hostilities continue to generate casualties and create problems of access. The deliberate targeting of hospitals, schools and civilian infrastructure remains a serious concern in this area. Lastly, the armed dispute that erupted in mid-2021 in the south over control of Dara'a al-Balad, displacing thousands of people, is a further indication of the tension and simmering conflicts that continue to mark life in areas that were retaken by Damascus in 2019.

A recurring theme, highlighted by international humanitarian actors based in Damascus as problematic, is the spillover effect of unilateral international sanctions on the country. In practice, it leads to limitations and restrictions on their ability to deploy their interventions with international funding. Despite the EU's humanitarian waiver mechanism, international humanitarian actors point to multiple constraints that affect their relationship with the banking system and procurement processes inside and outside the country.

Finally, the coexistence between humanitarian and stabilization operations in areas not controlled by the Syrian Government has been a constant during the crisis, with many challenges in terms of coordination and respect for humanitarian principles.

In neighbouring countries

In order to respond to the humanitarian and resilience needs of Syrian refugees and host countries, the governments of these countries, together with UN agencies, donors, the World Bank and international NGOs, have prepared national and regional response plans. The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan or 3RP 2021-23 is the result of this joint work and includes humanitarian, resilience and macro-financial support. The Governments of Jordan²⁴ and Lebanon²⁵ integrate their national response plans into this regional plan as part of a coordinated and comprehensive response.

In the case of Lebanon, the financial crisis also has significant implications for humanitarian response in terms of devaluation, inflation, exchange rates, access to goods and energy sources, and the security aspects of humanitarian operations in the country.

International response and Spanish response

In 2021, the UN appeal for Syria was covered by 45.1%²⁶ and the regional appeal for the Syria crisis and region by 27.6%, showing the first signs of exhaustion among the donor community.

Spain has fulfilled the commitments it has undertaken at various international donor conferences. At the Brussels IV Conference in 2020, Spain pledged EUR 5.79 million and disbursed EUR 17.3 million—including AECID and decentralized cooperation contributions—between humanitarian and development aid.²⁷ In addition to this amount, EUR 22.4 million were disbursed in 2020 for Türkiye's

²³ 3RP: Regional, Refugee and Resilience Plan 2021- Regional strategic Overview 2021-2022, https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/rso_up.pdf,

²⁴ United Nations/Jordan Minister of Planning and Cooperation: "Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2020-2022".

²⁵ Government of Lebanon/United Nations: "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2021 (2021 update)" <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2021-2021-update>

²⁶ Financial Tracking Service <https://fts.unocha.org/emergencies/600/summary/2021-03.12>, 2021

²⁷ *Supporting Syria and the region: Post-Brussels Conference Financial tracking. Report 11 March 2021 (EUR 17.3 million of which EUR 11.7 million came from AECID—EUR 9 million from the Humanitarian Action Office, EUR 1.1 million from the Directorate for Cooperation with Africa and Asia, and EUR 1.6 million from the NGO Department—and EUR 5.6 million from the Autonomous Communities of Asturias, Andalusia-AACID, Balearic Islands, Castile La Mancha, Catalonia, Extremadura, Galicia, Castilla y León, Madrid, Basque Country and Valencia).*

“Refugee Facility” (additional EU response funding to assist refugees and host communities in Türkiye, focusing on humanitarian assistance, education, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure and socio-economic support). In 2020, despite the pandemic, Spanish Cooperation made a significant effort to address part of the Syrian population’s needs.

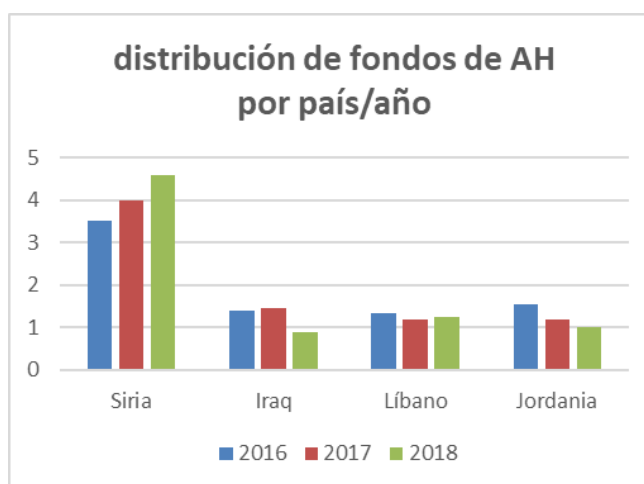
At the Brussels V Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, in March 2021, the international community pledged USD 3.6 billion in humanitarian, resilience and development activities for 2021, and USD 1.7 billion for 2022 onwards. In 2021, the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria required a total of USD 4.22 billion to provide multi-sectoral assistance to 13.4 million people inside the country. For its part, in 2021, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) requested EUR 231.9 million for this crisis (EUR 181.6 million for Syria; EUR 40.8 million for Lebanon and EUR 16.8 million for Jordan).

