Transforming Syria’s Lifeline: A Plan for Sustaining Cross-Border Aid in Northwest Syria

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Cover Photo Caption: A worker monitors the production process in a bakery in Idlib, Syria, where bread prices have risen due to high wheat prices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Photo by Anas Alkharboutli/picture alliance via Getty Images.
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Introduction

On July 12, 2022, the UN Security Council (UNSC) renewed the cross-border resolution authorizing UN agencies to continue providing aid from Türkiye into Northwest Syria for six months. The renewal averted immediate catastrophe. But Russia’s insistence that the mandate be cut from 12 to 6 months created significant challenges and uncertainties around the UN cross-border aid effort. This outcome reflects diplomatic tensions within the UN Security Council exacerbated by the Ukraine war. It also underscored the fragility of the UN cross-border aid mechanism.

Despite the six-month respite, Syrians cannot breathe a sigh of relief. As of June 2022, there are 4.1 million people in need in Northwest Syria, 3.1 million people are food insecure, and 1.7 million people are internally displaced and living in camps. In the middle of winter, when Syrians’ needs will be at their height, aid agencies and communities will be left to hope for a miracle in the UNSC negotiations to extend the resolution forward another six months to July 2023. As UN Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syrian Crisis Mark Cutts said, “Every year there is a risk of non-renewal, and each year the risk gets higher.”

On July 8, 2022, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield stated, “I have long said this is a life-and-death issue,” and “people will die because of this vote.” Indeed, were Russia to veto the resolution and finally close the essential Bab-al-Hawa aid crossing in either January or July of 2023, millions of people would be left to fend for themselves. However, most are bereft of the means to do so.

It will be extremely challenging to find adequate alternatives for the UN cross-border aid mechanism in the face of a Russian veto. However, donors and aid agencies must accelerate planning for this scenario and prepare to provide humanitarian aid as best as possible to the people of Northwest Syria. Syrian NGOs (SNGOs) and other civil society organizations must play a central role in formulating any such plan, which will likely have two main components. The first component should seek to mitigate the shocks of a possible halt to UN cross-border assistance on the immediate humanitarian relief effort. That effort will no doubt suffer. But there are steps that can be taken now to avoid the worst outcomes.

The second component should lay the groundwork for a more sustainable aid strategy in Northwest Syria by strengthening early recovery and localization efforts in the response. For years, humanitarian interventions have focused on immediate needs. This has come at the expense of long-term and sustainable strategies to equip people with the means to build self-reliance. Donors and international aid agencies should seek to alter this reality through new resilience programming and by shifting resources and decision-making to Syrian relief groups inside Northwest Syria.

Research Overview

This report focuses on the provision of humanitarian aid in Northwest Syria through the United Nations cross-border aid mechanism at Bab-al-Hawa. The analysis is based on dozens of interviews with local actors, UN officials, senior government officials and representatives from international and local NGOs. These interviews were conducted in-person and virtually by a Refugees
International team in March 2022. The team traveled to Gaziantep, Reyhanli, Antakya and Ankara, Türkiye, and conducted virtual interviews in Washington, DC and Amman, Jordan.

The report also draws on valuable conversations and input from members of the Syria Northwest Aid Continuation Task Force (SNACTF), which was created in late 2021 to explore alternatives to the UNSC-led cross-border mechanism.

In addition to representatives from Refugees International and additional operational NGOs, members of the SNACTF include:

- Hazem Rihawi, Senior Programs Manager, American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS)
- Hisham Dirani, CEO, Violet
- Mohamad Katoub, Project Manager, IMPACT Civil Society Research and Development
- Saad Barood, Board Member, Nexus Action.

What’s Next for Northwest Syria?

In July 2022, following days of contentious negotiations and the failure of two previous drafts, including a Russian veto for a 12-month extension, the UN Security Council adopted a compromise resolution extending the authorization for the Bab-al-Hawa border crossing into Northwest Syria for six months. As a result, a new resolution will be needed to extend the mechanism for another six months when it expires on January 10, 2023. The resolution 2642 (2022) was adopted with 12 votes in favor and none against, with three abstentions from France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The three permanent member states abstained to signal their dissatisfaction with the Russian-backed 6-month renewal as opposed to the normal 12-month renewal. Indeed, French Ambassador to the United Nations Nicolas de Revière said his delegation will not be satisfied with a “precarious” renewal that expires during the winter, when humanitarian needs will be even higher.

