

CASE STUDY

SYRIAN ARAB REP. 2022-2023 / COMPLEX CRISIS

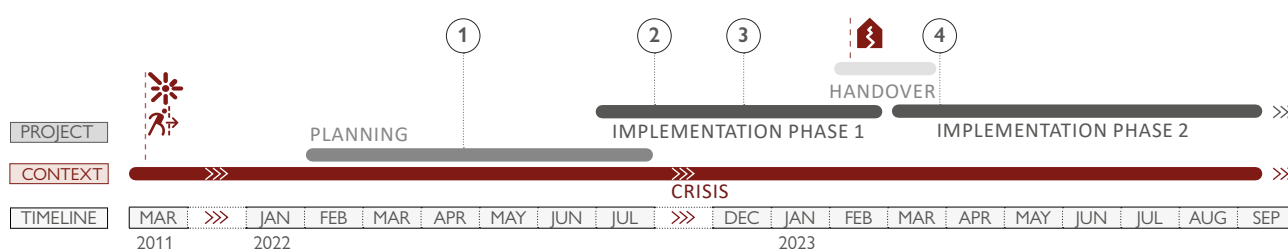
CONTEXT / SETTLEMENT	SHELTER TYPE	SUPPORT METHODS			
CRISIS	Syrian Crisis and 2023 earthquakes				
PEOPLE AFFECTED	15.3 million people* (as of Dec 2022)				
PEOPLE DISPLACED	6.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)*				
PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS	5.7 million people in need of shelter assistance*				
PROJECT LOCATION	Kili, Maaret Tamsrin, Idlib governorate, northwest Syria				
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	5,521 individuals (1,413 girls, 1,550 boys, 1,171 men, 1,387 women, 262 person with disabilities)				
PROJECT OUTPUTS	1,000 shelters built and delivered to IDPs. Site level interventions include: road levelling, gravelling, paving; installation of sewer system and drinking water network; street lighting; rainwater drainage; fire points; boundary wall and geo-fencing; gates; registration area (men and women); site management system established; community committees formed and trained.				
SHELTER SIZE	37.5 m ² (including two rooms, kitchen, latrine, foyer)				
SHELTER DENSITY	7.5 m ² of living space per person (incl. facilities) based on the average HH size. 3.6 m ² counting the rooms only.				
DIRECT COST	USD 2,100 per household				
PROJECT COST	USD 2,400 per household				



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Al Zohoor IDP site project delivered safe, durable shelters for 5,521 displaced individuals in northwest Syria, constructing 1,000 housing units designed for resilience. The intervention met urgent shelter needs while delivering essential settlement infrastructure, including drainage, roads, water supply and sewage systems. The February 2023 earthquake took place at the completion of the project, which reprioritized the targeting for the most earthquake-affected families in an already high need area.

* Syrian Arab Republic: 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview.



Mar 2011: Syrian civil war begins.

- Apr 2022:** Project inception completed, including needs assessment, settlement planning, land allocation, technical design preparation, resource mobilization, and obtaining the required approvals.
- Jul-Aug 2022:** Site preparation completed to make the land construction ready; Shelter construction initiated on prepared plots.
- Dec 2022:** Water and sanitation infrastructure implementation, including drinking water and sewage networks.
- Feb 2023:** Major earthquakes affected Syria and Türkiye, triggering reprioritization to the most affected and vulnerable households.
- Mar 2023:** Handover of completed shelters to families, with occupancy documentation signed.



The project provided housing blocks built with durable materials alongside a road and sewer network, ensuring more dignified solutions and immediate usability.

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Please refer to previous editions of Shelter Projects (including A.22 SP 8th ed. or A.27 SP 9th ed.) for more background on the Syrian complex crisis. A.24 in this edition also provides more background on the situation before and after the 2023 earthquakes.

NATIONAL RESPONSE AND PROJECT DESIGN

After 14 years of conflict, the shelter response in North West Syria prioritized multi sector approaches integrating site planning with shelter and WASH, as well as protection mainstreaming and specialized services, acknowledging seasonal stresses (winterization needs, flooding) and the protracted nature of displacement.

Within this wider framework, this project aligned with the drive toward more durable outcomes, complementing immediate humanitarian assistance with community infrastructure. Programming decisions emphasized cost effective investments to reduce the need for recurrent emergency shelter support within a protracted displacement, and targeted families that lived for years in emergency camps, with intermittent access to services and significant economic vulnerability.

Given market disruptions and constrained household capacity to self build, as well as the need for a consistent quality across 1,000 shelters, the project opted for a contractor-approach for the construction of infrastructure and shelters. It integrated a non permanent framework for site management and service provision, to be still run as a planned IDP site for the transition phase.



Following site preparations, the organization focused on the main services, including drainage, water and sewer systems, before shelter completion.

PROJECT SCALE AND LAND ALLOCATION

Through the protracted period of the Syrian conflict, assessments conducted in coordination with government authorities identified many households whose homes had been damaged or destroyed and who lacked access to adequate shelter. Based on the severity of needs, available resources, and the capacity of the allocated site, the project was designed to accommodate 1,000 of the most vulnerable families through a planned settlement approach.

