

NEED ASSESSMENT in Northwest Syria Camps



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Introduction

The suffering of Syrian internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the camps of northwest Syria is increasing with the humanitarian crisis in Syria entering its twelfth year, as they have been waiting for a long time for a solution that ends their tragedy and returns them to their homes in their cities and villages, in conjunction with the scarcity of humanitarian aid and the continuation of attacks by the Syrian regime and its allies. While the vast majority of the IDPs live in miserable conditions inside the camps that do not provide the minimum basic services, including water and sanitation.

This study, prepared by the Information Management Unit of the Syria Civil Defense (SCD), presents the most important basic needs of the IDPs in 929 camps inhabited by 1,393,128 displaced persons in northwest Syria, 73% of whom are women and children, in an attempt to strengthen the capacity of actors to plan and provide humanitarian support that meets the required need in the right time, and to improve the reality of the camps and reduce the recurring tragic accidents.

The preparation of this study coincides with the beginning of the winter season, in which the IDPs suffer from extremely difficult living conditions within their tents, which neither protect them from the cold of winter nor from the heat of summer. As many accidents are repeated annually, including the sinking of the tents and the uprooting of other tents by the wind, or their erosion by torrents, and burning of tents. In addition to the difficulty of humanitarian access due to the bumpy roads. These accidents that lead annually to deaths and injuries among the displaced Syrians and whose recurrence can be avoided through projects that improve infrastructure and provide the camps with basic services, given that the humanitarian response provided by the actors over more than a decade failed to secure a sustainable solution to the camps in northwest Syria, while they were limited to temporary solutions, such as providing food and hygiene kits.

UN relief chief, Martin Griffiths, warned ambassadors on 14 September 2022 that "14.6 million people in Syria, more than half of them children, need humanitarian assistance. This is the highest levels of need since the crisis began. And as I think I have said on previous occasions, we seem to fail the people in Syria more each year. As each year comes and each year passes, the needs grow, the gap increases and the stress and the suffering of the Syrian people from this crisis continues to be exacerbated."¹

The White Helmets volunteers carried out 28,375 service operations within the formal and random camps in northwest Syria during the last two years, i.e., from October 2020 until September 2022, which included service operations related to the infrastructure of these camps.

Disinfection and sterilization operations, as precautionary measures to prevent the spread of the Covid-19, topped the services provided through 11,405 operations. The operations also included 6,435 land leveling operations, 2,150 digging a sewer line operation, 1,740 road opening operations, 875 waterway opening operations, 800 backfilling holes operations, and preparing 313 camps.



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¹ https://bit.ly/3XOEKQ4

Methodology:

The Information Management Unit of the SCD developed the questionnaire for this study based on the standard in the survey of shelter needs, and also benefited from feedback from stakeholders to make the questionnaire materials compatible with the current context in terms of coverage and the way data presented. Data was collected in 929 camps by a team of 88 experienced enumerators, who underwent special training on the questionnaire to guarantee professionalism in data collection. The data collection method relied on direct observations, Face-to-face interviews with camp officials, in addition to reports by the SCD teams that provide community services in most of the camps. The Information Management Unit thanks the camp officials who answered our questions and provided us with information.

The data collection process was carried out during August, and the final study will be issued in November 2022.

Most of the camps included in the study have witnessed an emergency intervention by the White Helmets volunteers during the last winter (because of the accidents and disasters they were exposed to). In order to monitor the current situation of these camps, evaluate the interventions during the last period and their impact on the residents of these camps, take appropriate measures, and develop appropriate strategic plans to intervene within them.

The situation in assessed camps

Number of camps and their geographical distribution by district

International human rights law recognizes the human right to adequate housing. This right includes a number of freedoms, including the protection of the individual from forced evictions and the arbitrary destruction and demolition of his home, the right to determine his place of residence, and to freedom of movement. Most of the forcibly displaced Syrians from their cities and villages suffered the bitterness of forced eviction, and their homes, neighborhoods, cities and villages were destroyed, and they suffered the bitterness of repeated forced displacement to save their lives due to the change in the control map.

The studied sample included 929 camps within 30 sub-districts in nine districts in Idlib and Aleppo governorates, Including 648 camps in Idlib and 281 camps in Aleppo. The sample includes 682 regular camps and 247 random camps in northwest Syria.



