

## One year after the devastating earthquake in southern Turkey and northern Syria. A brief review of the situation now and a cautious look into the future

From the KRC communications office

The night of February 6, 2023, changed the world from one moment to the next for millions of people. Thousands lost their lives or were injured. Millions lost their homes and millions more in southern Turkey and northern Syria are still suffering from the impact today. In Syria, it hit a region that is still heavily affected by the war, where houses and public facilities were already shaken by the war and the earthquake finally put an end to it. Thousands of war refugees had to leave their homes once again. For months, people remained on the streets, partly out of fear of the aftershocks, which could still be felt a month after the strong quake, and partly because of the traumatic experience of literally losing the ground beneath their feet. The feeling of being seized by a sudden seasickness as soon as you enter a building lasts for months. And in the worst affected areas, we will probably have to deal with the traumatic experiences for



even longer. The feeling of being exposed to this incredible force of nature, of being unable to go anywhere that doesn't shake, and of simply being unable to do anything to protect yourself and your loved ones naturally leaves massive traces. Whereas in a war attack, you usually have at least one direction in which you can flee, in an earthquake you are simply at the mercy of the situation. The difference is that warlike attacks usually last longer.

The region has already been affected by thirteen years of war, destruction, and constant attacks. As one civilian in Aleppo aptly described it: "Now we don't just have to be afraid of attacks from the sky, now not even the ground we are standing on is safe."

It was even more shocking to realize that even after such a devastating disaster, armed conflicts are not stopped at least temporarily, and the situation of the suffering population continues to be exploited for power politics and humanitarian aid is massively prevented.

Collapsed house in Sheikh Maqsoud / Aleppo  
– picture by KRC Communications Office

### Immediate measures by the Kurdish Red Crescent

On the same day of the earthquake, large collection tents were erected in all major cities in the northeast. The large tents provided shelter. Ambulances provided medical care at all collection points and blankets, food, and water were distributed. For over a month, people remained largely on the streets and spent the nights either in their cars or at our refuge points. Other NGOs and the local authorities also stepped in to provide the most necessities. We were also able to bring a few tents to Aleppo.

A larger aid transport from the KRC reached the first Syrian checkpoint on February 10 intending to bring the first relief supplies to the remote regions (Shahbah, Aleppo). However, the militias controlling the checkpoint did not allow our teams to pass. The team spent a total of 10 days at the checkpoint in the middle of nowhere, loaded with an already insufficient number of blankets, mattresses, tents, medicine, food (especially baby food), and a little diesel for our generators. Two ambulances and a medical team, technicians, and coordinators to get an initial picture of the situation.

During these 10 days, negotiations were attempted at various levels. While the UN assured us several times that we could pass, we tried to negotiate with SARC with the help of the Italian ambassador, meanwhile, in our negotiations with those responsible we were only granted passage if we handed over parts of the aid delivery to the Syrian military or handed it over to



Preparation for the humanitarian convoy to Aleppo on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2023  
– picture by KRC communications office





SARC, which in the end probably amounts to the same thing. The team on the ground refused any delivery without adequate control mechanisms. In the meantime, media attention has also increased. Above all, the support of international partners, media campaigns, and support from other governments as well as the knowledge of the suffering population in the

region has kept the team out in the bitter cold. In the end, we were able to pass safely with all the relief supplies and a slightly slimmed-down team and continue to Aleppo and Shahbah to collect and distribute the relief supplies there.

However, it was clear that there would be no further aid shipments to this region. However, the team was able to gain a good overview of the overall situation and initiate further emergency projects with the support of our partners and donors. In the first 6



months, the focus was primarily on initial emergency aid and several experienced teams from the northeast part could provide humanitarian assistance to the affected population. As we assessed the situation; 1105 private houses were destroyed or made uninhabitable. 24 public buildings such as schools, government offices, and health care facilities were destroyed, unusable, or at least damaged. A total of 3750 people have been rendered homeless for a long time and are dependent on assistance, even over a longer period. The sewage network was partially damaged, and a great risk of diseases occurred.

As KRC and with the support of our partners we were able to purchase relief aid materials in the region of Aleppo (instead of sending shipments from the eastern parts).

