European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Syria

Introduction

Now in its 10th year, the war in Syria has led to a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions. The country counts the largest internally displaced population in the world. There are 6 million displaced people, of which close to 1 million fled the Idlib offensive in northwest Syria between 1 December 2019 and February 2020. The humanitarian situation remains alarming in the northwest despite a ceasefire agreed in March 2020. With only half of all health facilities fully functioning, and increasing economic hardship, the coronavirus outbreak is also of great concern. The EU continues to be a major humanitarian donor to Syrians in need.

What are the needs?

At least 2.8 million people remain displaced in northwest Syria, sometimes multiple times, and are in urgent need of humanitarian aid. A UN Security Council resolution on cross-border assistance offers a vital lifeline and needs to be maintained. Recent coronavirus restrictions on movements, including from Turkey, have nonetheless limited supplies and further driven up the cost of living. Most protection and education activities had to be suspended.

Shelter, food, water, sanitation, education and protection continue to be pressing needs in northern Syria. Economic conditions have also seriously deteriorated throughout Syria, with hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) and vulnerable households struggling to meet their basic needs. In addition, specific constraints are hampering the work of humanitarian organisations.

According to the World Food Programme, 9.3 million people – 46% of the population – are now facing food shortages. The increasing vulnerability of families, having exhausted all existing coping mechanisms, is now further exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, which is expected to push another 1.4 million people into food insecurity by the end of 2020.
How are we helping?

The EU and its Member States are the leading donors of international aid to those affected by war in Syria. Since the start of the crisis in 2011, more than €20 billion has been mobilised to support the most vulnerable Syrians inside the country and across the region. The EU has been the driving force of the Syria pledging conferences, which took place in Brussels for 4 consecutive years (2017-2020).

In 2020, the European Commission alone mobilised €194 million in humanitarian aid, enabling partners to reach millions of people with vital assistance inside Syria. This includes close to €40 million to respond to the needs arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

Following the latest escalation of fighting in northern Syria and the threat of coronavirus, the EU repeatedly called for a ceasefire which eventually came into effect on 5 March 2020. In light of numerous attacks on civilians, hospitals and schools during 9 years of war, the EU has continuously urged all parties to the conflict to allow unimpeded and safe humanitarian access to people in need. It also repeatedly called for the respect of international humanitarian law.

After the latest mass displacement of populations in early 2020, EU humanitarian partners ramped up their emergency assistance. They also adapted ongoing programmes to include preparedness and response interventions related to the coronavirus outbreak, a first case of which was confirmed in Syria around mid-March.

Inside Syria, EU humanitarian assistance supplies over 40 humanitarian partners working countrywide where needs are the most acute. They are providing Syrians with food assistance, healthcare, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, psychosocial support, essential household items, as well as education and protection. As humanitarian organisations operate in very challenging circumstances, obstructed by insecurity and continued access constraints, they strictly adhere to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

The EU also funds humanitarian aid in countries of the region – Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey – which together host more than 5 million registered Syrian refugees.