Families and individuals in assessed camps

There are (238,346 IDP families, 1,393,128 IDPs) in the assessed camps, including (437,999 women, 31%) and (588,966 children, 42%), with an average of six people per family. The largest number of IDPs (121,291 IDP families, 721,336 IDPs) live in Harim district, within 395 camps on an area of 32,909,370 square meters. Noting that according to the statistics issued by the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster (CCCM) in September 2022, 1,844,668 IDPs, including 434,534 women, 1,038,740 children, and 73,908 people with disabilities live within 1,420 camps in northwest Syria. In addition to a large number of IDPs who live in camps that the CCCM did not count.



Camp establishment date

The dates for the establishment of the assessed camps covered ranged between 2012 and 2022, where the largest number of camps were established during 2019 and 2020 following the displacement crisis caused by the fierce military campaign launched by the Syrian regime and its allies in Idlib, Aleppo, and Hama countryside, where (320 camps, including 229 regular camp and 91 random camps were established during 2019) and (167 camps, including 123 regular camps, and 44 random camps were established during 2020).





IDPs places of residence by type

The total number of shelter units within the assessed camps was 260,817 shelter units, of which the fabric tents constituted the largest proportion, 60%, followed by 34% tents with concrete walls roofed with rain insulators and caravans by 4%.

Some families, with individual efforts or with the support of some NGOs, sought to improve their housing conditions, as camp residents suffer every year as a result of water leaking into the tents, or flooding the tents, which causes damage to the IDPs' simple personal belongings, and even uprooting the tents following severe storms. As the Sphere standards state the right of IDPs to improve or increase their available covered space: "Involve affected communities and households as much as possible in determining the type of assistance to be provided. Consult with the people who spend more time in the covered living space and those facing mobility or access barriers. Initial shelter responses typically only provide a minimum level of covered or enclosed living space. However, the initial construction methods and materials should enable households to maintain, adapt or upgrade the shelter to meet their longer-term needs. Adaptations should be made safely using locally available, familiar and affordable tools and materials, where possible."²



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² https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Handbook-2018-EN.pdf

Camps according to the ownership of the land

The phenomenon of constructing random camps on private agricultural lands increased, as the largest number of these camps were established during 2019 and 2020, following the displacement crisis caused by the military campaign launched by the Syrian regime and its allies in the countryside of Aleppo, Idlib and Hama, which caused a massive displacement wave of nearly one million people. In light of the inability of the previous camps to accommodate the numbers of IDPs. Where the IDPs lived in agricultural lands for free at the beginning of the wave of displacement, but with the prolonged displacement, the landowners turned their lands into rented lands. Therefore, tent dwellers faced the obstacle of securing the annual rent of the private agricultural lands on which their camps were built.

The survey indicates that the highest percentage of camps (46%), were established on privately owned lands, while 37% of the camps were established on publicly owned lands, and 17% of the camps were established on lands of various types of public and private ownership.



The camps that were exposed to accidents or damaged during last winter

The scene of the suffering of the Syrian IDPs in their camps is repeated every year, especially during the winter season, as they suffer from torrential rains and the flooding of tents, while supporters and supervisors are unable to find a sustainable solution for the tent residents. On the other hand, the SCD volunteers intervene in response to accidents and natural disasters.

Many camps, especially random ones, were established by the displaced themselves, Without technical studies of the infrastructure and public utilities or even considering the nature of the land, which makes these camps vulnerable to many risks resulting from the random construction operations, which affects the SCD teams and makes them in a race against time to try to take measures and precautions to prevent these disasters from occurring before the onset of winter.

(732 camps, 79%) of the assessed camps were damaged during the last winter season, while (197 camps, 21%) were not damaged during the same period.

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Figure 5: The camps that were damaged during last winter



Challenges at camps during last winter

In a review of the most prominent difficulties and challenges faced at these camps, 68% of the camps suffered from floods and tents sinking, and tents at 61% of the camps were torn down because of strong winds and heavy rain, where this suffering specifically appeared at 100% within the camps of Ariha district, and 50% of the camps suffered from the lack of adequate means of heating, 50% of the camps also suffered from the formation of water swamps and mud as a result of the poor condition of roads and sidewalks, and 26% of the camps faced difficulties as a result of the inability of humanitarian organizations to reach due to the poor condition of the roads leading to the camps.



