

25 JANUARY 2026

ICRC RESPONSE ACROSS NORTHERN SYRIA



Northern Syria witnessed a sharp escalation of hostilities in January, triggering a wave of large-scale displacement across Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ezzor and Hassakeh governorates – a region already hosting some of the country's largest camps.

Fighting in densely populated areas has resulted in casualties and disrupted access to essential services such as healthcare, water and electricity. Essential civilian infrastructure including water pumping stations, dams and electricity networks serving millions of people has been put at serious risk.

Thousands of families have fled with little more than the clothes on their backs. Many had already been displaced multiple times, having sought refuge in collective shelters in Raqqa, Tabqa, Aleppo and Hassakeh – only to be uprooted once again. With no designated or sufficient reception sites available, newly displaced people are now scattered across overcrowded schools, informal settlements, abandoned buildings, host communities and public facilities. Some families are even returning to previously affected zones, in northern Aleppo, driven by desperation or lack of suitable alternatives.

Civilians are struggling to survive amid freezing winter temperatures, with severely limited access to water, warmth and healthcare.

Beyond harsh winter conditions, the risk from unexploded ordnance (UXO) remains high – particularly in densely populated residential areas where heavy weaponry was used. As people begin to return to their homes, UXOs will only pose a greater risk that will last well beyond the fighting.

In cooperation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and in coordination with relevant authorities, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has launched an emergency response across four governorates – Aleppo, Hassakeh, Raqqa and Deir Ezzor – to address the most urgent humanitarian needs.

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“The hardest part isn’t leaving. It’s getting used to leaving again” said one man in his fifties who had returned to Aleppo after a decade of displacement, only to be forced to flee again and seek refuge in Afrin.

In Hassakeh, a mother of four described the harsh reality of displacement: “My children are all sick now. It’s very cold. There’s no electricity here, no fuel, and no way to keep warm.”

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EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE



In Aleppo, the ICRC has delivered life-saving medical supplies to Al-Razi Hospital, sufficient to treat at least 50 severely wounded patients. Additionally, five first aid kits and consumable items were provided to the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Emergency and Disaster Management, enough to stabilise 100 critical cases. Medical supplies and consumables to meet the essential primary health care needs of 10,000 people for three months were also delivered to the ICRC-supported SARC polyclinic in Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood. To support patient care during harsh winter conditions, the ICRC delivered 300 blankets to Al-Razi and Aleppo University Hospitals.

In Hassakeh, the ICRC delivered lifesaving medical supplies to the Military Hospital, sufficient to treat at least 50 severely wounded patients. Medical supplies and consumables were also dispatched to the Newroz IDP Camp, which has been receiving displaced families from western Syria. Additionally, six SARC EMS ambulances, supported by the ICRC, have been operational in Hassakeh City to facilitate emergency patient transfers.

In Raqqa, the Directorate of Health was supported with lifesaving medical supplies sufficient to treat at least 50 severely wounded patients, medical supplies and consumables to meet the essential primary health care needs of 10,000 people for three months, and a first aid kit to stabilise 30 critical cases.

In Deir Ezzor, to strengthen front-line emergency response, the ICRC provided one first aid kit to the Directorate of Health and an additional first aid kit to the SARC EMS – enough to stabilise 50 critical cases in total. Additionally, Deir Ezzor National Hospital received direct support through the ICRC delivery of life-saving medical supplies sufficient to treat at least 50 severely wounded patients. Four ICRC-supported SARC EMS ambulances continue to operate in Deir Ezzor, conducting inter-governorate patient transfers to Homs and Damascus, with logistical reinforcement from other ICRC-supported EMS units in central Syria.

These coordinated medical interventions across four governorates aim to ensure the continuity of emergency care for the wounded and sick amid escalating displacement, infrastructure damage and access constraints.