Contingency Planning

The new resolution requires UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to provide a report on humanitarian needs in Syria by December 10, 2022, to assess the impact of a possible border closing in January 2023 if the resolution is not renewed. Guterres is also required to brief the Council monthly and issue regular reports on the progress of crossline deliveries (aid delivered to the Northwest through Damascus), humanitarian assistance delivered from Türkiye, and early recovery projects, which have long been a priority of the Assad regime and the Russian delegation.

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<th>Cross-border Aid Mechanism</th>
<th>Crossline Aid Delivery</th>
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<td>Humanitarian aid delivery through the Bab-al-Hawa border crossing in Reyhanli, Turkey. Aid flows through a UN-led transshipment hub that closely monitors each truck shipment and facilitates the transfer of goods to Syrian NGO counterparts for beneficiaries in Northwest Syria.</td>
<td>Humanitarian aid delivery that flows from UN agencies through a Damascus-led hub to Northwest Syria. While humanitarian aid deliveries should in principle be viewed as impartial, beneficiaries are concerned about the reliability of aid passing through regime-controlled areas.</td>
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Escalating tension between Moscow and the Western capitals amid the Ukrainian war underscore the critical need for a preparedness plan. These dynamics should push previously reluctant actors like UN agencies and donors to engage more actively in finding credible—albeit imperfect—alternatives to the cross-border resolution. However, these alternatives must be broader than simply asserting that crossline delivery replaces the cross-border aid mechanism.

The Northwest NGO Forum—a coalition of Syrian and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) engaged in the humanitarian response in Northwest Syria—led initial efforts to develop a contingency plan. The Forum Secretariat worked closely with donors, UN agencies, INGOs, and SNGOs. However, significant hurdles and uncertainties remain. All actors should take advantage of the resolution’s renewal for six months to address the shortcomings of contingency planning to date. This includes addressing urgent concerns over funding and looming programming and operational restrictions.

**Funding**

Donors need to ensure that overall funding for the response matches increased needs, as well as support a funding solution that allows money to continue to reach NGO partners. Finding a replacement for the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) is an urgent priority. The SCHF, or pool fund, allows donors to channel funding through the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), and for large Western donors—whose domestic legal systems often prevent them from directly funding local groups—to channel resources to these groups indirectly. In Northwest Syria, which is partially controlled by Hay’at Tahrir As-Sham (HTS)—a group designated by the United States, the EU, and the UN, as a terrorist organization—the pool fund insulates Western donors from potential liability relating to money laundering or financing terrorism. UN OCHA conducts due diligence and monitoring measures related to the delivery of aid.

Senior aid officials close to the planning process report that the United Kingdom (UK) has led the creation of an alternative pool fund, the Interim North Syria Aid Fund (INSAF), to facilitate the flow of funds to international and Syrian NGOs in the event of a non-renewal in January 2023. The UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has secured some donor commitments already, although a formal announcement has not yet been made. Donors should continue to support INSAF to ensure there is no interruption of funding to operational partners.

In addition, some European officials have acknowledged that the response to the Ukrainian conflict will divert major funds away from Syria (and other crises). According to a representative from one European donor country, “there is a real, obvious risk of decreased attention and funds. Millions and billions in resources will be needed in Ukraine. We have seen a decreased willingness to donate to the Syria situation last year and [this] will likely unfortunately continue this year.”

This risk was evident in May 2022 when the European Union convened its annual Brussels Pledging Conference for the Syrian response. International donors pledged $4.3 billion for 2022, falling short of the UN goal to raise $10.5 billion. Additional pledges for 2023 and beyond and loans brought the total higher to match the amount pledged last year. However, needs have increased significantly in Syria, with food insecurity at record-high levels while food prices skyrocket.
Programming and Operational Restrictions

In the past, UN officials have assured Refugees International that, in the event of a Russian veto, UN agencies would not abandon the cross-border aid effort entirely and would continue to support the humanitarian response from Türkiye. But how exactly a post-resolution UN role would play out remains unclear.

In a post-resolution scenario, donors and UN agencies have focused on securing a future UN role in procurement, especially for food and vaccines, but also non-food items. No other participants in cross-border aid delivery have the deep expertise and resources to adequately take on the complex, burdensome and high-risk aid procurement process on the scale that UN bodies do. One option would be to limit the UN's role to purchasing goods and storing them in warehouses in Türkiye and cease any UN involvement in the delivery or monitoring of goods at the transshipment hub at Bab-al-Hawa. In turn, SNGOs and INGOS would continue to be responsible for transporting these supplies into the Northwest, as well as storing them and distributing them safely inside Syria.