269% of the camps faced difficulties as a result of the inability of humanitarian organizations to reach due to the poor condition of the roads leading to the camps.

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Response operations within the camps that were damaged last year

According to the information sources participating in the study, humanitarian actors intervened within 373 camps, or 51% of the assessed camps which experienced accidents and difficulties during the past winter, in an attempt to remedy these damages, while no intervention was made within 359 camps, or 49% of the camps.

The impact of the response in addressing difficulties and problems

The intervention of the humanitarian actors contributed to solving the problem within 55% of the camps where they intervened, while the problem was not resolved within 45% of the camps despite the intervention, so that the humanitarian actors should deliberately intervene to find an actual solution to the problems and difficulties that they intervened to solve within the camps.



Figure 7: Was the problem solved after response? -

The basic needs of the camps

The most prominent suggestions to solve the problems faced by the camps

Based on the experience and knowledge gained by the camp supervisors over the past years and in light of the unfortunate recurrence of the problems they face within the camps, the sources of information were asked about their suggestions to avoid the problems that the camps faced during the winter season, and ways to solve them in the event of a recurrence next winter. The top suggestions included rehabilitation of the roads and spreading gravel on the roads, and the replacement of tents. The proposals also included building cement blocks and improving sanitation by providing sewage channels and sewage pits, draining rainwater, and providing heating materials.



Figure 8: Suggestions for solving the problems encountered in the camps last winter-



The greatest need for the rehabilitation of roads and spreading gravel on the camp land was recorded in the camps of Ariha district, and the greatest need for the replacement of tents was recorded within the camps of the Jisr al-Shughur and Jarabulus districts, while the greatest need for sewage and rainwater drainage was recorded in the camps in Jarablus district.

The nature of the campground

The results of the study showed that 33% of the assessed camps were established on dirt land, which makes them more vulnerable to flooding, while 31% of them were built on rocky land, 26% of them were built on dusty rocky land, and only 10% of them were built on graveled land, making them suitable for camping.



The need for insulators at camps

The results of the study indicate that 84% of the assessed camps need floor insulation, as a total of 131,571 insulators were needed within 778 camps.

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Figure 10: No of needed land insulators -





Moreover, 76% of the camps need additional insulation measures, as 70,351 tents within 693 camps need to insulate the tents' floor, lift them and cover them with gravel.



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Figure 12: No. of tents that need insulators and raising the floor with gravel by district.



Providing safe drinking water to camp residents is one of the most basic rights that all humanitarian organizations and UN agencies must seek to secure, especially in light of the onset of cholera in northwest Syria and the need for continuous cleaning and sterilization operations.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in November 2002 adopted General Comment No. 15, which states the human right to water: "The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses. An adequate amount of safe water is necessary to prevent death from dehydration, to reduce the risk of water-related disease and to provide for consumption, cooking, personal and domestic hygienic requirements."³

On 28 July 2010, through Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognized "the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights."⁴

³ https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G03/402/29/PDF/G0340229.pdf?OpenElement

⁴ https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml

Providing the camps with drinking water

The results of the study showed that 83% of the assessed camps were provided with drinking water during the data collection period. While the residents of 17% of the assessed camps suffer due to the lack of an entity to supply their camps with drinking water, which requires them to secure drinking water themselves. 29% of random camps were not provided with drinking water, compared to12% of the regular camps that were not provided with drinking water.



In a question about the frequency of water supply to these camps

information sources indicated that 83% of these camps are supplied with water daily, while 17% of them are supplied with water weekly.



The daily supplied and needed quantities of water

The quantities of water that are currently supplied to the camps by various parties do not meet the needs, according to camp managers and officials, as the camps are provided daily with 32,258 cubic meters out of their daily need of 48,759 cubic meters, meaning that there is a daily gap for a total of 16,501 cubic meters of water within the assessed camps. Noting that the greatest need was recorded in Harim district for additional 7,933 cubic meters of water per day.





