HIGHLIGHTS (19 Sep 2022)

- On 18 August, artillery shelling in Al Bab city hit a popular market, killing five children and 10 civilian men. Eight children, a woman and 33 civilian men were injured.

- In total, at least 14 civilians (including six children) were killed due to shelling and more than 30 civilians including 10 children were injured in August, according to OHCHR.

- Five unexploded ordnances and two shooting incidents resulted in the death of at least 11 civilians including three children in August.

- According to HNAP, 13,260 people were newly internally displaced in August, almost double the amount in July and largely driven by the deteriorating economy.

- Underweight is an emerging significant problem of public health in north-west Syria. The SMART survey finds less than 1 out of 10 children is fed an adequate diet for their age.

KEY FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population in north-west Syria</td>
<td>4.5M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in need in north-west Syria</td>
<td>4.1M</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food insecure people</td>
<td>3.1M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internally displaced people (IDPs)</td>
<td>2.8M</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDPs living in camps</td>
<td>1.8M</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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BACKGROUND (19 Jun 2022)

Disclaimer
This Situation Report covers developments in north-west Syria and Ras Al Ain – Tell Abiad. OCHA Türkiye prepares this report with the support of Cluster Coordinators and the Humanitarian Field Officers (HFO). The data/information collected come from both sources.

FEATURE (18 Sep 2022)

Narcotics abuse on the rise in north-west Syria

Drug and substance abuse cases in north-west Syria are increasing, reported the Syria Cross-border Health Cluster.

Access to narcotic substances has significantly widened since the eruption of the conflict in 2011. A recent research report of the Syrian non-governmental organization Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), and member of the Health Cluster, finds that 26 per cent of the population in the north-west considered the spread of narcotic substances, both synthetic and natural, to be a “severe phenomenon” in 2022. Almost a quarter of respondents who partook in the research revealed that up to 10 per cent of the population have used narcotic substances for various reasons. The most commonly cited reason is the desire to “forget the difficult reality” (18 per cent of respondents) followed by the lack of job opportunities (17 per cent) and support to endure war injuries and pain (12 per cent).

The report also suggests that the group of people taking narcotic substances is diverse, ranging from individuals from armed factions (17 per cent of users) to unemployed youth and uneducated adolescents (about 10 per cent of users). The majority of narcotic users were found to be male. Education also plays a key role in substance consumption, given that 66 per cent of people in the study who used narcotic substances permanently were illiterate.

The spread of narcotic substances has measurable psychological and social impacts.

According to the same research, family disintegration constitutes 16 per cent of these perceived impacts while domestic violence constitutes 13 per cent of them. Narcotic abuse has also led to unemployment and debts as some community members resorted to borrowing money to keep up with their addiction. However, narcotic use can affect people regardless of their employment status. For example, between four to five per cent of both employed and unemployed people were found to take narcotics at the same level occasionally at celebrations.

MEDIA (18 Sep 2022)

The toll of addiction: a mental health expert’s perspective

In a short interview, Dr Nidhal Saadoon shares his insights on the drug and substance abuse situation in north-west Syria, having served as the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Director of a hospital in Azaz for over four years. Today, he is among two psychiatrists in a region of 4.5 million people and works part-time as an MHPSS Consultant at the World Health Organization (WHO).

Could you please provide an overview of the drug and substance abuse situation in north-west Syria today? Who is most affected?
The situation is not looking good as cases have continuously risen since the start of the war. At the hospital in Azaz, we have received cases from all age groups from teenage boys and girls to adult men and women. Recent findings reveal that between 10 to 20 per cent of people in north-west Syria are abusing substances today, including narcotics and beyond. Half of them are between the age of 18 and 30 years old while adolescents make up 14 per cent of the affected group. We also found that the most commonly available substance in the north-west is amphetamine followed by Tramadol and cannabis. Tramadol is among the medications prescribed by doctors to help with war traumas but unfortunately, some of the treatment cases have escalated into addiction and abuse.

**What are the key challenges in responding to the spread of substance abuse?**

Before the war, substance abuse was less common. But nowadays, it is much easier to access drugs on the streets including from non-certified pharmacists. In north-west Syria, there are not enough specialized staff, centers or medical units to treat patients and provide mental health support. There is only one psychiatrist in Idleb. I am the sole cross-border psychiatrist. This is not enough. Even if treatment is available, individuals sometimes hesitate to seek help due to the high stigma in their community. This burden is even heavier for women and teenage girls. Then, we also have to consider the interlinkages between substance abuse and other issues that need attention, notably domestic violence and family disintegration.

**In your view, what are the main steps needed to change the status quo?**

We have to address the root causes that drive abuse and addiction. If the socio-economic situation in north-west Syria improves, this will play a tremendous role in reducing drug addiction, particularly among the young population. To ramp up treatment, we urgently need specialized rehabilitation centers and we need to continue integrating mental health into existing health facilities. At WHO, I supervise the Mental Health Gap Program in which we build the capacities of general practice (GP) doctors in detecting, referring and treating mild substance abuse cases. So far, we have trained 285 GPs in one training which is the first step. Another important starting point is education. This includes having awareness sessions targeting communities and relevant training for health workers so that they can detect, treat or refer cases accordingly. Training sessions aimed at psychosocial workers are also important to create interventions that help reduce stigma.

**EMERGENCY RESPONSE**  (18 Sep 2022)

**Development of Action Plan on Substance Use and Addiction**

Drug and substance abuse in north-west Syria requires a comprehensive response, taking into account challenges related to access, prevention and treatment, in addition to stigmatization among communities.