Similarly, participants in the cross-border mechanism have stressed the importance of maintaining the UN coordination role in any future aid effort. They would seek to preserve the humanitarian cluster system, including information-sharing and data collection, as well as facilitating access into the Northwest. The cluster system is used by UN OCHA to coordinate multi-agency responses to large-scale humanitarian emergencies.

However, in June 2022, Refugees International learned through Syrian partners that the UN had begun to plan for full withdrawal, especially the immediate cessation of OCHA and other UN agency-funded projects through the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF). Refugees International cannot confirm the accuracy of these reports. Senior UN OCHA officials sought to dismiss them, insisting that there was no plan for the UN to withdraw completely in a non-renewal scenario and that many of the UN functions would continue. Nonetheless, these rumors have increased tensions between SNGOs and UN OCHA. SNGOs are wary that opponents of the cross-border resolution, especially Russia, will use their diplomatic influence inside the UN system to make a continued UN presence difficult, if not impossible.

The situation in the Northeast Syria offers an important example of what could happen if the UN Security Council fails to extend cross-border aid for Northwest Syria. The Ya’roubia border crossing from Iraq into Northeast Syria was closed in January 2020 due to similar political disputes in the UNSC. UN agencies withdrew virtually overnight. Within six months, aid groups reported that the UNSC decision to close Ya’roubia had “fatal consequences” with NGOs unable to fill the gaps in services. As a global pandemic surged, the health sector was hit hardest. Eleven health facilities faced closure or disruptions. Critical shortages of PPE, ventilators, hospital beds, and essential medicines also resulted.

The UN withdrawal from Northeast Syria has shaped expectations for many local aid groups and communities in Northwest Syria. To address these concerns, the UN should formally commit to maintain some of its vital activities should the cross-border resolution not be renewed. In addition, humanitarian actors in Northwest Syria should begin to reduce their dependence on the various elements of the UN cross-border mechanism. These steps should include more information sharing within the humanitarian clusters, as well as a partnership between UN and INGOS to allow INGOS to take over some aspects of the procurement process.
Many INGOs working in Türkiye have faced new operational constraints in recent years. These include the non-renewal of registration, lengthy and cumbersome application processes for registration and staff work permits, and the imposition of a quota for hiring Turkish nationals. As a result, many INGOs were obliged to close or relocate their regional offices to Amman. The move to a different country undermined coordination and information-sharing in the humanitarian response. Today, several Amman-based INGOs are attempting to reestablish themselves in Türkiye. However, the government of Türkiye requires rigorous documentation and reporting and only allows a yearly registration. Furthermore, Ankara has imposed financial constraints on NGOs, most notably restrictions on money transfers (hawala), in the absence of a functioning banking system in Northwest Syria.

Türkiye’s cooperation will be crucial in the next phase of the humanitarian response in which the government of Türkiye and Turkish NGOs like the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) will likely play a larger role. As Türkiye is strongly in favor of maintaining the UN-led cross-border aid mechanism, it should begin to work more collaboratively with INGOs and SNGOs. The government should begin to relax administrative, legal, and financial constraints on NGOs now in anticipation of closer partnership down the line.

The Need for a Long-Term Shift

Over the next six months, aid agencies and donors will increase planning to manage the consequences of a non-renewal of the UN cross-border mechanism. However, there are steps that can be taken now—that should have been initiated long ago—to lay the groundwork for a more sustainable aid effort and to increase the resiliency of communities in Northwest Syria.

The Humanitarian Predicament

For many years, aid agencies in Northwest Syria were compelled to focus on emergency relief at the expense of a longer-term approach. To be sure, this was due to dwindling funding, continuous conflict, and donors’ prioritization of short-term programming in the absence of a political solution. Since its inception, the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HPR) has incorporated some resilience and early recovery initiatives. Yet, eleven years into the conflict, it remains a small part of the humanitarian response, accounting for only 10 percent of the HPR in 2021.

