

CASE STUDY

SYRIAN ARAB REP. 2019–2020 / SYRIAN CRISIS

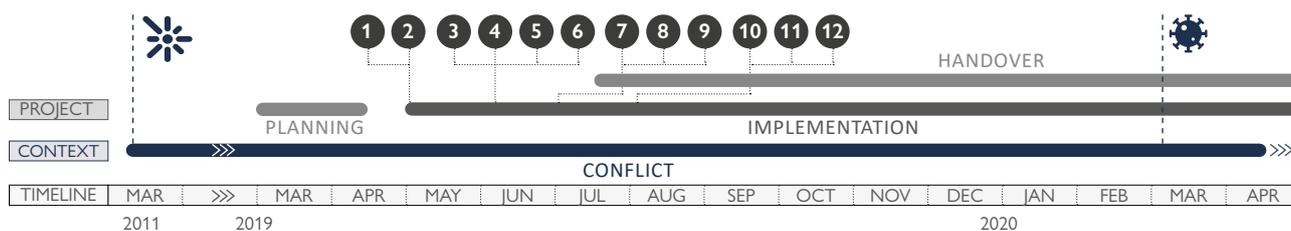
KEYWORDS: Community engagement, Conditional Cash Transfer, Housing rehabilitation

CRISIS	Syrian crisis, 2011 onwards
PEOPLE AFFECTED	4.3 million people affected by conflict in Northwest Syria of whom 2.8 million are IDPs*
PEOPLE DISPLACED	2.7 million IDPs living in Northwest Syria*
PROJECT LOCATION	Idleb and Aleppo Governorates, Northwest Syria
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	609 local/returnee HHs 298 hosted IDP HHs 907 HHs (living in 609 houses)
PROJECT OUTPUTS	609 houses repaired/rehabilitated
SHELTER SIZE	40m² on average
SHELTER DENSITY	4-5m² per person (excluding WASH facilities, kitchen & circulation).
DIRECT COST	Average of USD 500 for minor repairs Maximum of USD 2,000 for major repairs
PROJECT COST	Average of USD 1,200 per HH
* Source: North-West Syria: Shelter & NFI Emergency Overview (Dec 2020)	



PROJECT SUMMARY

The project supported vulnerable local communities, returnee households and IDP populations who were living in damaged homes to improve their resilience through housing repair and rehabilitation assistance. Shelter rehabilitation works were implemented through providing cash grants and technical assistance to households, targeting houses which were inhabited by homeowners with priority given to the most vulnerable families and families hosting IDPs in their homes. Shelter assistance was part of a wider package of support provided by the organization, which involved WASH integration, community infrastructure repair, and food and NFI assistance.



Mar 2011: Syrian Crisis began.

- 1 May 2019:** Community selection and prioritization.
- 2 May - Jun 2019:** Community mobilization.
- 3 Jun 2019:** ERW (Explosive Remnants of War) Awareness Campaigns.
- 4 Jun 2019:** Damage and Vulnerability Assessments (DVA).
- 5 Jun - Nov 2019:** Housing, Land and Property (HLP) due diligence.
- 6 Jun - Dec 2019:** Bill of Quantities (BoQs) developed.

- 7 Jul - Dec 2019:** Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with homeowners signed.
- 8 Jul - Dec 2019:** Delivery of first cash installment.
- 9 Jul 2019 - Apr 2020:** Site works implementation and monitoring.
- 10 Aug 2019 - Apr 2020:** Delivery of second cash installment.
- 11 Aug 2019 - Apr 2020:** Completion certificates issued.
- 12 Aug 2019 - Apr 2020:** Post-Implementation Monitoring.
- 11 Mar 2020:** WHO declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.

CONTEXT

For more background information on the crisis and response in the Northwest of the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) [see A.22](#).

Many villages were either bombed or had been in the middle of front line conflict, leading to significant damage to housing and infrastructure. The lack of financial resources and inability to pay for housing rehabilitation or rent compelled many households to either remain displaced living in damaged housing or to return to their own damaged house. Yet, technical assessments conducted by the organization across six target locations concluded that the large majority (80%) of houses damaged were easily repairable. An assessment carried out by the organization also showed that house-sharing was common, with 30% of assessed host and returnee households accommodating displaced persons. Out of the 30% of IDP families being hosted, 18% reported paying rent.

PROJECT APPROACH

The project assisted both highly vulnerable families who were returning to their place of origin following a period of displacement, and households who had not been displaced but who had been equally affected by the crisis. Both groups were supported with sustainable repair/rehabilitation of their damaged homes. The goal was to target 600 houses (600 families) but the project ultimately supported the repair of 609 houses, which due to the hosting of IDPs, resulted in 907 families being assisted.

The project took a people-centered approach, focused on enabling and assisting household self-recovery and strengthening systems to increase the resilience of affected communities by delivering dignified and longer-term shelter solutions. The project approach also aimed to strengthen intercommunal relations and social cohesion, looking to reduce any risk of conflict among the different groups in the targeted communities and mitigate rising social tensions between IDPs and host communities.

