



**ACTION
FOR
HUMANITY**



**NO PLACE BUT
DISPLACEMENT**

**A report into multiple displacement of IDPs in Northwest Syria
due to 12 years of conflict and February 6th's earthquakes**



Acknowledgments

Authored and designed by Holisitq Comms Ltd, commissioned by Action For Humanity

Data collected by Action For Humanity

Data analysed by both Holisitq Comms Ltd and Action For Humanity

Editorial support provided by Maryam Ahmed and Wassim Khemadja

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**By Othman Moqbel, Chief Executive Officer
Action For Humanity**

The devastation caused in 75 seconds on February 6th, by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake was a microcosm for the past 12 years of conflict in Syria; widespread death and destruction, hospitals, schools and shelter left in rubble. Those lucky enough to escape with their lives, being forced to flee their home.

Sadly, whilst the devastation caused by the earthquakes shocked the world, this level of destruction has been all too familiar for generations of Syrians. In fact, as we commemorate 12 years since the conflict in Syria started on March 15th, 2011 and over a month since the earthquakes tore through Northwest Syria and Southern Türkiye, it is the scale of displacement we are highlighting in this report.

12 years of protracted crisis and now a devastating natural disaster has forced an unprecedented number of Syrians from their homes. Many Syrians have been, and are being, displaced multiple times throughout the past 12 years. Families have fled across the country in the pursuit of safety only for many to be displaced once again by last month's earthquakes.

Prior to February 6th, the population of Northwest Syria was 4.4 million. 2.8 million (64%) of those people were IDPs (internally displaced persons) and 1.8 million of those IDPs (64% of displaced population in Northwest Syria, 41% of total population) were living in one of 1,420 IDP camps.[1] [2] This is a report into the nature of the displacement of people in these camps, following 12 years of war and the earthquakes, it finds:

- 9 out of 10 (89%) people in IDP camps in Northwest Syria had already been displaced by the conflict at least once, when they were displaced by the earthquakes last month.
- 98% of people in IDP camps were displaced by the earthquakes in total, 9% of families were newly displaced by the earthquakes.
- 91% of people in IDPs in Northwest Syria were displaced by the conflict at least once over the past 12 years.



- Multiple displacement is very common for the majority of IDPs in camps. Whilst 12% have been displaced once or twice, 65% of IDP households have been displaced between three and seven times. Nearly a quarter (23%) have been displaced eight or more times.
- As the above numbers suggests, the earthquakes meant all of people who had already been displaced, most of whom multiple times, by the conflict had been displaced at least once more.
- Displacement has forced overcrowding. Over two-thirds of households in IDP camps (64%) have between 4 and 7 people in and almost a quarter of households (23%) have between 8 and 13 people in them.
- More funding is needed as part of the response in Northwest Syria to build permanent and semi-permanent homes for the million people left at greater security and health risks by not being in proper shelter.

We at Action For Humanity are calling on donors to donate to our Rebuilding Syria One Village At A Time housing project, in order to alleviate the catastrophic shelter needs in Northwest Syria at <https://actionforhumanity.org/appeals/build-a-home-in-syria/>.

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INTRODUCTION

The humanitarian needs in Syria were at their highest yet, even before the devastating earthquakes which tore through the Northwest of the country, as well as southern Türkiye, on February 6th.[3] 12 years of a protracted conflict which, according to most interpretations began on March 15th, 2011, have been the main driver of the deteriorating conditions in Syria. The conflict has killed over 306,000 people. In addition, February's earthquakes killed[4] more than 50,000 in both Syria and Türkiye.

Even before the devastation of February 6th, 90% of Syrians lived below the poverty line[5]. 12 million people in Syria were experiencing food insecurity, more than ever before, due to this conflict[6]. Over 90% of the people in Northwest Syria need humanitarian assistance[7] Even prior to the devastation caused by the earthquakes, Northwest Syria was already a global epicentre of poverty, spiralling needs and crumbled infrastructure. The earthquakes compounded the destruction and suffering, it did not create it.