Many factors have impeded truly sustainable efforts. Uncertainty about the cross-border resolution’s yearly renewal has limited donor and aid agency appetite for long-term multi-year planning and funding. Chronic funding shortages have forced humanitarian actors to redirect funds from longer-term, less urgent programs to more urgent needs. In addition, continued conflict, violence, and displacement have pushed humanitarian organizations to prioritize emergency and lifesaving needs. As rebel areas fell one by one under Syrian government control, the province of Idlib and its surroundings became the last resort for hundreds of thousands of displaced people. However, the area was far from safe due to fighting between armed opposition groups and repeated attacks by regime forces and Russia.

The consolidation of HTS control over much of the province in January 2019 further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. Concerned about the diversion of aid by a group designated as a terror-
ist organization, donors have discontinued support for resiliency and stabilization programs and restricted nearly all funding to lifesaving programs. Meanwhile, the Syrian regime and its Russian backer launched two destructive offensives retaking parts of Idlib and displacing hundreds of thousands of people. The COVID-19 pandemic then hit the province, followed by the conflict in Ukraine. The latter has increased food and gasoline prices in Idlib and northern Aleppo, threatening the lives of an already impoverished population. These factors have conspired to deepen aid dependence for communities in Northwest Syria.

Nowhere has this dependance been greater than with the delivery of food and non-food items (NFI). The UN World Food Program (WFP) provides more than 80 percent of food assistance in Northwest Syria through the monthly delivery of nearly 1.4 million food baskets. Similarly, hundreds of thousands of people in the northwest receive medicine and other non-food items (NFI) from the World Health Organization (WHO), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and other UN agencies.

**Building Resilience**

During an emergency, aid agencies can and should prioritize life-saving activities. However, as the Syrian conflict has dragged on for more than eleven years, a shift toward more sustainable approach has become even more essential. In 2021, the UNSC endorsed early recovery in its July cross-border resolution. Subsequently, the U.S. Treasury Department amended the Syria Sanctions Regulations to facilitate the early recovery efforts of NGOs. However, Russia has been the main proponent of incorporating early recovery in the resolution, which some UNSC members saw as a precursor to bypassing sanctions and supporting reconstruction. Assad’s opponents’ fear that the regime will stand to gain the most from ramping up early recovery have grown even more pressing in light of the regime’s pattern of aid diversion, exhaustively documented by numerous reports. In the northwest, donors more meaningful funding for early recovery initiatives has yet to materialize.

Donors and aid agencies should take advantage of this new window to undertake early recovery programming. A first step will be to fund livelihood opportunities. Agriculture, for example, should be supported by providing farmers with microcredits, agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, equipment, or training. Donors should also invest in critical infrastructure like irrigation plants. Agriculture support will also help to gradually decrease food insecurity and reliance on food aid in the region. People who have had so much taken away from them will benefit greatly from regaining some sense of agency to be free of the burden of dependence.

Greater use of cash and voucher assistance (CVA), especially for livelihood programs, can improve the humanitarian response. Vouchers in the form of a paper, token, or electronic cards can be exchanged for a predetermined amount or value of goods, cash, or services. Studies have found that cash assistance boosts local economies and increases household income capacity, as well as the ability of NGOs to support more people. As an Overseas Development Institute (ODI) report notes, “the element of choice is critical. Rather than having aid agencies assess and decide what people most need, cash enables people to make their own choices, so greatly increasing its value.”

People living in tents require specific attention and immediate action. These tented camps have turned what was supposed to be a temporary solution for more than 1 million internally displaced Syrians into a long-term reality. Many displaced people in the northwest have fled areas retaken
by the Assad regime. Given the country’s bleak prospects for peace and reconciliation, displaced Syrians will most likely remain in the area for years. However, people continue to live in deplorable conditions in these camps, unprotected from harsh winters, storms, flooding, and extreme heat.

Syrian groups have begun to build dignified housing units using crowd-funding and private donations. So far, hundreds of families have relocated from tents to these newly constructed units. These efforts should be supported by donors and international organizations. However, housing support is significantly more complicated in some areas in Northern Aleppo, specifically in traditionally Kurdish regions whose populations were displaced by Turkish incursions in 2018. Thus, any support to housing programs must ensure that it does not exacerbate demographic transfer inside Syria.

In addition, donor support to vital infrastructure like water and sanitation projects, and health facilities should be the foundation of a shift to early recovery and resilience. The water sector provides a cautionary tale for overreliance on short-term humanitarian assistance models. Trucking is an expensive and unsustainable tool, but it continues to be a main source of water as donors have prevented any significant repairs to infrastructure. However, as funding for Syria decreased over the years, many organizations had to stop water trucking altogether, leaving people without access to safe water.

