



DON BOSCO NETWORK - MOR PROVINCE - PDO MOR

“A CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS”

2023 - 2024 SYRIA EARTHQUAKE
EMERGENCY RESPONSE REPORT

DECEMBER 2024

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February 6th, 2023

A CRISIS WITHIN A CRISIS

On February 6th, during night time, a 7.8 degree earthquake rocked southern Turkey near Syria's northern border.

Tremors were also felt in Lebanon, Greece, Palestine, and Cyprus. The consequences in the South of Turkey and in the northern Syrian region were devastating, hundreds of structures were destroyed and thousands of people were killed.

The governorates most hit by the earthquake were Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, and Tartous. A second shake of similar intensity was recorded on the 20th of February, further affecting the already fragile conditions of the local population.

The earthquakes occurred during a particularly hard winter, with some places in Syria experiencing even below-zero temperatures, at a time when people were facing severe power, fuel, and water shortages, record poverty rates and unemployment trends, sad consequences of the 12-year-long crisis which has pushed the country in a dramatic social, economic and financial downward spiral.



500K
people
displaced

Over
3600
casualties

10485
people
injured

February 8th, 2023

THE SALESIANS IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE

As soon as the ground started to shake in the mid of the night in Aleppo, hundreds of people left their houses to seek shelter and relief at Don Bosco Aleppo center. In a few hours, over 400 people were welcomed, offered a warm meal, medical assistance, and an improvised place to rest. Many of them had their houses damaged, others were afraid of the potential risks due to the damage their houses had undergone during the war years, and were under deep shock. In the following days, the Don Bosco center, also thanks to the important contribution coming from many local donors and institutions, was fully re-organized to better serve this key humanitarian purpose, and with the support of more than 50 volunteers it was made able to provide for the basic needs of an average of 350 people a day. All beneficiaries were people living in the areas and neighbourhoods surrounding the centre, 90% of them Christians. On average, 25% of the sheltered were elderly people, another 25% children.

The number almost doubled after the second earthquake which took place on the 20th of February, which caused absolute terror and panic in the city and the other affected areas, highlighting the need of deep psycho-social support initiatives for the thousands of people under deep shock conditions.



February 20th, 2023

THE DON BOSCO NETWORK EMERGENCY COORDINATION AND SUPPORT

The earthquake emergency response operated by the Salesians was made possible thanks to the support of many local and international donors. Among them, the widest source of support was represented by the Don Bosco Network and its 30+ members. The emergency coordination mechanism was activated the day following the earthquake, ensuring daily communication between PDO and the international coordination, resulting in all the members quickly launch fundraising campaigns and initiatives which quickly secured the resources.

This ensured that all the funds needed to promptly implement the different earthquake response projects identified by the Salesians with a view to provide humanitarian assistance and mitigate the vulnerability of the most fragile segments of population. The Salesians were one of the 4 church structures which kept hosting people for more than a month, securing the furniture and equipment needed to ensure safety and security of all: mattresses and bed sets, towels, hygienic materials, clothes...

Most of the sheltered people started returning to their homes or to temporarily rented houses in the first 10 days of March. All of them were offered food and vouchers for basic sanitation products before leaving, and the possibility to have qualified engineers carry out inspections to assess their houses' infrastructural conditions and make the necessary maintenance works to ensure their safety. The first immediate response phase implied the need to suspend the regular centre's activities due to the presence of the sheltered families. With its conclusion, the attention was shifted towards other needs and a wider variety of emergency-related interventions for the affected communities. this enabled the Salesians in Aleppo to resume their oratory and socio-educational activities while keeping on supporting neediest families and individuals