At the time of writing, the death toll from the earthquakes in Northwest Syria alone is 4,500 and 8,700 injured, however as the rescue and recovery operation continues, these numbers are steadily rising still. People who had already endured so much loss of life, thanks to living in an active conflict zone for 12 years, once again faced more loss. Even at Action For Humanity, not only were countless number of the organisation's beneficiaries killed and impacted, but five members of staff lost their lives due to the earthquake. As well as the destruction and damage to life, the earthquakes damaged or destroyed over 10,000 buildings.[8]

One key characteristic of the past 12 years of war in Syria has been displacement. Whether it's the rows of tents in Idlib or on the border with Lebanon, or the harrowing images of a lifeless Alan Kurdi, a child washed up on a beach trying to escape the war, all these elements of the Syrian crisis are symptoms of mass displacement. The scale of people made homeless in one country alone, has been historic. So many people have lost their homes due to this war, whether it's because they have been destroyed by shelling and airstrikes or that they have fled their hometown due to the intensity of the conflict there.

With 13 million displaced people, 6.9 million (prior to the earthquake) internally, Syria is the largest displacement crisis globally[9]. In addition to this, last month's earthquakes displaced nearly 2.2 million both sides of the border[10], 850,000 of whom being children[11].

Throughout Northwest Syria there are 1,420 informal internally displaced persons (IDP) camps[12], where living conditions are severely poor, with little access to heat, water, medical care and livelihoods[13]. In winter especially, when temperatures drop below freezing, 6 million Syrians, 2.5 million of whom live in Northwest Syria, require winterisation assistance to survive the cold months. These needs are driven in a large part to how poor the access to adequate shelter is[14].

Throughout the past 12 years, the brutal conflict has raged across virtually all of Syria at some point. Due to the spread of the violence, many people have been displaced multiple times. People make the impossible decision to leave their homes once they feel it is no longer safe and move to another part of the country. However, often, the conflict has followed them. Many displaced people in Northern Syria have been displaced multiple times. Multiple displacements are traumatic for those involved.

In addition to this, the motive of this report is to look into how the conflict and the earthquakes have caused and exacerbated displacement and multiple displacement for Northwest Syria's IDPs. The desire to explore this is driven by the amount of homes that have been damaged and destroyed by an earthquake that has caused \$5.1 billion of damage[15], and factoring in that the pre-earthquake population of Northwest Syria was 4.4 million with 2.8 of whom being displaced to the region by the conflict and 1.8 million living in informal IDP camps[16]. This report attempts to find out how many times a population made up of so many people that have already left their homes at least once, have had to leave their homes again and why, over the past 12 years. We also hope to discover how many people have been displaced for the first time by the earthquake and how many people have been displaced by both the war and the natural disaster. [11]

METHODOLOGY & FINDINGS

The pre-earthquake population of Northwest Syria was 4.4 million, 2.8 million (64%) of whom were displaced to the region. 1.8 million IDPs in Northwest Syria (64% of displaced population in Northwest Syria, 41% of total population) are living in informal IDP camps like our respondents.[17] Our research is representative of this final group.

All data was collected on 12th March 2023, by 8 different members of the Syria Relief/Action For Humanity programme team of 263 respondents. All data was collected via a survey, to ensure the anonymity of the respondents. This ensured their security, whilst at the same time allowed them to submit information without fear of stigma or without expectation of a material return. Individuals were selected randomly, whilst at the same time ensuring multiple members of the same household were not duplicated and that a gender balance was achieved. 51% of respondents were female (135), 49% were male (128)

The 263 respondents were living in IDP camps across Aleppo (128) and Idlib (135), across 10 different IDP camps:

- Ajnadayn (Afrin, Aleppo) 32 respondents
- al-Bakara (Afrin, Aleppo) 22 respondents
- al-Kurdiu (Harim, Idlib) 36 respondents
- al-Zohor (Idlib, Idlib) 44 respondents
- Dar al-Iman (Idlib, Idlib) 13 respondents
- Iman Camp 1 (Afrin, Aleppo) 32 respondents
- Iman Camp 2 (Afrin, Aleppo) 32 respondents
- Kwiros (Harim, Idlib) 32 respondents
- Yaroub Bawabeh (Idlib, Idlib) 10 respondents

The mean average number of people in a household was 6 and the average number under 18s in a household was 3.



Size of IDP households

According to our survey the amount of people in an IDP household across Northwest Syria are as follows:

Number of People in Household	Number of Households	Percentage
1	3	1%
2	12	5%
3	21	8%
4	33	13%
5	47	18%
6	49	19%
7	38	14%
8	15	6%
9	22	8%
10	11	4%
11	7	3%
12	2	1%
13+	3	1%

Causes of displacement

98% (257) of IDPs in Northwest Syria have been displaced due to the earthquakes, 2% (5) have not

91% (240) have been displaced due to the conflict at least once over the past 12 years of conflict, 9% (23) haven't

89% (234) respondents have been displaced by the conflict at least once over the past 12 years and the earthquakes of February 6th.