The project provided target households with tailored financial support and technical assistance to repair their homes, which also resulted in injecting resources into the local economy and had a positive impact on the community as a whole. The housing rehabilitation assistance was



Many IDP, returnee and vulnerable local households were living in significantly damaged homes.

part of wider holistic support offered by the organization. Rehabilitation activities were combined with water and sanitation interventions, and with community-level infrastructure repairs such as water and sewage system repairs. Additionally, all households receiving housing rehabilitation support were also assessed using the organization's Multi-Sectoral Needs assessments. Based on confirmed needs, most vulnerable families received integrated Food and NFI assistance.

Specifically, the organization contributed to the achievement of the Shelter Cluster strategic objectives by: 1) Providing life-saving and life-sustaining shelter by addressing inadequate shelter conditions of people living in substandard shelters, and 2) Contributing towards the resilience and cohesion of communities and households by improving housing and related community/public infrastructure by rehabilitating houses of local residents living in their damaged houses.

TARGETING

The organization prioritized communities for the interventions based on the severity of needs and safety and security concerns. Eligibility for household inclusion in the project included that the home was being inhabited by the property owner or their family, that housing damage was repairable, and that the damage caused to the house was as a result of the conflict. Priority was given to vulnerable people who did not have the capacity or resources to repair their houses themselves, in particular, female-headed households, elderly, Persons with Disabilities, war injured, families with no resources, and families who had lost their livelihood as a result of the war. Priority was also given to families who were hosting other families.

Reasons for exclusion from selection included if a house was totally destroyed and would need full reconstruction (which was beyond the scope of the project), if households were less vulnerable or had land and/or other resources, and if areas were unsafe, for example if there was presence of armed groups, military, or where there was evidence or suspicion of dangerous environments due to the presence of mines or remnants of war. Additionally households were not targeted where other organizations were already assisting with the reconstruction or repair of houses.



The project targeting prioritized households that were hosting IDPs, among other criteria.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The organization was committed to support the development of self-protection capacities and to assist people to claim their rights, including – not exclusively – the rights to shelter, water and sanitation. As such local communities were actively involved throughout the project life-cycle. In the planning phase, the organization actively involved community members in the project design and in identifying needs for house repairs. The prioritization and selection of community infrastructure projects was made by the communities themselves. Through its Community Outreach team and in coordination with local authorities, the organization conducted community mobilization campaigns which included communicating the overall objective of the project, the project criteria, and holding Q&A sessions.

DAMAGE AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENTS

Each house was assessed through a Damage and Vulnerability Assessment (DVA) to determine the level of damage as well as the social vulnerability of the family. The organization's engineers were responsible for conducting the DVA for each damaged house and preparing the BoQ for each house accordingly. BoQs were developed in close consultation with households, taking into consideration the specific needs of the household including gender and protection sensitive measures (such as the provision of inclusive and gender separated WASH facilities), and taking into consideration the specific requirements on Persons with Disabilities (for example by including adaptations).

HLP DUE DILIGENCE

Prior to the conflict many household did not have documentation of their homeownership. For those who did have documentation of their homeownership prior to the conflict, destruction and displacement meant that many of these papers had been lost, damaged or destroyed.

HLP statuses therefore needed to be verified and documented, so that housing rehabilitation could take place. The organization worked with local authorities and local community representatives in the HLP verification process. Certificates were signed to document the verified homeownership. Once the validation of HLP documents was complete, an MoU was signed with each homeowner outlining the rehabilitation works to be completed and the process for cash installments.

It was found that in cases where IDPs were being hosted in the homes of selected households, these IDPs were in most cases friends or family members of the host family. Due to the nature of these relationships, the organization did not consider it necessary to introduce clauses into the MoU with the homeowners that specifically protected the tenure security of the IDP households.

CASH DISPERSAL AND MONITORING

The project was implemented through restricted cash grants paid directly to homeowners. The first installment, for 50% of the total amount, was disbursed at the time of the MoU signature. The second cash installment of 50% was disbursed upon completion of all works as outlined in the BoQ.

The construction process was closely monitored by the organization's site inspectors (technical and social staff).

Female staff were recruited within the technical, social assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation, and Complaint and Response Mechanism teams. Social staff were present during the site works (especially for female-headed households). Families headed by Persons with Disabilities and/or elderly persons received additional technical support such as facilitating the contractor/craftsman relationship and advanced cash grants (based on the family's economic vulnerability).

Upon completion of the site works, a completion certificate was issued by the organization, only for houses who had completed implementation as per the signed MoU. Upon signing of the completion certificate the second cash installment was disbursed. Upon completion of site work, Post-Implementation Monitoring was conducted by the organization's M&E team to capitalize on lessons learned and best practices.



Before and after photos showing house rehabilitation.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Insecure conditions resulted in accessibility problems and exposure to risks to staff and target communities. To prevent these risks, safety precautions were taken such as ensuring with the families and stakeholders the safety of the selected sites (distance from frontlines, HLP disputes, and mine action).

Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). The project took place only in locations that had been cleared by the local civil defense. All organization staff were trained on ERW awareness. In addition, and prior to any house rehabilitation, community members and selected households participated in ERW awareness sessions conducted by well-trained organization staff.

Tensions in the community due to selection criteria for rehabilitation of houses. The organization mitigated this by ensuring dialogue and explanation of criteria through community group discussions and involvement and consultation of all communities throughout the whole process. In addition, a complaint/feedback mechanism was implemented.

Implementation during winter caused delays. The implementation of site work during the harsh winter season (December – February) resulted in delays in completions.

Requirement for completion of works prior to receiving second cash installment. As the second installment of cash was not disbursed until after the completion of the rehabilitation works, this created some challenges for households who needed to have the cash up-front. It was found that many households (approx. 80%) addressed this challenge by making verbal agreements with contractors and suppliers who agreed to be paid once the household had received their second cash installment. Going forward the organization is planning to split the cash installments into three installments, with the final installment being reduced to 20-25%.

COVID-19 pandemic. Standard operation procedures were developed and implemented. The procedures included establishing a COVID-19 task forces within the organization, the organization's staff members completing training in crisis management in the context of COVID-19, and mitigating the risk of COVID-19 by distributing cash grants through door-to-door visits to all households.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

Households who received rehabilitation support confirmed (through visits and focus group discussions) that **the project had a positive impact on the community in general. Markets were positively impacted and daily laborers had an opportunity to secure some income** through the project implementation. Craftspeople, carpenters, iron-smith and other skilled and non-skilled workers were able to secure temporary income within the rehabilitation and construction works implemented in the selected communities. Another impact that was observed was of households adapting their homes to also support their home-based enterprises. For instance, one family modified a part of their living room into a hairdressers.

The organization's approach aimed at **long-term community cohesion** by providing assistance for both local/host and IDPs communities. The IDP communities were always a part of the community meetings and mobilization, and community infrastructure projects targeted both the local/host and IDPs communities.

The organization gained a lot of expertise in the shelter sector through this project and was selected by the Shelter Cluster to undertake the training of all the NW Syria shelter partners on shelter emergency rehabilitation methodology.



Before and after photos showing house rehabilitation.



STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- √ **Social cohesion and community engagement.** The project provided assistance for local, returnee and IDPs communities and aimed to support social cohesion between different groups. It was reported that the transparency showed by the organization in community engagement had a positive impact on the community in general, and enhanced the trust between the local communities, IDPs, and local councils.
- √ **Integrated assistance.** Shelter assistance was linked to other interventions by the organization within the same communities, including WASH, community infrastructure, and food and NFI assistance.
- √ **Positive impact on market recovery and support to local employment.** The cash-based approach supported local markets and supported the return of local craftspeople and construction workers back to the villages.
- √ **Assistance provided was specific to each household.** BoQs were developed in close consultation with the households, taking into consideration the specific needs of the households including gender and protection sensitive measures and the specific requirements of Persons with Disabilities.
- √ **Engagement with local authorities.** The organization engaged with local authorities in conducting the community mobilization campaigns and in the HLP due diligence process. As part of other projects being run by the organization, local authority members were also trained on ethical tender processes and referral pathways.

WEAKNESSES

- × **Cash installment at end of the process created challenges for households.** As the second cash installment was paid after the completion of works this created challenges for households as it essentially reimbursed households for money that they needed to spend up-front, which many households did not have. Many households made verbal agreements with suppliers and contractors to agree to pay them upon their receipt of the final cash installment.
- × **Heavy procedures for monitoring of small cash grants.** As per donor requirements, the monitoring and documentation process was extremely thorough, with the documentation of each intervention step required for each housing rehabilitation. While this ensured rigorous oversight, it was time-consuming and resource heavy, and in the case of the small cash grants (for example of USD 200) for minor repairs, this approach was seen as overly burdensome and not cost-effective.
- × **Unrepairable homes beyond the scope of the project.** There were cases of very vulnerable families with structurally damaged or totally destroyed houses that were beyond repair. The organization had no possibility to intervene to provide reconstruction support to these households as this was not within the scope of the project and there was a funding gap in supporting full reconstruction.



The organization made regular field visits to support households and monitor progress throughout the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Simplification of procedures for minor repairs.** The organization is discussing with donors (with mixed success) the possibility of simplifying the monitoring process for minor repairs so that the process could be less resource intensive and increase efficiency in delivering assistance without jeopardizing the quality of response.
- **Introducing a third cash installment.** The organization has revised the cash installment process so that the total amount of cash assistance is now split across three cash installments instead of two in order to reduce the degree to which households need to spend other money up-front or seek alternative solutions.
- **Communication with communities and community leaders/stakeholders is a key for a successful implementation.** The organization intends to invest more time and resources in the preparation phase and ensure that this is properly budgeted for in project proposals.
- **The gap in funding for households whose homes are beyond repair needs to be addressed.** The organization has raised this issue to the Cluster and donors to advocate on behalf of the critical needs of such households. The organization has managed to secure funding to pilot the construction of shelter units for households whose homes have been totally destroyed.