A family prepares to stay outside in Aleppo in February 2023  
– picture by KRC Communications Office



### Immediate relief aid provided

- Provision of collective shelters including supplies (short-term relief)
- Provision of medical help through mobile units and ambulances including emergency referrals (short-term relief)
- Expansion of the camps Berkhadan and Serdam in Shahbah, provision of tents for 410 families in the camps (long-term emergency relief)
- Provision of winterization and summarization items in the camps as well as blankets, mattresses, and kitchen sets
- Regular distribution of Hygiene Kits, Food Baskets, and water through water trucks (6 months emergency relief)
- Provision of PSS services in the camps (6 months)
- A new ambulance was handed over to the hospital in Sheikh Maqsood since they had no functioning ambulances available.

In total, we could reach around 14.265 beneficiaries with our emergency response. The monitoring teams made sure that the distribution processes were established with fairness and efficiency. Priority was given to the most vulnerable groups as

women, children, and elderly. Furthermore, we paid attention to those who did not find shelter with their families.



Furthermore, we could rehabilitate 10 severely damaged health points, including the hospital in Menbij (NES). Two Schools with severe damages could have been rehabilitated including hygiene measurements as the connection to a water system could have been taken.

The most critical damages to sewage systems and freshwater pipes could be fixed including electrical networks. Up until today, we can refill the stocks with medicines and medical supplies. A new medical warehouse including a cooling system with solar panels could have been provided.

Extension of the camp Serdam in Shahbah including the sewage system – Picture by KRC Communications Office



We could send water testing devices to prevent water-borne diseases.

We could increase our teams including training in terms of health care, WaSH, administrative processes, Psychological First Aid (PFA), and monitoring. Furthermore, health waste management was implemented in all health points.

PSS centers in the camps were established and materials and furniture were provided.

Awareness sessions from Protection and PSS teams, health measurements, and protection from natural disasters.



A mobile unit, providing health services in Shahbah – Picture by KRC Communications Office

Solar systems have been provided to some health points to at least ensure the cold chain for drugs and medicines (refrigerators). But in any case, the power supply shall be increased.

### Ongoing projects and future perspective

As we are aware of the very fragile situation in the northwest part, we were planning the projects from the beginning with a focus on sustainability. Therefore, we are focusing on an adequate water supply by increasing the wells and providing solar systems for the pumps. During the increased number of the population, the public hospital needs to extend its capacities. Medical devices and supplies are needed as well as an increase in the beds.

The local authorities provided land for agriculture for families who had lost their houses and income. KRC with its partners is building small farming houses for those families. Due to the critical political situation, we are currently not able to





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build all houses as planned, since there is no possibility now to send enough construction materials to the region of Shahbah. With the current material, we had to reduce the number of houses, the houses will be provided with furniture, furthermore, the extension of the hospital and the planned wells can be constructed.

In any case, KRC continues the support of our teams in Shahbah and Aleppo, provides medical supplies, and extends it to prosthetic services, physiotherapy, and PSS services. We were monitoring the water quality and quantity as well as the general health status of the population.



KRC teams providing water from a new well – Picture by KRC Communications Office

Other lively-hood projects are currently under review focusing on the strengthening of women and girls. Furthermore, whenever possible we intend to increase the power supply via solar panels at least for critical infrastructure. Furthermore, an incinerator for the adequate disposal of health waste.

As we have learned from the devastating earthquake, we must be much better prepared for future natural disasters as well as other humanitarian disasters. Therefore, we are building up civil defense units, which might be one of the most important projects. The civil defense units shall decrease the risks of future disasters. For example, teams shall be trained in search and rescue operations mainly for structural collapse of buildings but also floating and fire outbreaks. In our vision volunteers in each region shall be trained and participate in an emergency network. Firefighters as well as medical teams shall be prepared and equipped with materials and devices.

Even though the political situation remains fragile and unstable and geo-political interests remain somehow vague, we consider it our responsibility to provide as best as possible humanitarian assistance, especially in areas that are hard to access for other organizations and if we can provide a little bit of stability and



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sustainability for the affected population who lives in those areas we see it as a part of our duties. We will continue to advocate for the population for their right to humanitarian assistance, no matter what religion, culture, nationality, gender, or political opinion they belong to.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners and donors, friends who conducted public campaigns and stood at our side, and all those who have donated to the people in need. Without this support, the impact of the earthquake in northern Syria would have been much more devastating. Thank you for your continuous solidarity and support. Last but not least, we also want to take the opportunity to thank our teams. It's their tireless commitment, often associated with the risk of putting their own life and health at risk, that we can provide help to those who need it. We thank all teams, from the administration to the field workers for your ongoing efforts and energy under weak circumstances.

**Today our thoughts are with the families and friends who have lost their loved ones in this fatal disaster and our efforts and energy are with those who are still in need of help and support.**