Our research found that the only other reason for someone to be displaced, besides the conflict or the 6th February earthquakes was that the landlord raised the rent of their accommodation to a degree that it became beyond their means to remain there, thus they were displaced from it.[15] In total 3% of families, (7 of the 263 respondents) were displaced because of this. All these families have been displaced in total between 4 and 7 times. They had all been displaced by the 6th February earthquakes *and* the conflict at least once. Our research found that no IDP (0%, 0) had been displaced solely by a reason other than the conflict or the earthquakes of February 6th.

In total, only 2% of families (6 of 263) had been displaced solely by the conflict (i.e. avoided being displaced by the February 6th earthquakes).

9% of IDP families (23 of 263) were newly displaced by the earthquake and had not been displaced by the conflict.



METHODOLOGY

Multiple displacement

Of all those surveyed, when asked how many times they have been displaced by the conflict over the past 12 years (i.e. not the earthquakes or any other reason) the numbers were as follows:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced	Percentage
0	23	9%
1	9	3%
2	16	6%
3	59	22%
4	33	13%
5	39	15%
6	25	10%
7	16	6%
8	7	3%
9	5	2%
10	23	9%
11	0	0%
12+	8	3%

The amount of times families have been displaced in total, whether it is due to conflict, the 6th February earthquakes or unaffordability is as follows:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced	Percentage
0	0	0%
1	22	8%
2	10	4%
3	29	11%
4	48	18%
5	42	16%
6	29	11%
7	23	9%
8	17	6%
9	7	3%
10	10	4%
11	18	7%
12+	8	3%



METHODOLOGY

Multiple displacement and children

10% (25 of 263) of IDP households surveyed have **no children** in them, of them, the amount of times they have been displaced in total:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced
0	0
1	2
2	1
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	4
7	1
8	1
9	0
10	1
11	1
12+	2

14% (38 of 263) of IDP households have **two children** in them, of them, the amount of times they have been displaced in total:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced
0	0
1	3
2	3
3	2
4	9
5	7
6	4
7	2
8	3
9	1
10	1
11	3
12+	0

8% (22 of 263) of IDP households have **one child** in them, of them, the amount of times they have been displaced in total:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced
0	0
1	0
2	0
3	0
4	4
5	2
6	1
7	6
8	1
9	0
10	4
11	4
12+	0

21% (54 of 263) of IDP households have **three children** in them, of them, the amount of times they have been displaced in total:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced
0	0
1	4
2	3
3	5
4	11
5	9
6	8
7	3
8	3
9	1
10	1
11	6
12+	0

METHODOLOGY

16% (42 of 263) of IDP households have **four children** in them, of them, the amount of times they have been displaced in total:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced
0	0
1	8
2	2
3	1
4	6
5	4
6	4
7	5
8	4
9	3
10	3
11	0
12+	2

16% (42 of 263) of IDP households have **six or more children** in them, of them, the amount of times they have been displaced in total:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced
0	0
1	8
2	2
3	1
4	6
5	4
6	4
7	5
8	4
9	3
10	3
11	0
12+	2

15% (40 of 263) IDP households have **five children** in them, of them, the amount of times they have been displaced in total:

Times Displaced	Number of Times Displaced
0	0
1	4
2	1
3	10
4	5
5	5
6	5
7	2
8	3
9	0
10	0
11	3
12+	2





ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This research gives a key insight into how prevalent multiple displacement is for Northwest Syria's IDPs. The most startling figure is how many families in IDP camps have been displaced by the earthquakes (98%). Even more than those who had been displaced there due to the 12 years of conflict (91%).

The combination of such a devastating natural disaster and the protracted crisis have contributed to the multiple displacement of the overwhelming majority of Northwest Syria's IDPs. 9 out of 10 (89%) people in IDP camps in Northwest Syria have been already displaced by the conflict at least once, when they were displaced by the earthquakes last month.

It is also startling how rare being displaced only once has been - only 8% of IDPs have only been displaced once and 4% twice. Whereas 65% of IDP households have been displaced between three and seven times. Nearly a quarter (23%) have been displaced eight or more times. One respondent claims to have been displaced a total of 26 times and three families claim to have been displaced 20 times.