Drinking water

Many humanitarian organizations and local bodies monitor and analyze the quality of the water supplied to the camps as a preventive measure that preserves the health of the beneficiaries and helps them avoid diseases caused by contaminated water. According to the sources of information, the water supplied to the camps is subject to analysis to ensure potability of water in 95% of the assessed camps, while water is not analyzed in only 1% of the assessed camps, and the participants also indicated that they are not sure about the analysis of water in 4% of the assessed camps. In a related context, the water is sterilized in 96% of the assessed camps, while the water is not sterilized in 1% of the assessed camps, the participants were also unsure about the sterilization of water in 3% of the assessed camps.



Need for water tanks

The IDPs in the camps get their water needs through the public water tanks in the camp, which must be available near the tents of the IDPs. Water tanks are available in 78% of the total assessed camps, while water tanks are not available in 22% of the assessed camps. Knowing that, there are no water tanks in 200 camps, of which 98 are in Harim.



Although there are water tanks in some camps, their number is less than the actual need in most camps. A total of 54,849 water tanks are needed in 884 camps, the largest percentage of the need for water tanks is in Harim district which needs alone 28,569 water tanks.



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According to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in November 2010: "Disseminating information on practices that have worked allows others to learn from these experiences and can promote progress in ensuring access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation. In this regard, the identification and dissemination of good practices can contribute to the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as to preventing human rights violations."⁵

In September 2010, the Human Rights Council passed a new resolution (HRC res 15/9) affirming "the recognition by the General Assembly and clarifying that the rights to water and sanitation derive from the right to an adequate standard of living, which is considered a binding human right on almost all States."⁶

Citizens' access to clean water and effective sanitation is fundamental to their lives, health and dignity. Effective sanitation must be ensured to reduce the risk of flooding within the camps, and deterioration of environmental health conditions due to stagnant water. Safe disposal of sewage and safe transfer of waste and rainwater must be ensured away from living areas.

Within this criterion, the teams participating in the evaluation process conducted an analysis of the reality of the camps within this sector. The results showed the presence of a sewage system within 53% of the assessed camps, where the sewage system includes the sewage line, and sewage grills within 26% of the camps , while the sewage system is limited to toilet blocks and bathrooms within 27% of the camps, and there is no sewage system within 47% of the assessed camps, while there is a sewage system close to 28% of the assessed camps, and there is a waterway close to 19% of the assessed camps.



⁵ https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/685823?ln=en

⁶ https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2020/07/10th-anniversary-recognition-water-and-sanitation-human-right-general-assembly

A total of 11,477 sewage holes are needed within 56% of the assessed camps. These needs are distributed in several areas, where the greatest need appears in the camps within the Harim area, with 4,441 sewage holes.





Soil type in camps that need sanitation

Ideally, the camp site should be planned prior to the arrival of IDPs or refugees, preferably on sandy soil and a slightly sloping ground surface to facilitate drainage. Such sites may require only limited intervention to ensure adequate drainage throughout the camp. In sites that lie on flat or steep terrain, effective drainage becomes critical, but may pose a particular challenge.

The study showed the diversity of the soil of the lands in the camps that need sewage holes, as there is dirt land within 179 camps, while the soil is rocky within 165 camps, and dusty rocky soil prevails within 150 camps, and graveled soil is available only at 29 camps. This diversity in the properties of the soil imposes subsequent challenges that must be taken into account, especially when carrying out construction work in



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Availability of toilets

IDPs in camps use public toilets. Toilet blocks supposedly spread throughout the IDPs camps, and the distances between the tents and the toilets vary according to the tent's location, where the provision of toilets within the camps is one of the basics needs for public hygiene.

The results of the study showed that there were no public toilets at all in 17% of the camps, which makes these camps potential hotbeds for the spread of diseases and epidemics.



Figure 22: Percentage of camps with public toilets –



The availability of toilets within the camps does not mean that they meet the minimum needs of the IDPs. Despite the presence of toilets in 83% of the assessed camps as mentioned above. 71% of the assessed camps need additional toilets. Lack of permanent maintenance forced many IDPs to construct rudimentary toilets, or to dig a hole outside or inside the tent to use it as a rudimentary toilet at night or during the winter season especially for women, children and the elderly. Most of the IDPs camps do not have a sewage network connected to public toilets, therefore camp management relies on humanitarian organizations to empty sewage tanks and collect waste. Some organizations also empty technical pits and rudimentary toilet waste.

Figure 23: Percentage of camps that need toilets



There is a need for 9,508 in 656 camps, where the largest need was recorded within the camps of Harim district, which need 3,164 toilets within 258 camps, as well as the camps in Idlib center that need 2,239 toilets within 167 camps.



