

## Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal

## Turkey-Syria Earthquake

Impact report October 2023

In February 2023, a series of devastating earthquakes hit southern Turkey and northwest Syria resulting in 55,000 individuals losing their lives. Christian Aid is very thankful to our church partner the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal for their speedy response to this appeal, this prayerful and timely financial support enabled us to scale up our response work in the immediate aftermath of these devastating earthquakes.

Devastation was widespread across the region, and political issues around the Syrian civil war made it difficult for many agencies to get emergency aid and rescue services to some areas.

Christian Aid was already working in northwest Syria where almost 2 million people live in formal and informal camps as a result of the conflict, and had prepared winterisation kits for those living in need.



This meant that Christian Aid was able to adapt and expand our work to respond immediately in helping those affected by the earthquake, and reach 25,000 people, with 13,000 of these kits distributed in the first 4 days of the response.

In the direct aftermath of the earthquake, priority was given to families whose homes were destroyed or badly damaged, alongside families caring for children who had lost their parents. Funding provided to Christian Aid supported families with the provision of various resources including:

- Winter kits including food, blankets and fuel
- Emergency kits for children including soap, warm clothing, stationery and small toys.
- Cash to pay for family essentials such as food (given to 1,500 families)

Aside from this, donations including those from the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal are also being used to support child-friendly spaces that Christian Aid partners are facilitating in Northwest Syria. Where, in the midst of devastation, children have a safe space to be themselves, learn, spend time together, play, and have fun.



### Fragile healthcare services

Following the earthquake, many hospitals in Idlib were threatened with closure, and had to work with scaled-down operations and a lack of medicines and medical materials. In



response to this, Christian Aid provided emergency cash grants to two clinics in northwest Syria to enable the purchase of urgent medical supplies to treat 250 survivors of the earthquake. Public health information was also shared at food and cash distributions, alerting people to the threat of a cholera outbreak.

### **Children affected by the earthquake**

Sami (not his real name) is a ten-year-old boy living in northern Idlib, Northwest Syria and is one of the many children impacted by the trauma of the earthquake.



He recounts the moment the earthquake hit *“the house shook a lot, things fell on the floor, and the cupboard overturned and broke. I became afraid that it would happen again, and became afraid to sleep at home.”*

Sami has hearing problems and a speech impediment, and was not attending school before the earthquake hit. As a result, he fell far behind with reading, writing, and maths. Sami’s father brought him to Christian Aid’s partner in Idlib once they learned they would be educational services suitable for him. Sami was offered specialist one-to-one educational and emotional support in one of the 100 child-friendly spaces that Christian Aid’s partner runs in Northwest Syria.

In total, 4,000 children attend these safe spaces and can participate in fun activities designed to help reduce stress and promote their wellbeing. Sami speaks fondly of this space,

*“I consider this place my second home. It is where I feel safe. I love this place very much... I come here three times a week and really look forward to it.”*

### **Sara in western Aleppo**

One of those given a child’s emergency kit was six-year-old Sara (not her real name) who has lived in a tent with her mother, father and two sisters at a collective shelter since the earthquake. The shelter in the countryside of western Aleppo is home to 200 people.



Sara said: *“Life here in the camp is so tough. The tent is sometimes freezing and sometimes it’s too hot. I feel bored most of the time. I don’t know anyone. I have no friends.”*



Thankfully Sara has been able to attend a newly established school where she is making new friends, as well as taking part in fun activities at a child friendly space at her shelter, run by Christian Aid's local partner.

Sara hopes her family are able to move to a permanent home soon.

Sara's story highlights how Christian Aid's response is developing in the region, focusing now on education, resilience and community led development.

It is estimated over 1 million school aged children in the region are currently at risk of being out of education, and Christian Aid is working to ensure children get access to education services by rehabilitating/ rebuilding 35 schools, enabling children to get access to resources and back to learning.

The rehabilitation of schools also involves partnering with local agencies who provide mental health and psychosocial care to children to help them with trauma and the difficult situations they face.

Christian Aid is also partnering with engineers in Idlib to look at improving the structure of school buildings to make them earthquake resistant against any future shocks.

### **Thank you**

Thank you to the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal for standing together with us at such a time of need for communities in Turkey and Syria, and enabling this response to take place – both now and into the coming months\*. The total amount received by Christian Aid to date for this appeal is €249,520.65 and £19,216.08. The prayers and financial contributions of individuals and congregations for these regions, and our work are immensely appreciated.

For more information on the impact of this support, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me directly.

\*Please note in the last 8 months, Christian Aid has supported 60,000 people living in Northwest Syria, and 5,000 living in southern Turkey.

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# Thank you

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