According to the ACU report, the overall perceptions and attitudes of people in north-west Syria towards drug users are mixed. While a minority considers drug users primarily as “criminals” who need to be punished as severely as possible, an overwhelming majority sees substance addiction as a medical condition in need of treatment and care, with the possibility of recovery.
In 2022, the humanitarian community is putting together an inter-cluster action plan to address substance abuse in north-west Syria.

The plan primarily aims to ensure safe access for affected people to relevant multi-cluster services such as individual or family counseling sessions, peer-to-peer support groups, recreational activities for youths, and access to relevant medication or interventions including detox and inpatient care. The plan also aims to enhance the capacities of health workers through training sessions, strengthen referral pathways and promote awareness while also taking into account cross-cutting elements such as gender-based violence and education. The plan is expected to be ready in October this year.

To date, OCHA's Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund has financially supported 67 multi-sectoral early recovery projects. Top photo: A business fair was held in Afrin in March 2022 to support Syrian women business owners. (Photo: Welthungerhilfe). Bottom photo: An elementary school was rehabilitated from February to June 2022 in Aghtrin and can now accommodate up to 250 students. (Photo: HFOs)

 FEATURE (18 Sep 2022)

Early Recovery: Progress and Inter-cluster Action Plan

After over a decade of conflict and acute socio-economic crisis, around 90 per cent of the population in Syria is now living in poverty.

The average monthly income in the country has not been able to cover basic needs since 2020. The latest UN Security Council Resolution 2642, which authorizes the UN to deliver life-saving aid to north-west Syria until 10 January 2023, has called for an increase in "early recovery projects" in all parts of Syria. These types of activities are critical in strengthening the self-reliance of affected community members, enabling them to better manage stresses and shocks, and building social cohesion in times of competition over scarce resources. Examples of such projects include civilian infrastructure rehabilitation, removal of debris and solid waste, income-generating activities, vocational and skills training, and interventions to promote social cohesion.

Early recovery is integral to the humanitarian response to north-west Syria, where more than 90 per cent of the 4.5 million population depend on humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs.

In 2021, more than 319,900 people have benefited from the rehabilitation of infrastructure in sites for internally displaced persons including road graveling and tent leveling. Some 62,000 people were reached by shelter rehabilitation activities while a total of 199 primary health care facilities and 270 water systems became functional again due to these interventions.

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Early recovery progress continues to be reported in 2022. According to the last bi-monthly report of the Secretary-General in August, early recovery and cross-border partners have removed eight tons of solid waste, repaired two kilometers of the sewage system, and rehabilitated 159 classrooms in the Aleppo Governorate. In the Idleb Governorate, 25 public services were supported and more than 1,500 individuals received vocational or business training. Two markets and 40 bakeries were rehabilitated in both governorates. Additionally, 1,240 short-term jobs were created in Aleppo and 1,095 in Idleb in June and July.

**To expand these activities, the humanitarian community is discussing the development of an Early Recovery Action Plan.**

The aim of this plan is to guide the collective operationalization of early recovery in north-west Syria and strengthen the operational collaboration between clusters and maximize the synergy effect.

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**FEATURE (18 Sep 2022)**

**Meet Haloum: displaced mother, hairdresser and business owner**

Haloum is the only hairdresser in a displacement camp in Afrin, working to support her six children along with her husband. The camp currently hosts 203 families.

“My general services are haircuts and hair dye. I also provide make-up services for weddings which have been a hit among the women in the camp,” she shares.

On average, her makeshift salon receives at least three customers per day. In addition to beauty services, she also sells perfumes and make-up and rents out clothes to women and children for special occasions.

Originally from Idleb, Haloum was first displaced in 2017 with her family due to the increased airstrikes in the area. Prior to this, she ran her own hairdressing business for over three years in the comfort of her house.

In 2019, Haloum and her family reached Afrin after being forced to move for the third time.

"We are eight people squeezed in the same tent for over three years. It gets unbearably hot in the summer and cold, rainy and muddy in winter," she tells, adding that the tent has been torn before due to extreme weather conditions. The remote location of the camp also hinders her children's access to schooling.

Against all odds, Haloum was determined to find ways to support her family.

In 2021, she submitted an application to a small business grant project of Welthungerhilfe, funded by OCHA's Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF), and received a grant of US$900. As part of the project, Haloum also participated in training sessions on topics ranging from business plan development to accounting and marketing.

Today, her services have reached clients as far as those living outside the camp in Azaz.
“Before this business, Eid was a sad moment for us as it was a constant reminder of our difficult financial conditions,” shares Haloum, adding that they largely depended on monthly food aid baskets to survive. Now, with the additional income, she is able to buy new clothes for her children to celebrate the festivity.

In addition to running her own business, she also volunteers to help other communities in her spare time. In 2022, Haloum spent three days providing hairdressing training to women in two different salons in Afrin and Atareb.

“I hope I can open my own beauty center outside the camp one day. For now, we still need humanitarian assistance,” she says.

FEATURE  (18 Sep 2022)

World Humanitarian Day: Sheroes and Heroes of North-west Syria

Each year on 19 August, World Humanitarian Day advocates for the survival, well-being and dignity of people affected by crises, and for the safety and security of aid workers. This year’s theme, “It Takes a Village,” celebrates the unity and solidarity involved in humanitarian action. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a whole community to help people in need. On this occasion, OCHA Türkiye is sharing four stories involving five humanitarians from north-west Syria.

Click here to the read the stories of Dr. Habosh, the health worker; Bilal, the engineer; Muhammad and Saad, the NGO workers; and Rasha, the community leader.