March, 2023 - December,
2024

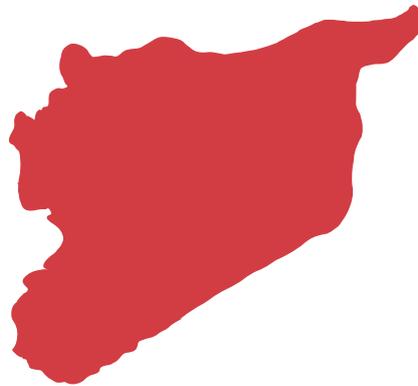
SECTORS OF SALESIAN RESPONSE INTERVENTIONS

**Reconstructi
on**

Livelihoods

**Medical
assistance**

**Education
support**



**Psycho-
social
support**

**Maintenance
and safety**

**Support to
Syrian
refugees**

**Long-term
assistance**

Reconstructi on

In the framework of the First emergency response programme, the possibility to support people who had their houses, furniture and essential appliances damaged was immediately considered. A total of 43 families' houses were identified and selected for reconstruction aid, defining the individual financial aid amount case by case. The interventions mainly revolved around fixing of cracks, damaged wall and ceiling joints, windows and doors frames, broken water pipes and electrical network. Additionally, 9 families were provided financial assistance to rent apartments to be accommodated in while works were conducted, 50 families were provided essential home appliances and devices (such as refrigerators, freezers, stoves, washing machine) after having theirs strongly damaged or destroyed due to the earthquake, and 150 families were provided with batteries (55 ampere capacity, plus 20 ampere battery charger and 4 Led sets) to store a limited quantity of electricity and face the frequent blackouts which cause, especially in families with small children and elderly people, significant problems particularly in the fall-winter season.



Medical assistance

Right after the earthquake struck Aleppo and the Salesians started providing first aid to the local population, medical checks, treatment and medicines with the support of several volunteers and two young pharmacists, who also regularly followed up on elderly people and children. 5 distributions of vouchers for pharmaceutical and hygienic products were organised in favour of the pastoral community to around 200 families. Particular attention was dedicated to people affected by chronic and cardiovascular diseases through a focused project which allowed to reach more than 150 vulnerable beneficiaries.



Education support

Following the earthquake, thousands of children in northern Syria were unable to go to school for one or more months, either due to the damage their schools were inflicted, or to their temporary utilization as shelters, or to their displacement. The return to school was even harder for many children with strong PTSD symptoms which deeply affected the children's capacity to concentrate. Additionally, the widespread loss of jobs and income due to the earthquake, combined with the spike in the prices of basic goods and fuel, made meeting school-related expenses became extremely hard for many.

This complex situation pushed the Salesians to swiftly plan a scaling-up of the afterschool and remedial education programme already ongoing in Aleppo center through a focused project. Thanks to it, the Salesians in Aleppo were able to double the number of beneficiary children reaching about 150 students, enhancing the didactic preparation and the learning spaces and equipment, strengthening the relation and involvement of families through focused seminars, developing capacities of teaching and administrative staff and introducing a psychologist for group activities and follow-up and individual counselling when needed. Scholarships to around 500 poor and vulnerable children were distributed twice, easing the financial burden of school fees, materials and transportation on their families.



Psycho-social support

The psychosocial and mental health support field was identified as a priority intervention area by the Salesians from the earliest earthquake response moment, due to the intense and continued experience accumulated in the field since the Syrian crisis' outbreak in 2012.

Psychosocial support initiatives were therefore swiftly planned and implemented, initially targeting the people who'd been more intensely affected by the event (displaced, temporarily homeless or physically injured) as well as the ones who were more actively engaged and dedicated in the humanitarian support activities,

bearing the weight of people's fears and despair throughout the first response period. A psycho-social support intervention was hence launched in Kafroun in March, to provide tailored socio-educational activities to mitigate the psychological consequences of the earthquake on displaced as well as local children and teenagers, about 500 in total. Between March and June 2023, 8 psychological first aid sessions for around 30 people were conducted in Maara Sednaya for youth, adults and families, with the professional guidance and mentorship of a qualified psychologist. From the summer season 2023 onwards, the psychosocial support interventions were integrated into the regular oratory and youth centers activities to maximize their results and amplify the beneficiaries' numbers, reaching around 2500 children and youth across the three centers. The regular activities were therefore remodelled and refined to address relevant psychological aspects and behavioural issues. In parallel, two capacity building activities were launched with a view to strengthen skills and competencies of young Salesian educators, animators, teachers and volunteers. The first took place in Syria and saw a total of 99 beneficiaries attending a 4- day training course on trauma healing and management provided by highly qualified experts from the Italian psychology faculty of the Italian university IUSVE. The second training programme was held in Italy and saw 9 young people from Syria and Lebanon, along with 12 from Ukraine attend a 14-day training in Rome with international professors from UPS university in Rome named ACCOMPANYING WHEN TRAUMA HITS, aimed at training youth leaders on trauma management and prevention in complex emergency contexts.



Maintenance and safety

The DB Aleppo center was subject to significant damage in several areas, hence a structured maintenance works plan was launched in May 2023.

The works mainly focused on demolishing some damaged walls and partitions, excavation and installation metal wire with mesh for all cracks in the monastery. The cracked facade of the center was restored by placing iron beads and broken water pipes in the wall (which worsened wall moisture) were treated.

4 bathrooms were also renovated as well as 4 windows frames. Renovation and upgrading works were also carried out in the 6 rooms regularly used as classrooms within the remedial education program. The whole electrical system of the house was maintained and optimized, to ensure maximization of the capacity of the 60 KwP PV system which was in the meantime provided and installed on the centre's rooftop. Through the new PV system, the Aleppo house will remarkably increase its self-sufficiency by saving over 30.000 eur in fuel costs yearly. The centre's water solar system, which allows a cost-free production of warm water, was fully renovated as the old solar modules were old and inefficient.



Support to Syrian refugees

The Salesian emergency response mechanism adopted a holistic and region-wide approach targeting earthquake-affected people both in Syria and in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon.

This enabled the Salesians to assist Syrian people who were displaced by the event and fled to Lebanon seeking support from the Salesians in the country, either material assistance and/or educational support. Through the emergency coordination the Angels of Peace school for refugees run by the Salesians in Beirut was widely supported in its activity, as well as the institution's socio-educational and recreational activities offered to Syrian refugee children in Houssoun.

Long-term assistance

The last phase of the earthquake emergency response initiative focused on the identification and launch of projects and interventions with a longer term and sustainability-oriented approach, acknowledging the situation of the Syrian population who is bound to face the long-term consequences of the earthquake in the framework of the local socio-economic context already devastated by a decade-long crisis.

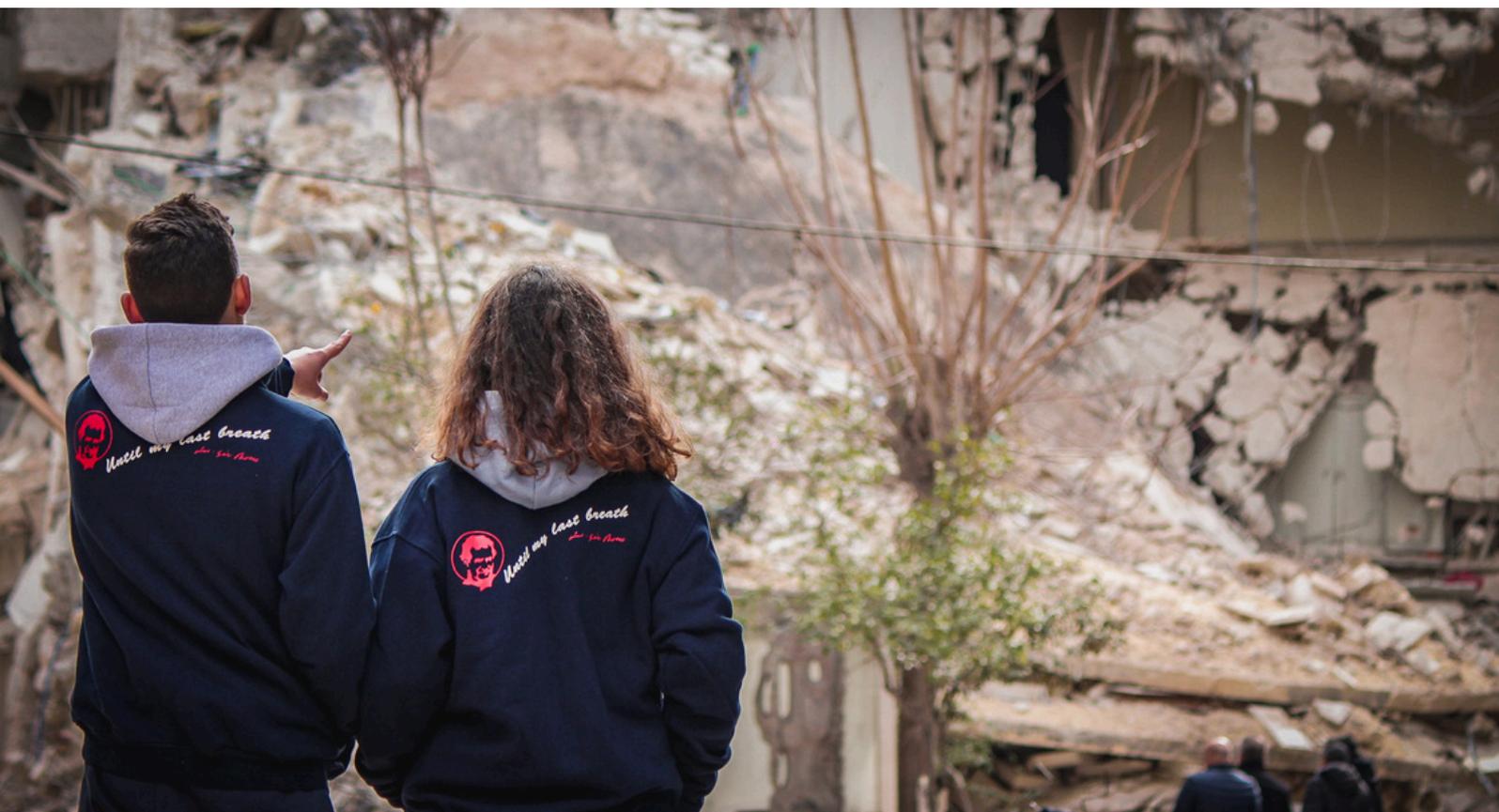
This approach led the province to assess the main sources of socio-economic vulnerability of the Syrian population and identify strategies to address them, keeping into account the specificity

of the Salesian identity and mission, its added value as well as limits.