At this same Conference, Spain pledged EUR 6.6 million, and disbursed EUR 8.5 million for Syria and the region, including humanitarian aid and development contributions from AECID and from Spain’s Autonomous Communities. In addition to this, Spain paid EUR 13.3 million in 2021 to Türkiye’s “Refugee Facility”, bringing Spain’s total contribution for 2021 to EUR 21.8 million.

5. STRATEGIC POSITIONING

The crisis in Syria and in the host countries remains a significant humanitarian context for AECID. In 2019-2021, this crisis has received an annual average of EUR 8.1 million²⁸ from AECID in humanitarian assistance. In 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it received special attention, with up to EUR 10.3 million in funding. These funds have been channelled mainly through United Nations system international organizations, the ICRC and, to a lesser extent, through Spanish NGOs.

Over the next two years, AECID will continue to support this crisis, adapting the budget to the evolving context.



5.1. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The context strategy for the Syrian crisis has three strategic objectives:

SO1. Improve the **protection** of crisis-affected populations by providing integrated and quality protection services, including strengthening the technical capacity of humanitarian actors to assess, analyse, prevent and address protection risks and needs.

²⁸ This figure includes the Humanitarian Action Office budget and the activation of emergency and humanitarian agreements.

SO2. Contribute to **early recovery** and access to basic services—especially health, education, safe drinking water and sanitation—and support the **livelihoods** of the most vulnerable rural and urban Syrian populations affected by the conflict.

SO3. Respond to **critical situations and emergencies** in a rapid and flexible manner by activating and/or contributing to specialized instruments.²⁹

SO1, **improving protection**, seeks to optimize the provision of quality services, support for the most vulnerable people—including persons with disabilities, minors and victims of gender-based violence—and access to civil documentation, promoting respect for and implementation of international humanitarian law.

SO2, **early recovery**, seeks to respond to immediate needs beyond the assistance actions that were implemented at the outset of the emergency. At the same time, it aims to improve **access to basic services**, especially health, education and safe drinking water and sanitation services for the most vulnerable Syrian and/or refugee groups affected by the conflict. Finally, it seeks to **improve the livelihoods** of the most vulnerable Syrian populations affected by the conflict and by the profound economic crisis, both in rural and urban areas, focusing on agriculture as a strategic pillar of the economy.

SO3 seeks to provide a rapid and flexible response in coordination with other donors to **critical situations and emergencies** that the Syrian conflict continues to generate, through the use of relevant emergency response instruments.

This entails continuing to exercise influence in international forums through **humanitarian diplomacy** to advance in respect for and implementation of international humanitarian law (especially for civilian protection and compliance with UNSC Resolution 2286 [2016] on the protection of medical missions in armed conflict); progress in the safe, free and uninterrupted access of humanitarian actors to beneficiary communities; and assistance to vulnerable populations in accordance with the needs identified in the Humanitarian Response Plan. Moreover, efforts will be made to influence relevant forums to limit the detrimental effects of sanctions on the work of humanitarian actors.

All humanitarian responses will consistently include a **gender-, age- and diversity-based approach**, encouraging the use of gender markers in decision-making, and assistance that integrates **humanitarian protection services** as a core or cross-cutting element. The

This strategy values the participation of communities and people in need at all stages of an intervention. It will favourably consider funding interventions that promote an area-based approach, which includes several of the prioritized sectors and promotes a more comprehensive response model to the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable communities.

Lastly, in response to the Grand Bargain commitments and the EU's position towards increasing humanitarian assistance via cash transfers, the aim is to promote the **cash transfer** modality in **humanitarian assistance in this context**.

