

Strategy Paper for the Emergency Response Fund in Syria

5 May 2015



I. Rationale

This strategy paper is issued by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and endorsed by the Advisory Board to set the general direction and programmatic focus of the Emergency Response Fund in Syria (hereafter “ERF” or “the Fund”).

It provides an overview of the allocation criteria, parameters and processes underpinning the project cycle (see workflow charts in section VI), meant to:

- (i) guide implementing partners; and
- (ii) Facilitate the role of OCHA, members of the Advisory Board, Review Bodies and sectoral experts.

The HC and the Advisory Board will revisit this strategy paper every six (6) months or more often as required to adjust the general direction and programmatic focus of the Fund, thereby ensuring its relevance and effectiveness over time as the humanitarian situation evolves.

II. Background: the ERF in Syria and other country-based pooled-funds in the region

In June 2014, considering the increased operational complexity and scale of the Syria crisis, USG Amos decided to set up three separate Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The ERFs in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon are led and managed respectively by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and the OCHA office in each country to support the delivery of country-led response plans. In addition, a pooled fund was created in Turkey focusing on funding cross-border projects, managed by the OCHA office in Gaziantep and led by the D/RHC. The Jordan ERF may also fund cross-border projects.

Altogether, and guided by humanitarian response plans, the Funds in the region aims to provide flexible and timely resources to partners, thereby expanding the delivery of humanitarian assistance, increasing humanitarian access, and strengthening partnerships with local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

III. Humanitarian Context

In the last four years, since the start of the Syria crisis, violence has reportedly led to the death of 191,339 people including children. The number of people in need of assistance has grown to over 12 million, including about 7.6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), more than 4.8 million living in hard-to-reach areas and over 213,000 who are trapped in besieged areas. Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt host over 3.2 million refugees who have fled Syria as a result of ongoing violence.

Limited access to affected populations and high insecurity remain the main constraints for humanitarian organizations providing assistance and services.

Despite these risks and challenges, humanitarian assistance and services continues to be delivered to affected and internally displaced people in Syria

The escalating instability in the country continues to increase humanitarian needs while constraining humanitarian space, highlighting the need to expand the delivery of assistance inside Syria with existing organizations, while at the same time building the capacity of new humanitarian actors.

VI. Leadership and Governance of Syria ERF

The HC provides strategic leadership and ensures effective management and oversight functions of the ERF, supported by the OCHA office in Syria. Two governance mechanisms warrant the overall transparency of allocation decisions: an Advisory Board (strategic level) and two Review Bodies (programmatic and technical level). The size of the Advisory Board will be kept small to maintain a balance between representation and efficiency. All members of the Advisory Board and Review Board will be formally endorsed by the HC.

The Advisory Board is chaired by the HC and convenes every six months to revisit the strategy, or more frequently as required. In addition, the Advisory Board, in consultation with the sectors/clusters, assists the HC with the formulation of allocation papers that determine the objective and parameters of individual calls for proposals. The members of the Advisory Board are:

- 3 contributing donors to the Fund;
- Operational partners from the various constituent groups of the Humanitarian Country Team, with preference given to current HCT members and agencies leading sector working groups/clusters, as follows:
 - 3 UN agencies
 - 3 International NGOs
 - OCHA Head of Office

There will be 2 review bodies that will oversee and facilitate the (i) strategic and (ii) technical review of project proposals to consolidate and provide the HC with programmatically-coherent and technically-sound recommendations on allocation decisions. These review bodies will work closely with the sectors. The role, function and composition of the review bodies are detailed in annex 2

V. Scope and objectives

Within the programmatic framework of the SRP, the ERF will enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance by especially focusing on:

1. Promoting needs-based assistance in accordance with humanitarian principles
2. To rapidly respond to critical life-saving needs, with a particular focus on the most acute needs in the most underserved areas, including besieged and hard to reach areas
3. To improve the relevance and coherence of the humanitarian response by strategically funding assessed humanitarian action, including as identified in the Syria Response Plan process.
4. To strengthen coordination and leadership, primarily through the cluster/sector system and function of the HC.
5. To support and strengthen priority cluster/sectors and subnational priorities in accordance with assessed needs.

In keeping with objective 2, in 2015 the fund will aim to focus 50 percent of its allocations to respond to humanitarian needs in Hard to Reach or besieged areas.

VI. Allocations

Donor contributions to the Syria ERF will be utilized to finance projects carried out by the following entities:

- UN Organizations (UNOs) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and
- NGO partners (“the Implementing Partners”) which include national and international NGOs and Red Cross and Red Crescent societies registered in Syria.

(i). Eligibility Criteria

OCHA, in its function as the manager of the Syria ERF determines the eligibility criteria for partners to qualify for funding. These criteria will be based on OCHA assessments of NGO partners in the areas of administrative, financial, technical and operational capacities. It is the responsibility of OCHA as the fund manager to set up and implement an assessment procedure. Cluster/sector Coordinators will support OCHA to assess technical capacities of partners.

Given the importance of broadening partnerships in order to reach people in need in the most underserved areas, the fund will aim to allocate 50 per cent of its resources to projects implemented by NGOs

(international or national) as well as the Red Cross / Red Crescent movement. OCHA will work to proactively reach out to existing or potential NGO partners with a view to enhancing their capacity to enabling them to apply for and secure ERF funding.