The site was established on public land, with access and use arrangements agreed through local authorities. Occupancy documentation was provided at handover, and conditions allowed families to reside in the shelters on an open ended basis as long as agreed terms were respected. Required documentation was maintained to facilitate transparent handover and long term use and tenure security.

The site's location close to existing communities and service areas aimed to reduce isolation commonly associated with informal camps, facilitate access to markets, and improve links to healthcare, education and livelihood opportunities.

COORDINATION

The intervention was implemented in close coordination with local authorities and shelter sector mechanisms. Key project parameters, including beneficiary targeting criteria, shelter size, technical specifications, and indicative cost per household, were aligned with the agreed shelter response standards in the area. This coordination helped ensure consistency with other shelter actors' interventions while allowing project-specific adaptations based on available resources, site conditions, and identified needs.

The project required coordination among multiple stakeholders, including local authorities, shelter organizations, engineering and infrastructure teams, service providers, community representatives, and implementing partners. These stakeholders contributed to decisions related to beneficiary targeting, settlement planning, technical standards, infrastructure design, service provision, and implementation sequencing.



Shelter units were equipped with 1,000 liters water tanks and a small garden space by the entrance. An open air foyer led to the main living spaces.

DESIGN AND PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The layout incorporated organized road networks, primary drainage, and the installation of drinking water and sewage networks. The design also included space and mechanisms for site management and community engagement, building channels for residents to flag service and maintenance issues after relocation.

The site planning was developed by the organization's engineering team in coordination with local authorities and relevant stakeholders. The layout included designated areas for future community services based on projected needs, while decisions regarding the establishment and operation of specific facilities were made separately by the responsible authorities and service providers.

Over time, and following community priorities, additional social services were established at the site, including a health center and a school, to ensure access to basic services and support the long-term sustainability of the settlement.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Construction relied on local contractors and labor drawn from both the host community and the displaced population. The main implementation phases included:

- **Site preparation and primary infrastructure:** clearing, leveling and drainage works preceded the installation of water and sewage networks and the grading of roads within the site.
- **Shelter construction:** once plots were serviced, shelter units were erected to agreed standards, enabling faster, safer occupation.
- **Handover and occupancy:** after completion of shelters and core services, families relocated to the site and signed occupancy documentation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SITE GOVERNANCE

Community committees were mobilized progressively during construction and before handover. These groups became the main conduit for communication with residents, flagging service issues, liaising with providers, and supporting coordination within the site. Orientation for residents focused on reporting and resolving common maintenance issues (drainage blockages, wastewater overflow, minor shelter repairs, solid waste management). This approach built local capacity to sustain the site's basic functionality and hygiene, strengthen accountability, and identify priorities for follow up.

CHALLENGES

- **Earthquakes and reprioritization:** The project pivoted to prioritize newly displaced and highly vulnerable families affected by the disaster, revising the beneficiary selection criteria and reorganizing the sequencing to accelerate completion of critical components before relocation. The reprioritization also meant fewer overall individuals than initially targeted, reflecting both the urgency of the situation and larger household sizes among those most affected.
- **Community expectations:** Adjusting targeting after the earthquakes raised expectations among families who had initially anticipated inclusion. These were addressed through additional community communication and awareness sessions explaining the emergency reprioritization process and the criteria used to identify the most vulnerable households.
- **Logistics and market conditions:** The team faced market price volatility, intermittent availability of construction materials, and cross border logistical constraints, all of which affected procurement timelines. To cope, the project used flexible operational management, continuous coordination among technical teams and contractors, and more agile purchasing strategies.



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1,000 shelters were built on the site for IDPs affected by the earthquake. The project had already targeted families displaced by the Syrian crisis, but was rapidly adapted following February 2023. The site was chosen with local authorities and due to the proximity to other existing communities, ensuring it would not be isolated.



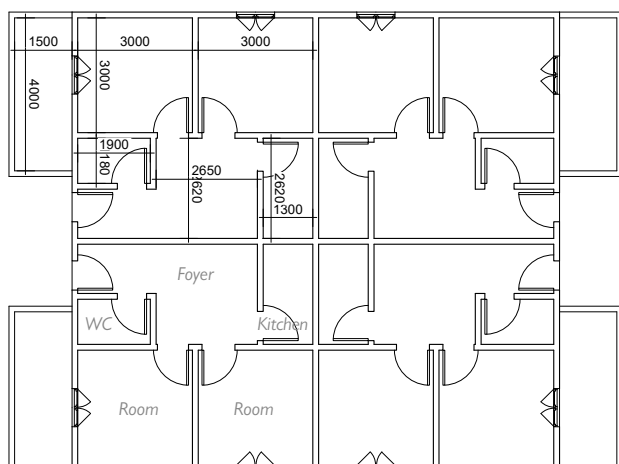
The project was implemented through contractors, while community participation was ensured by establishing site committees with various responsibilities.

CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

Protection mainstreaming and GBV risk mitigation were integrated into site planning and management, with an emphasis on safer movement through organized roads, improved lighting and clear pathways, and community committees acting as focal points for reporting safety or service concerns. Accessibility and habitability guided shelter layout and infrastructure design, while environmental considerations informed the drainage and wastewater systems.