Similarly, the education sector is among the most deeply debilitated but it remains woefully underfunded. Repairing of schools, providing training to teachers, funding for books and supplies among other initiatives, will help lift a vital sector and respond to people’s aspirations.

**Localization**

In recent years, donor states and international bodies have championed the localization agenda through prominent pledges and Grand Bargain commitments. However, the rhetoric rarely matches the reality on the ground, especially in places like Northwest Syria. The slow pace of progress on the localization of aid is particularly concerning as the international humanitarian coordination structure is in danger of a sudden and dramatic disruption. Donor commitments to get aid directly to local groups are often stymied by their own internal aid bureaucracies. In the United States, for example, the Congress, the Treasury Department, and other parts of the government have a role in setting funding priorities and overseeing budget allocations. This makes it very hard to allocate funding to SNGOs, especially under anti-terrorism laws.

In a major address in November 2021, USAID Administrator Samantha Power announced a goal of 25 percent of funding going directly to local organizations in the next four years, and additional commitments on inclusive development placing “local communities in the lead to either co-design a project, set priorities, drive implementation, or evaluate the impact of our programs.” This is a continuation of previous Western commitments to localization of aid. In the Northwest, active and vibrant civil society organizations have been instrumental in the aid response since the early days of the conflict. The nature of the cross-border response necessitates local organizations playing the lead role in the implementation of programs. There are no UN staff in Northwest Syria. Instead, agencies rely on local partners to carry out their programs, provide services, and deliver goods to beneficiaries.

While select donors including USAID have made incremental progress in funding some local organizations directly, there are still major challenges in the way of meaningful progress. “We
are going to disappoint you on localization, if you define it by direct funding to local NGOs,” said a senior official for a European donor. Similarly, a senior UN official conceded that “a change of mindset in Brussels is needed” for localization to be viable.

However, the issue is not only tied to funding. Syrian actors have often warned of a patronizing and unequal relationship with international stakeholders, in which their voice is not heard. “We are represented in the various meetings and groups,” remarked the representative of a Syrian coalition. “They let us speak, but they don’t truly listen to us. Our opinion has no weight.” The country director for a prominent INGO told Refugees International, “this is our chance to walk the talk on localization. We need to invest in capacity-building, listen to Syrians’ voices, have more [Syrians] in leadership roles in the Cluster system, and have less stringent regulations.”

Donors should direct more funding to these local partners and build a more inclusive aid agenda drawing on the proven expertise of local organizations. But Syrian organizations also have work to do. Some have a poor track record of accountability and transparency, and widespread perceptions of corruption among SNGOs exist. Increased transparency will help change these donor perceptions. Moreover, coordination and information sharing have frequently been insufficient, and competition among local groups has been rampant. While the risk of aid diversion will never be eliminated, SNGOs can work with INGOs and UN partners to significantly mitigate and reduce risks.

There is a need to transform the relationship between Syrian and international actors into a more balanced and sustainable partnership by providing those directly affected by the crisis greater ownership of the response. Donors, UN agencies, and INGOs should support Syrian communities and NGOs to set their own humanitarian and development priorities and have a meaningful say in all decision-making. SNGOs, for their part, must invest in efforts to build capacity and combat corruption. Local aid groups should also develop better coordination mechanisms and decrease competition among themselves.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

During the tense rounds of negotiations in the UNSC in July 2022, millions of Syrians were subjected to unprecedented uncertainty while their futures hung in the balance. International actors need to do everything in their power to avert a repeat of this harrowing experience in six months and then again in 12 months. Failing to renew the resolution at six months would cause a devastating, immediate disruption to the cross-border aid operation. It would interrupt critical life-saving assistance to more than 2 million Syrians in the peak of winter, when the need for shelter heating, blankets, and other critical goods will be highest. By working alongside local NGOs and committing to contingency planning, parties can begin to break the cycle of endlessly lurching from one resolution extension to the next and signal the beginning of a real sustainable future for Syrians in the Northwest.

**To UN Security Council Member States:**

- UN Security Council members should vote to renew Resolution 2642 on January 10, 2023, and again on July 10, 2023. While political tensions within the UNSC are high following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, permanent members including the United States,
France. and the United Kingdom should exhaust all diplomatic avenues to negotiate a renewal. They should continue to gather support from non-permanent members to send a unified message against the threat of Russian or Chinese veto.