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Availability of separate toilets for males and females

Many assessed camps lack separate toilets for women which is a basic need to keep the privacy of women. As there are no special toilets for women in 24% of the assessed camps that contain public toilets, which limits women and girls' access to public toilets.



The need for bathrooms

Securing bathrooms within the camps is a priority that must be provided mainly by the authorities in these camps, especially in light of the spread of diseases and epidemics and the need to combat epidemics resulting from the lack of hygiene standards and preventive measures.

56% of the assessed camps lack bathrooms within the camps, knowing that the presence of public bathrooms is one of the basic needs that must be met within the camps, which reflects the tragic reality imposed on the camp residents.





In a question asked to the participants about the sufficiency of bathrooms, where available, the need for bathrooms was recorded within 64% of the assessed camps, as 14,313 bathrooms are required within 599 camps, where the largest need was recorded in Idlib Center district, which needs 4,197 bathrooms within 169 camp, Azaz district, which needs 3,138 bathrooms within 26 camps, and Harim district, which needs 3,121 bathrooms within 202 camps.

Upon asking the sources of information about the availability of separate bathrooms for males and females within the camps that contain the bathrooms. it was noted that 21% of them lack separate bathrooms for women, which limits the access of women and girls to these bathrooms.

The need for drainage channels and a mechanism for rainwater drainage

The results of the study showed that 25% of the assessed camps have a rain drainage system, while 75% of the assessed camps do not have a rain drainage system.



Figure 27: The availability of rainwater drainage system in assessed camps.

Although there is a rain drainage system in some camps, it is incomplete and ineffective in a way that protects the camps from the danger of floods and the effects of torrential rains and does not cover the entire camp. Information sources mentioned that there is a need for 5,439 drainage channels within 583 camps, where 278 camps in Harim district alone need 2,991 drainage channels.

Figure 28: No. of needed rain drainage channels within the assessed camps



The need to rehabilitate roads within the camps

The IDPs suffer every winter from the difficulty of movement and access to their schools or workplaces, or even access to toilets, due to the flooding of many roads, especially since most of the roads within the camps are muddy, unpaved and they are not covered with gravel, which leads to road blockages when it rains or snows.

According to Sphere standards: "The site and any primary storage and food distribution points must be accessible by heavy trucks from an all-weather road."⁷

Information sources confirmed the need to rehabilitate roads within 71% of the assessed camps, while 29% of the assessed camps do not need to rehabilitate the roads.



⁷ https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Handbook-2018-EN.pdf





Availability of solar-powered lighting in the camps

The study reviewed the availability of solar-powered lighting equipment within the camps. The results showed that there was no solar-powered lighting or lighting poles in 84% of the assessed camps, while the solar-powered lighting was only available within 16% of the assessed camps. This reinforces the deteriorating reality within these camps and their public facilities, and reflects the challenges related to the infrastructure and service facilities sectors.



The need for solar lighting poles

A total of 30,666 solar lighting poles were needed in 911 camps, as 388 camps in Harim district need 15,345 lighting poles, and 192 camps in Idlib Center district need 6,246 lighting poles.

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Recommendations

- Raising the level of services provided and developing the methods used to address problems within the camps, as the problems facing the Syrian IDPs have not been resolved despite the intervention of humanitarian actors within 45% of the camps.
- The necessity of organizing random camps because they are still the most vulnerable to disasters and dangers during the winter season
- Organizing the infrastructure in the camps by providing sewage holes, rainwater drainage systems and paved roads to alleviate the problems facing the IDPs every winter.
- Providing the camps with various types of insulation, including ground insulation, insulating the tent floor, and covering it with gravel.
- Providing the camps with bathrooms and toilets, and maintaining them periodically, in order to ensure general hygiene and prevent the spread of diseases and epidemics, especially in light of the increase in cholera cases in northwest Syria.
- Increasing the amount of water supplied to the camps.
- Considering humanitarian standards in securing the requirements of vulnerable groups of women, children and people with special needs within the camps through providing them with separate and special toilets and bathrooms.
- Measuring the impact of the projects implemented in the camps to assess their benefit and their positive impact on the IDPs and their capacity to address the problems they face.



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