It is notable how displacement has forced overcrowding. The accommodation in IDP camps are often informal tents, not permanent and secure structures. [16] Over two thirds of IDP households (64%) have between 4 and 7 people in. And almost a quarter of households (23%) have between 8 and 13 people in them. However, when it comes to overcrowding, the number of people there are in a household, or the number of children there is in a household, does not appear to make a noticeable difference to how many times a family is displaced. A household of two non-adults, seems roughly as likely to be displaced three or four times, over the past 12 years, as a family with five or more children.

The data suggests that a significant amount of IDPs have been displaced more than once by the earthquakes. This maybe due to the amount of aftershocks which followed the February 6th earthquakes. It may also be down to people being displaced to unsuitable accommodation in the initial aftermath of the earthquakes and then moving to other accommodation soon after.

It is clear that for over millions of people in Northwest Syria, being left homeless has been a frequent occurrence - the overwhelming majority of whom faced displacement again due to the tragic events.

Life in IDP camps is not safe, and with 9 out of 10 IDP households housing under 18s, children are at an increased risk of exploitation, child labour, child violence and other child protection dangers.

In addition, IDP camps often have poor access to services like clean and hygienic water and medical services - meaning they are high risk environment for disease outbreaks, such as cholera which has killed 101 people in Syria and infected over 92,000 to date,[18] 18% of all suspected cases have been from IDP camps[19].

It is clear that one of the biggest needs, as part of Northwest Syria's recovery of both catastrophes, is large scale housing developments - enough to comfortably accommodate six individuals - across the region.

As part of the earthquake recovery, there needs to be a greater focus and increased funding towards shelter by UN bodies and donor governments. One such project that desperately needs funding is Action For Humanity/Syria Relief's Rebuilding Syria One Village At A Time Housing Project.

To provide a dignified living space for those affected, Action For Humanity is calling for support to the planned construction of the third phase of 500 homes in the Aleppo governorate of Northwest Syria. Each home unit will be 50 square metres in size. These units will serve as temporary homes for IDPs currently living in camps and informal settlements.

Action For Humanity has already completed the first two phases of this project. The first phase provided 250 families with new homes and the second phase provided an additional 500 families with new homes. The third phase will bring the total number of families provided with new homes to 1,250.

As well as providing a family dignity and an exponentially better quality of living, it also ensures that families have access to better amenities, like education, clean water, healthcare and are at less risk of the impact of winterisation.

Whilst this report shows that this project is only a drop in the ocean to meet the desperate housing needs of the millions multiply-displaced people in Northwest Syria, scaling up projects like this - through appropriate funding - is the only way this issue can be addressed long term, without leading to further multiple displacements (i.e. moving people to different areas of Syria, or to another country).

HOW TO HELP



The general public can help build homes in Syria by going to <https://actionforhumanity.org/appeals/build-a-home-in-syria/> and making a life changing donation to a Syrian family, displaced by conflict, natural disaster or both.

Building one home costs £2,500 or alternatively you can donate any amount to the 'Build a home/village fund'.

You can also write to your MP asking them to push the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to fund more housing projects like that of Action For Humanity's in order to give more multiple displaced Syrians a home.





CONCLUSION



Over the last 12 years, the Syrian crisis has become synonymous with devastating displacement. Countless buildings and lives have been destroyed by over a decade of conflict. Internally displaced families have been forced through unimaginable trauma in their pursuit of safety only to be faced with continued violence and a historic natural disaster.

65% of IDP families have been displaced between three and seven times. 89% of IDP families have been displaced by both the Syrian conflict, at least once, and the earthquake.

Whether it is through 12 years of brutal conflict or the 75 seconds of natural disaster^[18] last month and its aftershocks, the Syrian people have endured an unimaginable amount of death, destruction and displacement. We, as humanity, have a moral obligation to help the people of Syria now. ^[19] For too long, the international community has turned a blind eye to the growing humanitarian crisis in Syria, allowing it to worsen with little effort to alleviate the situation.

With the spotlight focused on growing crises around the world, the international community had all but forgotten the 12 years of suffering endured by the people in Syria until last month's tragic events. Following February 6th's earthquakes, Syria finally started to begin to receive, to a certain extent, the attention and assistance it needs from the world. However, now we are seeing the world's attention loosen from Syria. ^[20] ^[21]

Sadly, the last 12 years has taught us at Action For Humanity, and our subsidiary charity Syria Relief, that ignoring Syria leads to greater needs. Suffering grows in the darkness, apathy will only allow the conditions lead to greater displacement. ^[22] Only action can reverse the spiralling humanitarian needs in Syria. Now is the time to take action for the people of Syria.



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