



DEMAC

DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
& COORDINATION

DIASPORA HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT IN NORTH-WEST SYRIA REAL-TIME REVIEW

h—h
H2H Network
Humanitarian
Action Support



DISASTERS
EMERGENCY
COMMITTEE



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The DEMAC and ESDO research teams give their thanks to the members of the Syrian diaspora communities in North-west Syria, Türkiye and across the world, together with the representatives of SNA, donors, NGOs, and all other actors who supported this Real-Time Review (RTR), providing information and sharing their valuable knowledge and experiences.

This Real-Time Review is made possible by the generous support of the H2H Network. The contents and opinions expressed in this report should not be attributed to and do not represent the views of DEMAC and H2H Network.

This Real-Time Review was conducted between May and July 2023 by ESDO research team Nathaniel Logan, Nil Türkşen and Hussein Al Ali.

Published in August 2023.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Real-Time review is part of the Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination initiative (DEMAC) “Diaspora Humanitarian Engagement in North-west Syria”.

The real-time review (RTR) focuses on the period from February 2023 until July 2023, providing a snapshot of the humanitarian response of Syrian diaspora organizations (DOs) to the earthquakes that struck north-west Syria (NWS) in February 2023. The review aims to provide comprehensive information on the interventions, coordination, challenges and impact of these DOs in response to the earthquake. It covers both formal and informal responses, with a focus on cross-border and global DOs.

The real-time review was undertaken by a team of consultants from ESDO, an international humanitarian consultancy, supported by field researchers from Syria based in Türkiye and North-west Syria. This study applies a mixed methods approach, analyzing quantitative and qualitative data from social media mapping monitoring, interviews and a literature review. Twenty-seven individuals representing diaspora organisations, coordination networks, local authorities and local actors were interviewed. The research also included volunteer groups, search and rescue teams, volunteer-based women’s centres and youth teams.

The RTR identified 97 Syrian DOs involved in the NWS earthquake response, categorized as Registered Organizations (74), Volunteer Organizations/Associations (10), or Networks (13). These DOs, often composed of Syrian diaspora members, started initiatives to provide assistance and vital services to affected communities in NWS. The RTR further distinguished DOs as cross-border or global (outside Türkiye). Cross-border DOs based in Türkiye, particularly near the Syrian border (Gaziantep, Kilis, Hatay, Şanlıurfa), demonstrated strong integration into the humanitarian system, often with headquarters in Türkiye and core staff implementing projects on-site in NWS.

Together with institutional actors (donors, UNOCHA, clusters), the Syrian DOs inside and outside Türkiye mobilised to respond to the earthquake. Humanitarian response efforts were initiated both within Türkiye and by DOs situated in Europe, the USA, and other locations globally. These organisations had diverse timelines to respond, taking between one day and one month to begin providing assistance.

During the initial response week (6th to 13th February), challenges arose due to slow donor response, issues with coordination among sectors and a shortage of available staff affected by the earthquake. Global diaspora organizations (DOs) and external diaspora coordination bodies noted delays in the UN and institutional actors' efficient response, causing a critical delay in funds and support. In contrast, Syrian DOs and local actors swiftly responded within hours of the earthquake, utilizing social media campaigns, fundraising, information management, communication, aid coordination and advocacy efforts. During the second week, personnel availability stabilised for all actors including DOs, contributing to a more efficient response. As the third week commenced (27th February onwards), assistance became notably more organized, with clusters and cross-border DOs operating at full capacity.

Cross-border DOs responded to the earthquake in the primary response sectors of shelter, search and rescue, cash distribution, health, nutrition, WASH and protection. Education and early recovery services were also developed and deployed. Global DOs were more focused on fundraising, advocacy, information sharing, cash transfer and partnering with local organisations to provide humanitarian assistance directly. Coordination networks for DOs responded through informational management, coordination meetings, resource mobilisation, advocacy, fundraising and policy coordination.

Challenges identified by the RTR included a lack of heavy equipment, duty of care for humanitarian workers, limited access to funds and accurate information and the absence of sufficient contingency funding available. The earthquake directly affected staff members in both Türkiye and Syria, hindering their crisis response. Staff located in affected Turkish cities (Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Hatay) faced shortages, impacting DOs, INGOs and cross-border coordination bodies. Smaller global DOs encountered difficulties securing significant funds for the response. Due to restricted donor access, a considerable portion of funding went to international NGOs. With more funding and access, DOs could have leveraged their community networks for faster earthquake response.

Global Syrian DOs demonstrated a prompt and timely reaction to the earthquake. Their ability to swiftly mobilize resources and initiate response activities supported the affected communities in addressing urgent needs following the disaster. Because global DOs were not directly impacted by the response, it allowed them to swiftly deploy and mobilize their efforts using their existing connections in NWS. Leveraging their close connections and networks both locally and internationally, DOs are capable of establishing and sustaining development initiatives, as well as responding promptly to humanitarian emergencies in their homeland. They can access affected communities, they possess expertise to deliver vital resources to hard-to-reach areas, and, most importantly, usually enjoy the trust and familiarity of these communities due to their longstanding engagement, which extends far beyond times of crisis.

Recommendations

1. Donors and international organisations should ensure contingency funds, NFI stockpiles and equipment provision are included in humanitarian planning in NWS. This is especially critical for NWS where formal government is absent and local organisations and DOs are first responders.
2. International coordination mechanisms for NWS should better incorporate global DOs to enable more effective field-level coordination. This will help to ensure a more coordinated response in future, including on sectors, fundraising and access.
3. Explore alternative response mechanisms using the global diaspora. Considering the vulnerability of the region, alternative modalities for emergency response mechanisms including and building on the strengths of the global DOs should be explored. Such mechanisms have the potential to improve access and localization of future responses, particularly in cases where the cross-border mechanism is not functioning.
4. Strengthen local capacity through collaboration with DOs whose strong local connections facilitate knowledge sharing, resource allocation and expertise transfer to empower local actors in disaster response.
5. Donors should encourage and support the integration of “Duty of Care” for DO staff. This will help to reduce their vulnerability and exposure during a humanitarian or crisis response by enabling specific provisions for the safety, food and shelter for responders themselves and their families.
6. OCHA should sponsor a study to identify lessons from the earthquake response through a joint analysis across the humanitarian sector in NWS that includes DOs.
7. Donors and international organisations should conduct further studies about the integration of Syrian diaspora in the formal humanitarian system.



DEMAC

DIASPORA
EMERGENCY ACTION
& COORDINATION

Responsible for content and produced by
DEMAC - Diaspora Emergency Action & Coordination,
funded by The H2H Network.

Email: info@demac.org
Phone: +45 6026 8116

Photo Credits: Stefanie Glinski