- **UN Security Council members should reject attempts to wholly replace cross-border assistance with crossline aid delivery in future resolutions.** Since 2021, Russia has pushed for inclusion of crossline delivery of aid from Damascus to Northwest Syria. While this will continue under the July 2022 agreement, the few successful crossline convoys to date and logistical issues with previous deliveries have not demonstrated that crossline aid can be a sufficient replacement to cross-border delivery in terms of scale and reliability in the immediate future.

**To UN Agencies:**

- **UN agencies should ramp up preparedness for the possibility of non-renewal in six months.** UN Agencies should continue to engage in contingency planning, and finalize contracts, funding disbursements, and goods delivery to Syrian non-governmental organization (SNGOs) and international non-governmental organization (INGOs) partners to the extent possible ahead of the January and July 2023 deadlines.

- **The UN should ensure the continuity of the Humanitarian Cluster system.** Even in the event of a non-renewal, the presence of UN OCHA in Türkiye will be vital to help maintain logistical coordination and provide technical expertise among the many actors in the humanitarian cluster system. UN OCHA has reassured SNGOs and INGOs that they will maintain a leading role in the complex humanitarian emergency, and they should keep that promise.

- **Communicate clearly with SNGO and INGO implementing partners on contingency planning, programming, funding, and gaps.** It is vital that UN agencies are clear and transparent with their implementing partners to ensure that there is a smooth continuation of operations in any scenario. SNGOs have frequently felt excluded from frank contingency planning conversations in previous cycles and UN counterparts should strive to maintain trust in their partner relationships.

**To the Government of Türkiye:**

- **Türkiye should pressure Russia diplomatically to renew the UN cross-border mechanism.** As it has done in previous negotiations, the government of Türkiye should continue to use its key position as the host country to the UN cross-border mechanism and its relationship with Russia to encourage renewal of the resolution at the highest levels.

- **Türkiye should work collaboratively with INGOs and SNGOs operating in the Northwest.** Türkiye is strongly in favor of continuing the cross-border aid operation and should work with NGO partners to create an enabling environment to allow these groups to take on a greater role in the cross-border aid delivery operation. This includes easing regulations and restrictions on NGO registrations, money transfers, and reporting requirements. Türkiye should also allow SNGOs and INGOs to benefit from tax exemption for humanitarian commodities through the commercial border crossing.
To International Actors:

- **Donors should fully fund the UN’s Syria Humanitarian Response Plan for 2022.** As of July 2022, the appeal is only 24 percent funded, with $1.07 billion of the required $4.4 billion raised to date. Meanwhile, needs have increased significantly across Syria. Additionally, donors should continue to support the cross-border operation through the pooled Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) and be prepared to support an alternative pooled fund in the event of a UNSC nonrenewal to ensure funding to implementing partners is not disrupted.

- **Donors should fund a shift toward early recovery and resilience building projects that will benefit Syrians in the long term.** This should include vital infrastructure and water and sanitation projects, investments in the education sector and cash and voucher assistance for livelihoods programming. Additionally, donors should commit to building more dignified housing units, while taking into careful consideration the displacement of Kurdish populations in Northern Aleppo. Donors should work with SNGO and INGO patterns to increase early recovery and resilience efforts through their programming.

- **Donors, INGOs, and the UN should build equitable partnerships with local NGOs.** They should increase funding to local NGOs and build true partnerships that emphasize capacity-building, flexibility, inclusion, and decision-making authority. In addition to funding, international actors should work with SNGOs to build an inclusive aid agenda, include more Syrians in decision-making roles in the humanitarian response, and assist Syrian NGOs to navigate complicated Western funding bureaucracies to directly apply for funds.

To Syrian Organizations:

- **With the support of donors and international organizations, Syrian NGOs should develop more efficient information-sharing and coordination structures.** SNGOs should embrace and build upon the work started by consortiums including the Northwest Syria NGO Forum.

- **With the support of donors, Syrian NGOs should continue to invest in capacity building and increase transparency efforts.** Specifically, SNGOs can benefit from increased training in reporting and operational requirements and further development of technical and sectoral expertise with the guidance and support of donors.
About the Authors

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About Refugees International

Refugees International advocates for lifesaving assistance, human rights, and protection for displaced people and promotes solutions to displacement crises around the world. We do not accept any government or UN funding, ensuring the independence and credibility of our work.