Thus, besides the enhancement of the psychosocial support activities and the remedial education programmes which respond to key social needs of the local population, the possibility to materially support neediest families to meet the significant costs of energy provision was studied and approved, due to the ever-increasing prices of fuel which deeply affect the population's economic resources in the absence of a public electricity system.

67 families benefited from the pilot project phase in Aleppo, around 40 in Damascus (where the project is still ongoing). The first results of the initiatives have been remarkable, as besides the better and more secure living conditions beneficiary families experience (and tend to share with their neighbours) many affirmed the possibility to use the savings they obtained to purchase more nutritious food and cover school-related costs for their children, giving them a feeling of dignity and wider opportunities.

Acknowledging the pilot phase's success, a new project to continue on this path and extend the beneficiaries' pool in Aleppo is currently underway.



December, 2024

KEY RESULTS ACHIEVED THROUGH DBN EMERGENCY COORDINATION AND WAY FORWARD

The results of the Syria Emergency response coordination can be summed up in a few key numbers illustrating the wide extent of commitment, dedication and work all involved parties

- 80 communications and updates throughout the overall 18 months emergency timeframe
- 30 projects along the sectoral lines described in the previous paragraph, in Syria and Lebanon;
- 27 salesian-related donors involved all over the world
- € 2.989.218,38 raised for the 30 projects
- About 8000 beneficiaries reached across the three main salesian centres and communities

The earthquake emergency response in Syria was set to be officially closed in June 2024, with the interruption of the DBN's fundraising work for emergency related projects. Unfortunately, and clearly for all involved parties, the end of the emergency response coordination mechanism doesn't imply an overcoming or solution to the overall crisis in the country. The material consequences of the event (from an infrastructure, economic and employment point of view) are expected to be felt for long time ahead, compounding the already ongoing crisis in the country.

Nonetheless, the Salesian response, with its integrated approach, represented an impactful and key factor of mitigation of the consequences of the event on extremely vulnerable communities, saving many families and individuals from extreme poverty, supporting gradual recovery, and providing the much needed psychological support and presence to facilitate trauma management and overcoming. Many promoted projects included components aimed at building key human resources' capacities, upgrading premises and promoting economic and energy self-sufficiency, hence contributing and supporting on a long-term perspective the Salesian centres' capacity to keep on playing an impactful role in their everyday work with Syrian youth and children.

As soon as families started going back to their houses, a needs assessment was conducted in order to provide the needed support to families who had their main source of income and livelihoods affected by the calamity. Within a few weeks, the already high unemployment rates spiked further up and basic goods prices skyrocketed, making such support essential.

After around 3 weeks following the earthquake, a food and non-food basic items distribution was started, targeting at the beginning families not hosted in the centre which had therefore no direct meal/food support but were helped to purchase the needed food and non-food basic supplies and fuel to power generators. Around 400 families were then offered food vouchers during the summer season 4 times.

Along with food and non-food vouchers, several distributions of cash vouchers for gas and energy expenses took place benefiting 200 families. The voucher support component was of utmost importance for families, as prices in the country see continuous raises due to inflation, leading the average food basket value to around 208 USD (as per WFP reports) while the average monthly salary rarely reaches 100 USD, hence drawing the purchasing power to continuously deteriorate.

A meals distribution initiative for most vulnerable communities was also implemented thanks to the support of the Salesian Cooperators. A total number of 6285 meals were distributed over 27 days, during the Ramadan month. The beneficiaries were mainly people temporarily hosted in shelters (schools, community centres, public halls), or living in very poor neighbourhoods and rural areas, way less served by charities and organisations than the more central city areas.

Acknowledging the prolonged need of support of many households and individuals whose economic conditions got worse and worse, the food and non-food items voucher-based assistance programme continued throughout 2023 and 2024 with two consecutive focused projects, both in Aleppo and Kafroun, targeting around 400 families in total.

Livelihoods





Planning and Development Office
Salesians of Don Bosco Middle East

Thank you for your support!