(ii). Allocation Windows

The allocation of funds under the Syria ERF will be determined by the Humanitarian Coordinator. There will be two mechanisms for allocation:

Allocation modalities:

- a) **Calls for proposals:** on a periodic basis (2 to 4 times a year, depending on the availability of resources), the HC may issue a call for proposals in consultation with the Advisory Board through an allocation paper. OCHA will facilitate the drafting of the allocation paper, seeking inputs from the inter-sector working group as required. The Strategic Review Board will recommend which concept notes can be considered as eligible for funding (i.e. strategic review). The HC will then inform the Advisory Board on the projects that are cleared to move on to the technical review. The technical review is carried out by a pool of experts in the respective sectors. Successful project proposals will then be approved by the HC prior to the disbursement of funds. When announced, the calls for proposals will specify:
- General objective of the call, as well as concrete and measurable sectoral, demographic and geographic targets;
 - Maximum amount to be allocated through the call, as well as the percentage breakdown by sector;
 - Timeframe for the intervention (if less than 12 months);
 - Deadline for submission;
 - Timeline and milestones for each step of the allocation process, including the expected decision date (i.e. final HC approval).

Chart 1: workflow of the allocation process and project cycle for the call for proposals modality

	1. Submission of proposal		2. Strategic review	3. Clearance	4. Technical review	
ERF Strategy	Call for proposals Issued by HC in consultation with AB	Submission of concept notes	Prioritization and recommendation of the SRC	HC informs AB and makes decision	TRC conducts technical and financial review of full project proposal	
	5. Approval and disbursement		6. Implementation		7. Closure	
Agreement signature HC-partner	Disbursement	Implementation	Monitoring	Reporting (periodic and final)	Audit	Final payment/reimbursement

- b) **Rolling basis:** proposals may be submitted anytime throughout the year to respond to unforeseen or new needs. The rationale behind the rolling-basis mechanism is to enable rapid and/or short term critical responses that are time-sensitive and not covered through calls for proposals. To check whether a proposal meets these criteria, implementing partners must always contact OCHA before making a submission. OCHA will review projects against the objectives of the fund, conferring with the HC on the merit of the project as relevant. If the project meets the objectives, the project will be sent to the TRC for technical review before going to the HC for approval and disbursement of funds.

Chart 2: workflow of the allocation process and project cycle for the rolling basis modality

	1. Submission of proposal	2. Strategic review	3. Technical review			
ERF Strategy	Submission of full project proposal to HFU	OCHA reviews project against fund's objectives	TRC conducts technical and financial review of full project proposal			
5. Approval and disbursement	6. Implementation		7. Closure			
Agreement signature HC-partner	Disbursement	Implementation	Monitoring	Reporting (periodic and final)	Audit	Final payment/reimbursement

Under the rolling basis allocation, the strategic review will be conducted by OCHA, in consultation with the HC and the concerned sectors if required. This will be done in accordance with the programmatic framework and focus described above and on the basis of the following criteria:

- (a) Partner eligibility and capacity: verified through a due diligence and capacity assessment process
- (b) Access: accessibility and/or physical presence to areas of operation; the location of the project is clearly identified
- (c) Scope and objectives: clear linkage to SRP strategic and sectoral objectives, compliance with the terms of the call for proposals as described in the allocation paper, and alignment of activities with areas of special focus of the Fund
- (d) Needs-based: the needs are well explained and documented and beneficiaries are clearly described
- (e) Risk management: assumptions and risks are comprehensively and clearly spelled out, along with risk management strategies

Allocation parameters:

- (a) Project duration: maximum 12 months
- (b) Grant amount: the maximum allowable amount is to be determined by the AB, (currently up to US\$2million per project). For NGOs, the amount of each project will be disbursed in 1, 2 or 3 tranches on the basis of project duration, partner capacity and risk levels, and in line with OCHA's global guidelines on country-based pooled funds

VII. Accountability framework

The ERF Syria Accountability framework will be informed by the Global Guidelines for Country Based Pooled Funds as well as on lessons learned from other CBPF countries. The methodology, deliverables, and roles and responsibilities of stakeholders will be detailed in the "Syria ERF Accountability Framework" to be attached hereto as annex 1 (hereinafter referred to as "Accountability Framework").

The Humanitarian Coordinator has the responsibility to ensure the implementation of the accountability system for the ERF Syria. The accountability framework is built upon the following pillars: Risk management, Monitoring, Reporting, Audits and external Evaluations. A risk-based approach will inform how monitoring, reporting and audits' results will operate combined to ensure the accountability of the Fund while supporting the implementation of projects.

This work will be coordinated and facilitated by the Humanitarian Financing Unit on behalf of the HC.

VIII. Conflict Resolution and Complaints Mechanisms

Participants with insufficiently addressed concerns or complaints regarding Syria ERF processes or decisions can at any point in time contact the OCHA Head of Office or write to ERFsyr.complaints@un.org with these concerns. Complaints will be compiled, reviewed and raised to the Humanitarian Coordinator, who will then take a decision on necessary action(s). The Humanitarian Coordinator will share with the Advisory Board any such concerns or complaints and actions taken thereof.

IX. Communication

This document is the product of extensive consultation at the field and headquarters levels. As such it will be widely distributed in paper and digital versions to all stakeholders. The document will be made available on the Syria OCHA Website. Queries regarding the Syria ERF should be addressed to the head of HFU.

Acronyms

AB	Advisory Board
SRP	Syria Response Plan
ERF	Emergency Response Fund
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HFU	Humanitarian Financing Unit
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MA	Managing Agent
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
M&R	Monitoring and Reporting
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNO	United Nations Organization
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations