

Responding to the humanitarian needs of today, Preparing for the Syrian response tomorrow

In April 2018, Syria remains an **acute humanitarian situation**. In the first quarter of 2018, the conflict in Syria reached unprecedented levels of violence since it started in 2011. With an estimated total of 13.1 million Syrians in need of urgent humanitarian assistance⁽¹⁾ and 5.5 million Syrians registered as refugees,⁽²⁾ **responding to the emergency still remains an absolute priority today.**

The most urgent matter is to **maintain and increase**, whenever possible, the **continuity of services and humanitarian access** in all its current forms – such as distribution of hygiene kits, food aid, non-food items, shelter, water and sanitation services, provision of health care services, education and protection in emergencies.

In a context marked by a very intense use of **Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) and other explosive hazards**, HI is alarmed at the **level of explosive contamination in Syria**. Most Syrians have been displaced within and beyond Syria's borders multiple times. Socio-economic deprivation is acute amongst the population, in addition to grave humanitarian and safety concerns for civilians who bear the brunt of the war. After more than seven years of conflict in Syria, considering the **prevalence of war-related and other injuries and disabilities requiring care**, the provision of Physical Rehabilitation services for persons with injuries and disabilities is insufficient. **Supporting the response to such immediate needs should therefore not stop donors from preparing for the future:** despite the intensity of current challenges, humanitarian actors need to plan not only for the immediate response, but also for mid-to-long term response.

As HI, for example, engaging in activities such as humanitarian mine action (**Risk Education, mine clearance or Victim Assistance**), **physical rehabilitation, prosthetics and orthotics, psychosocial support**, is not only a matter of emergency, it is also crucial for the future lives of our beneficiaries and the Syrian population as a whole.

In Syria, but also other conflict settings, HI is therefore making a call to donors and humanitarian actors to prepare **a comprehensive response to the effects of the use of Explosive Weapons In Populated Areas (EWIPA) and other explosive hazards on civilian populations.**

For donors, this means that, beyond contingency planning, there is a need to increase multi-year funding: funding cycles of most multi-year donors end in late 2019/early 2020. Over 2018, donors should start planning and provisioning for 2020 and 2021.

1. Humanitarian Needs Overview [HNO] (2018), Syrian Arab Republic. Available at: <https://hno-syria.org/>

2. UNHCR data portal <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [Accessed 23 February 2018]

Not safe for return

- The extreme level of explosive contamination in Syria needs to be taken into account when exploring the conditions for the voluntary, informed, safe and dignified return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees to their communities of origin, even where the conflict has recently stopped. Yet, **access to many areas is not granted to humanitarian mine action actors.**
- At the moment it is not safe for refugees or IDPs to return to areas with high levels of contamination. Many returnees would be susceptible to high levels of vulnerability if they return too soon.
- Any return should be voluntary, this means that under no circumstances people should be encouraged or coerced to return to the localities or to relocate elsewhere.

In this context, ensuring continuity of services in Syria is integral to humanitarian work. The ability of **humanitarian workers** to safely and securely perform their duties by responding to needs without the fear of being harassed, arrested, or targeted, is, therefore, a crucial aspect of humanitarian access.

Recommendations

Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA), Explosive Contamination and Mine Action

Donors and international agencies should:

- Signal strongly that **humanitarian mine action is an essential and priority activity** in Syria now and in the future and bound by **humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and independence;**
- Commit to funding **a significant scale-up** in Risk Education, surveys and clearance of mines and explosive remnants of war, and Victim Assistance;
- Support **Syrian response capacity** to effectively respond to these threats in the short and long-term;
- Use their leverage and influence to ensure that **access to all areas is granted to humanitarian mine actors;**
- Ensure **funding for mine action activities is covered by humanitarian funding mechanisms.**

United Nations Security Council Members should:

■ Ensure that **paragraph 11 of United Security Council Resolution 2401 (2018)** which ‘calls for humanitarian mine action to be accelerated as a matter of urgency throughout Syria’ be **implemented immediately**.

