Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS)
Support to the Earthquake Response
June 2023
Introduction

The Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) is a multi-donor pooled humanitarian fund established in 2022 that brings together Syrian and international partners with a collective mission to maintain life-saving humanitarian assistance to Syria. This brief highlights how the AFNS responded flexibly to address the devastating February earthquakes (EQs). It emphasises the impact of ongoing AFNS-funded projects in meeting these needs and outlines the next steps for continuing the Fund’s support from first-line emergency response to post-earthquake recovery in the medium term.

Unique AFNS features

- **Timeliness of Response**: AFNS demonstrated a rapid and proactive response to address post-earthquake needs and gaps. This highlights the dedication of its donors and Steering Board to deliver humanitarian aid that is timely, people-centred, and responsive to demand. Within just 11 days, the Fund redirected US$24M initially allocated for its first Special Allocation (SA1) and programmed an additional US$4M to provide crucial support for EQ response.

- **Flexibility**: AFNS exemplified adaptability by making necessary adjustments to strategies and funding to address emerging needs. This included allowing new donors to contribute to existing projects, providing immediate assistance while finalising contracts, and making urgent changes to grants swiftly after the EQ.

- **Longer-Term Commitment**: AFNS benefits from the advantage of flexibility, allowing it to commit to longer-term projects. Currently, AFNS can enter into contracts lasting up to 15 months, and there is potential for even longer-term grants in the future. Most projects addressing the EQ response have a duration of twelve months, enabling more comprehensive and sustained support for those affected. AFNS’s commitment to ensuring the continuity of critical treatments at specialised hospitals further highlights its dedication to long-term assistance.

- **Integrated Programming**: AFNS adopts a holistic approach by integrating various sectors in its programming. For the EQ response, it combined Education with Protection, and Health with Nutrition and WASH, while also prioritising Cash Assistance as both a cross-cutting delivery mechanism and a stand-alone priority sector. This approach ensures a comprehensive response that addresses a broad spectrum of interrelated humanitarian needs.

- **Localisation**: AFNS prioritises localisation efforts to empower local actors and organisations to ensure that the aid provided is relevant and effective, taking into account the local context and needs. Under the SA1, seven out of eleven partners are Syrian-led organisations, and 70% of the overall allocation was awarded directly or indirectly to local, Syrian-led NGOs.

- **Innovation**: AFNS is committed to exploring innovative and effective programming approaches. As an example, it funded the establishment of a centralised blood bank system and linked nine blood banks with 41 hospitals and health facilities in close cooperation with WHO.

- **Comprehensive Support**: AFNS maintains close coordination with other humanitarian actors, including the SCHF, to ensure complementarity, continuity, and comprehensive support. This approach ensures that the aid provided is well-coordinated and effective.

Key facts and figures

- **Total beneficiaries**: 1.4 million (incl. 56.5% women and girls)
- **Sectors supported**: 3 integrated programming areas, covering 6 humanitarian sectors
- **Donors**: 5 (UK, USA, France, Germany and Jersey)
- **Total funding allocated so far**: US$28.1M (70% directly/indirectly to Syrian-led NGOs)
- **Rapid Response**: Within 11 days, AFNS redirected US$24M initially allocated and programmed an additional US$4 million
- **Funds allocated to cash modality projects**: US$12.7 million (45% of total funding)
- **Average grant size**: US$1 - 4 million
- **Grant duration**: Mostly 12 months
- **Number of grants**: 12
- **Implementing partners**: 11 (incl. seven Syrian-led NGOs)
Earthquake Response

AFNS launched its first major funding allocation, a Special Allocation (SA1), just before the devastating earthquakes that affected Syria and Türkiye in February 2023. In a rapid response, AFNS modified its SA1 programming based on insights from the ‘Lessons Learnt: A Northern Syria Earthquake Assessment and Response Analysis’.

The Fund redirected US$24M initially allocated for SA1 and programmed an additional US$4M within 11 days to support the EQ response. This adjustment allowed AFNS to include EQ-related, lifesaving support in three integrated priority areas: Cash and Voucher assistance; Health, Nutrition, and WASH; and Education and Protection. The Fund added a fourth priority area (“Emergency Lifesaving Assistance”) to enable the Fund to support an urgently needed blood bank.

100% of the US$28.1M SA1 was allocated to support communities affected by the EQ. Notably, 70% of the overall allocation was awarded directly and indirectly to local, Syrian-led NGOs.

Filling gaps post-EQ

The projects and activities implemented after the earthquake within the four priority areas of SA1 were specifically designed to address underfunded emergency gaps in the overall earthquake response. Here are a few examples that highlight the impact of AFNS in assisting individuals affected by the EQ.