5.2. INTERVENTION COUNTRIES

The priority intervention countries in this crisis during 2022-2023 will be Syria³⁰ and Lebanon. **Syria** will be the focus of most of our humanitarian response, which will be based on the Whole of Syria approach in order to reach people in need across the country. Lesser focus will be placed on Lebanon, although it will also be a priority in the response due to the large number of Syrian refugees it hosts





²⁹ Instruments such as the UN Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF), AECID's agreements on emergencies, etc.

³⁰ It could include cross-border actions.

and its fragile situation, especially aggravated by the complex crisis affecting the country, which is having a severe impact in terms of humanitarian needs, including both the refugee and the local population.³¹ As a general note, this strategy will remain flexible in terms of intervention countries, taking into account a changing and unstable regional context.

5.3. PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

Strategic planning for 2022-2023 regarding the Syria crisis will focus primarily on the following programme priorities:

	<p>As regards humanitarian protection, priority actions include:³² improving the provision of high-quality and integrated protection services; promoting international humanitarian law; supporting the most vulnerable people, including persons with disabilities and child protection (including case management, psychosocial support and mental health); preventing and addressing gender-based violence; and facilitating access to civil documentation and legal assistance.</p>
	<p>In early recovery and access to basic services, priority will be given to actions³³ in the areas of health, education, safe drinking water and sanitation. And in livelihoods: access to livelihoods and creation of income generation opportunities in the short term, including work for cash, support for urban and rural entrepreneurship, agricultural activity and vocational training; improving social cohesion at the community level, with activities aimed at strengthening community initiatives that promote participation and the reconstruction of the social fabric.</p>
	<p>The multi-sectoral response to critical situations and emergencies will prioritize the use of specific tools that enable humanitarian actors to take a flexible approach when responding to the most critical humanitarian needs and emergencies in Syria.</p>
	<p>Health assistance will focus on: provision of essential health services for vulnerable people; reproductive and obstetric health; and mental health and psychosocial support. Additionally, where required and where circumstances permit, the rehabilitation of health facilities will be supported in order to increase the population's access to basic health.</p>

Additionally, efforts will be made to encourage the **use of cash transfers** in relevant sectors and where the minimum necessary conditions are met.

All activities aimed at reversing long-term vulnerabilities of victims of the conflict will be guided by humanitarian principles and their basic parameters.

³¹Global Risk Index 2021

³² Priority actions have been selected based on the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria (2020 HRP - August 2021).

³³ Priority actions have been selected based on the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria (2020 HRP - August 2021).

5.4. MAIN PARTNERS

The humanitarian effort will be channelled through the specialized humanitarian partners of the UN system, the ICRC, and humanitarian NGOs. The selection of these partners will follow the criteria of sectoral specialization, geographical presence and implementation capacity, in line with the Grand Bargain commitments. Criteria of transparency and competitive tendering will also be paramount.

During these two years, efforts will be made to move towards more directly focused aid, promoting it via funding from the Common Humanitarian Funds and, where possible, through direct funding of local actors with a comparative advantage in the sectors prioritized in this strategy.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY MATARIX

INDICATORS ³⁴		
	General	Final annual budget disbursed in the context of Syria Final annual budget disbursed by sector No. of beneficiaries per year of interventions in this context Net annual budget of the context transferred in cash Annual budget disbursed on interventions tagged with gender marker 3 and 4 (IASC) or 2 (DG ECHO) in this context Net annual budget of the context transferred in vouchers Annual budget disbursed to local organizations directly or through a single intermediary, disaggregated.
Sectoral	Protection	No. of gender-based violence victims who have received assistance No. of children who have received psychosocial assistance No. of unaccompanied minors under alternative care and protection No. of beneficiaries of support in documentation and/or voluntary repatriation processes No. of people aware or informed of and/or trained in international humanitarian law
	Multisectoral	No. of people assisted through the Syrian Humanitarian Fund
	Early recovery and livelihoods	No. of people receiving livelihood support in this context No. of irrigation systems rehabilitated No. of beneficiaries of social cohesion support No. of educational centres rehabilitated No. of infrastructures and distribution networks rehabilitated
	Health	No. of people receiving health care in this context No. of health professionals and/or community agents trained No. of health centres rehabilitated

³⁴ Gender-disaggregated data will be provided to the extent that such data are available.

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Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo



Av. Reyes Católicos, 4
28040 Madrid, España

Tel. +34 91 583 81 00
www.aecid.es

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