EXIT/HANDOVER

Handover to households included occupancy documentation and orientation on rights and responsibilities. In parallel, coordination mechanisms with local councils and service providers were established to enable follow up on operational issues and continuity of services after project completion. Community committees assumed a progressively central role in communicating residents' concerns, reporting infrastructure and service issues, and prioritizing maintenance needs. Subsequent complementary interventions supported the site's management capacity and expanded community engagement structures.



Upon handover, families were supported with the relocation and were provided open-ended occupancy documents, to protect them from possible tenure issues.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

- **Local economic engagement:** Contracting local firms and workers created employment opportunities and supported market activity during implementation.
- **Public health benefits:** Proper sanitation and drainage reduced the risk of disease outbreaks, improving conditions for residents and neighboring communities.
- **Social services over time:** Following occupancy, the addition of a health center and a school within the site expanded access to services and strengthened the settlement's social infrastructure.
- **Demonstration effect:** By adopting a durable, integrated settlement approach within a humanitarian site, the project offered a model for responses in similar high displacement contexts, emphasizing quality and resilience alongside the temporary character of an organized site.

SHELTER BILL OF QUANTITIES

Item	Unit	Quantity
Concrete for floor (200 kg/m ³)	m ³	3.75
Reinforced concrete - 350 kg/m ³ with 8 mm diameter of steel bars.	m ³	3.1
Backfilling with raw materials from quarries	m ³	7.5
Hollow block [15 cm] with cement mortar 250 kg/m ³ (with plastering for two faces)	m ²	75
Sinks (laundry)	unit	1
Provide and install electrical system	point	8
PVC-HDPE pipes 4 inch	m	10
Provide and install W.C. (Arabic type)	unit	1
PPR pipes drinking water system	m	14
Faucets for WCs & Kitchen	unit	3
Water tank 1,000 liters	unit	1
PVC for Doors and windows	unit	7
Metal wrought iron	kg	27.5
Mosaic kitchen table	unit	1
Limestone foundation for base shelter	m ²	8.9
Clay agricultural soil for gardens	m ³	3.75

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- ✓ **Durable, integrated settlement approach.** Combining robust shelters with water, sewage, drainage and roads reduced recurring emergency support, while improving habitability from day one of occupancy.
- ✓ **Agile reprioritization after the earthquakes.** The team revised beneficiary criteria to focus on newly displaced and highly vulnerable families, delivering completion and handover with limited interruption despite the shock.
- ✓ **Community governance and accountability.** Establishing and empowering community committees created clear communication channels for reporting service and maintenance issues, improving accountability and responsiveness after handover.
- ✓ **Tenure arrangements that supported stability.** Using public land with occupancy documentation at handover, and open ended use conditions contingent on agreed terms, strengthened security of tenure and minimized eviction risks for the most vulnerable families.

WEAKNESSES

- × **Early stakeholder alignment under time pressure.** Compressed planning cycles and the number of actors involved created coordination challenges at the outset, highlighting the need for clearer phasing and early convergence on technical and operational decisions.
- × **Limited scope relative to overall needs.** Despite its scale, the project reached a small proportion of the caseload; balancing per household investment in durability with coverage will require continued strategic choices in similar contexts.
- × **Social and communal facilities phased in later.** The initial layout prioritized core shelter and infrastructure; some social functions (such as health and education) were introduced only after occupancy, suggesting the benefit of reserving and defining communal/service zones earlier.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Plan for pivoting from the outset:** Pre agreeing shock responsive targeting criteria, resequencing options and communication protocols enables faster, clearer reprioritization without compromising quality when an emergency hits mid implementation.
- **Build governance into design, not only into exit:** Defining committee roles, reporting pathways, and simple maintenance responsibilities during design and construction builds a culture of site stewardship and smoother post handover operations.
- **Secure tenure early and document it well:** Early HLP due diligence, clarity on land status and occupancy terms, and issuance of handover documentation reduce eviction risk and disputes, enabling families to further invest in their new homes.
- **Reserve and phase social infrastructure:** Even in a humanitarian site, designating and protecting space for future health, education and communal functions helps sequence services more smoothly as the settlement stabilizes.

RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

- Establish joint planning mechanisms with local authorities and service providers from the outset to ensure timely integration of education, health, and other essential services within new settlements.
- Strengthen livelihood and economic integration components alongside shelter interventions to improve long-term self-reliance and reduce dependency on humanitarian assistance.
- Introduce formal governance and management structures for settlements early in the project lifecycle to support sustainability, maintenance, and community participation.
- Promote multi-sector funding approaches that allow shelter, infrastructure, education, and health services to be planned and implemented as an integrated package rather than through separate phases.



FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

On responses to the Syrian crisis: [SP 8TH ED. / A.22-26](#)

On site planning: [SP SITE PLANNING: 16 CASE STUDIES](#)

On a project of similar scale using mud bricks in Idlib: [SP17-18 / A.28 / SYRIAN ARAB REP. 2015-2017](#)