“Everyone in the supply chain has access to real-time information about the availability of blood products across different regions” - WATAN

Figure 1: Number of beneficiaries in EQ-affected areas

![EQ Severity: Moderate (Level V) Strong (Level IV)]

Figure 2: SA1 Funding by priority area. Emergency Lifesaving Assistance was added as a fourth priority area, allowing the Fund to provide targeted support to the blood bank initiative.
Supplying safe blood products to save lives.

AFNS provided WATAN with a US$1.3M grant to establish and operate a centralised blood bank, ensuring the coordinated delivery of safe blood products to patients in need. This initiative has linked nine blood banks with 41 hospitals and health facilities across the northwest of Syria. Three of these blood banks supplied nine of the primary responder hospitals treating the injured in areas worst hit by the EQ. WATAN facilitated the provision of blood to over 1,250 people injured in the EQ.

According to Dr. Mahmoud, Director of the Health Programme at WATAN, demand for blood products has escalated by 20% due to the high volume of surgeries and operations following the EQs. WATAN is currently supplying 5,000 blood bags monthly to hospitals within its network.

Dr Mahmoud underscored the value of a centralised blood bank in responding to future emergencies, saying, “We can do something amazing through this project, which is to track and regulate where blood products are being overstocked or understocked. Everyone in the supply chain has access to real-time information about the availability of blood products across different regions.” He also pointed out that the collection and testing of blood products could assist in building infection profiles for each community, which could be instrumental in identifying and preventing potential health crises. In response to blood donor fatigue and to bolster future emergency responses, WATAN is set to procure 4 mobile blood banks using AFNS funding.

Continued access to lifesaving specialised healthcare.

AFNS made adjustments to partner Shafak’s US$2.7M grant and provided a US$1.1 million grant to partner Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations (UOSSM). This was done to ensure the continuity and uninterrupted provision of critical treatments for patients at specialised hospitals in the aftermath of the EQ. Shafak, for instance, established orthopaedic services at its Ariha Surgical Unit to treat EQ-injured individuals.

Since then, Shafak has successfully carried out 142 major surgeries. Dr. Anas, Senior Health & Nutrition Programme Manager at Shafak, highlighted two key factors contributing to the project’s success. Firstly, AFNS’ effective coordination with the Health Cluster and NGOs in identifying unmet needs, enabling support to be redirected accordingly. Secondly, AFNS’ flexibility in allowing other donors to contribute to the same project (NORWAC in the case of the Unit). This allowed Shafak to immediately provide assistance while finalising the contract with AFNS.

UOSSM identified 8 health facilities in worst-affected areas to support with AFNS funding. Hazem Alsabtee, Grants Coordinator at UOSSM, expressed that AFNS support came at the right time. This assistance facilitated two crucial objectives: firstly, responding to immediate specialised healthcare needs of patients, such as dialysis for those affected by Crush Syndrome in the EQs, and secondly, ensuring the stability of health services in the medium term to address longer-term effects of the EQ, including mental health issues and trauma.
"Cash assistance plays a crucial role in supporting beneficiaries after a disaster, but it's equally vital to prioritise sustainable solutions in the medium-term" - People in Need (PIN)

Distributing cash to reduce vulnerability.

After the EQ, AFNS increased grant funding from US$10M to US$12.7M specifically for cash assistance. AFNS instructed all partners to prioritise EQ-affected areas and individuals during distribution. This included multipurpose cash and cash for shelter, NFIs, and winterisation support. One of our partners, People in Need (PIN), adjusted their interventions to focus on those most severely impacted by the EQ.

PIN swiftly initiated distributions in February, and thus far, has provided over US$1.4M to more than 9,400 households. Nellie Soudah, Programme Director at PIN highlighted the significance of cash assistance for beneficiaries in the aftermath of such a disaster. However, she also emphasised the need for more sustainable solutions in the medium-term.

Key takeaways and next steps

AFNS’s swift response to post-EQ needs and gaps showcases the commitment of its donors and Steering Board to deliver humanitarian aid that is timely, people-centred, and driven by demand. The upcoming US$30M Regular Allocation (RA 1), scheduled for disbursement to partners in July 2023, builds upon the areas of support provided under SA1 for the EQ-response. This allocation marks a natural shift in focus from first-line emergency response in the short-term to early recovery in the medium-term.

RA1 will continue to address underfunded needs and gaps arising from the EQ, which will have long-lasting effects for the affected population. Key recommendations for AFNS moving forward are as follows:

- Include early recovery activities with life-saving impact to support those affected by the EQ in rebuilding their lives and promote sustainable solutions that enhance resilience.
- Commission further research and engage partners, beneficiaries, and local communities in the early stages of planning subsequent allocations to ensure relevance of activities.
- Maintain close coordination with UN-OCHA and the SCHF, other UN agencies, Clusters, NGO coordination bodies, and donors to ensure complementarity, continuity, and comprehensive support.
- Prioritise localisation efforts to empower local actors and organisations.
- Explore innovative and effective programming approaches and invest in capacity building to improve the quality of the response in Northern Syria.

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