Health Care and Health Needs – Physical Rehabilitation, Psychosocial Support and Mental Health

Donors and international agencies should:

- Prioritise **funding for the health sector**, as **improved access to and continuity of healthcare** is a priority in Syria and neighbouring countries;
- Prepare and implement a **comprehensive revision of the Jordan and Lebanon Compacts** in order to develop synergies between health, education and livelihoods and leverage the **necessary support to health services and systems**.

With regard to physical rehabilitation needs

Donors should:

- Support the capacity and resources needed to **conduct a Whole of Syria assessment on the profiles of injuries and disabilities** in order to have a more accurate understanding of their needs in Syria;
- Ensure that rehabilitation services are an integral component of the response and encourage non-specialised actors to develop their technical capacity and maintain standards of quality in relation to physical rehabilitation.

With regard to mental health and psychosocial needs

Donors should:

- **Step-up funding of mental health and psychosocial support** in the humanitarian response in Syria and neighbouring countries:
 - Ensuring a **long term strategy**, including funding, is in place to address **mental health consequences** and reactions to war-related violence and trauma-related **psychological processes**;
 - A **specific focus should be on children** affected by the exposure to violence and **strengthening parenting and care giving skills**.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Syrian Humanitarian Response

Donors need to:

- Work to ensure that the **situation of persons with disabilities is included as an integral part of the response across sectors**, but particularly in health care, to avoid segregation or patchy access to services;
- Make clear that an **inclusive humanitarian response requires further resources** and explicit long term commitments, alliances with specialised actors, and indicators to measure achievements;

- Ensure that:
 - Identification and early consultation of persons with disabilities and older people takes place at every stage of the project cycle so that their needs and concerns are articulated and addressed in the response;
 - Persons with disabilities and older people are included throughout the Humanitarian Planning Cycle (HPC) in each sector response plan;
 - **Sector data is disaggregated** by sex, age and disability.
- Work toward the **full implementation of human rights frameworks including the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and reaffirm the implementation of the commitments of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action** in the Syrian response.

Continuity of Services, Humanitarian Access and Protection of Humanitarian Workers

Donors, UN agencies, concerned states, and parties to the conflict should:

- Prioritise the **protection of civilians, including humanitarian actors and the continuity of the services** they are delivering, as an essential component of humanitarian access;
- Ensure that **humanitarian workers are not subject to arrest or detention for performing humanitarian services in accordance with International Humanitarian Law**, with related guarantees and appropriate monitoring;
- Facilitate and support the inclusion of **strong provisions towards protecting civilians, including humanitarian workers**, as part of any local truce, evacuation or reconciliation agreements;
- Ensure **in areas where control has changed that adequate support is given to humanitarian actors** who are operational and have the capacity to reach those in need;
- Emphasise that **funds linked to continuity of services are connected to the preservation and protection of humanitarian workers**;
- Facilitate **passage of humanitarian staff to and from neighboring countries for training and monitoring** of humanitarian activities.

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria should:

- Ensure that **preservation and protection of civilians, including humanitarian workers is an integral component of the UN-led Geneva Peace process**, in order to achieve a sustainable and meaningful peace in Syria that includes all sectors of society.

The members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and United Nations Members States should:

- Take action so that **all UN resolutions related to access and protections of civilians, including humanitarian workers, are effectively implemented in Syria**.

Since 2012, HI has been working alongside the victims of the Syrian conflict, in particular victims of explosive weapons. The organisation currently has 500 professionals working in the region to assist the most vulnerable Syrians, including persons with injuries and disabilities, and the elderly or isolated. Its teams also intervene to help displaced people and refugees living in camps or hosted in local communities. HI provides rehabilitation and orthopaedic fitting services, offers psychological support, ensures the most vulnerable have access to humanitarian aid, raises awareness of explosive remnants of war, conducts mine clearance work and distributes emergency kits.