BASIC RELIEF FOR DISPLACED FAMILIES



In Yad Al-Awn Camp, Afrin and Sharran, the ICRC and SARC jointly distributed assistance to 500 households displaced from Al-Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhoods in Aleppo city. The support included 500 food parcels, 1,000 mattresses and 500 hygiene kits. As a follow-up, 1,200 blankets were distributed to 350 households across villages in the Sharran sub-district. Additionally, the ICRC delivered 71 food parcels to the operators of the Khafseh water treatment plant, and their families.

In Hassakeh city, the ICRC and SARC jointly assisted 52 households across multiple sites, distributing 52 food parcels alongside emergency household items, including mattresses, blankets, buckets, solar LED lamps, hygiene kits, kitchen sets and plastic mats.

In Qamishli, 350 food parcels were dispatched to Newroz camp. Of these, 117 were distributed to recent arrivals, while the remaining 233 were handed over to camp administration for distribution to unregistered arrivals already gathered at the camp perimeter.





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ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND HYGIENE



In Aleppo, the ICRC and SARC completed water and sanitation interventions in six centres for internally displaced people (IDP). Activities included comprehensive maintenance of sanitation facilities – such as repairing showers and hot water systems and replacing water taps – and distribution of cleaning kits in ten IDP centres to maintain hygiene, ensure the cleanliness of shelters and sanitation facilities, and prevent the spread of diseases. Additionally, an emergency response was carried out for IDPs from Ashrafiyah and Sheikh Maqsoud hosted in Afrin Camp, involving the distribution of 100 cleaning kits and 600 drinking water bottles, as well as the maintenance and rehabilitation of sanitation facilities for approximately 100 apartments.

In addition to its regular daily water trucking support in Hassakeh city—where the ICRC delivers an average of 1,300 cubic metres of water per day to 176 communal street tanks, covering the needs of approximately 100,000 people—the ICRC also carried out urgent water trucking to four IDP centres, delivering 39 m³ of potable water to newly displaced families. Water tanks at these centres were equipped with covers and taps to ensure safe and hygienic access.

Moreover, nearly 1,000 bottles of drinking water were distributed in collective shelters across eight locations in Hassakeh city. In Qamishli city, 6,000 bottles of drinking water were dispatched to nine IDP centres, and an additional 1,000 bottles were delivered to Newroz Camp to support displaced households.

PROTECTION AND PREVENTION



PROTECTION OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION (PCP)

The ICRC has been engaging bilaterally with the parties to the conflict and publicly calling for the protection of those who do not participate in hostilities – such as civilians – and those who have ceased participating, including the wounded, the sick and persons deprived of their liberty. The ICRC has also stressed on the importance of protecting essential civilian infrastructure, warning of the devastating consequences for millions of people should such infrastructure be damaged or destroyed.



PROTECTION OF FAMILY LINKS (PFL)

As many families have been forced to flee, this has led – and could continue to lead – to family separations and loss of contact with loved ones.

The ICRC continues to receive calls from families who have lost contact with relatives – whether temporarily due to evacuation or following reports of recent detention.

The ICRC is engaging with relevant authorities who are responsible for conducting evacuations to help mitigate the risk and duration of family separation. This includes sharing preventive messages for dissemination to people being evacuated or on the move, as well as providing technical advice and practical tips to authorities when planning evacuations, particularly to protect vulnerable individuals such as the elderly, minors and persons with disabilities.

SARC has prepositioned kits to help people call their family to report they are safe and well or to charge mobile devices.

At the same time, in line with its mandate, the ICRC has approached parties to offer its services to visit persons deprived of liberty in relation to the hostilities, to monitor their conditions and treatment, and to reconnect them with their loved ones. The ICRC stands ready to play its neutral intermediary role and facilitate any detainee releases that the parties may agree upon.



SUPPORTING DIGNIFIED MANAGEMENT OF THE DEAD

To support forensic authorities, the ICRC has supplied 50 body bags to the Aleppo Forensic Medicine Centre. This enables the proper handling, identification and management of human remains – a critical step in preventing disappearances and alleviating the anguish of uncertainty for families.

As the situation evolves, the ICRC continues to engage with authorities and humanitarian partners and stands ready to scale up its response to ease the suffering of civilians who have already endured years of hardship.



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