



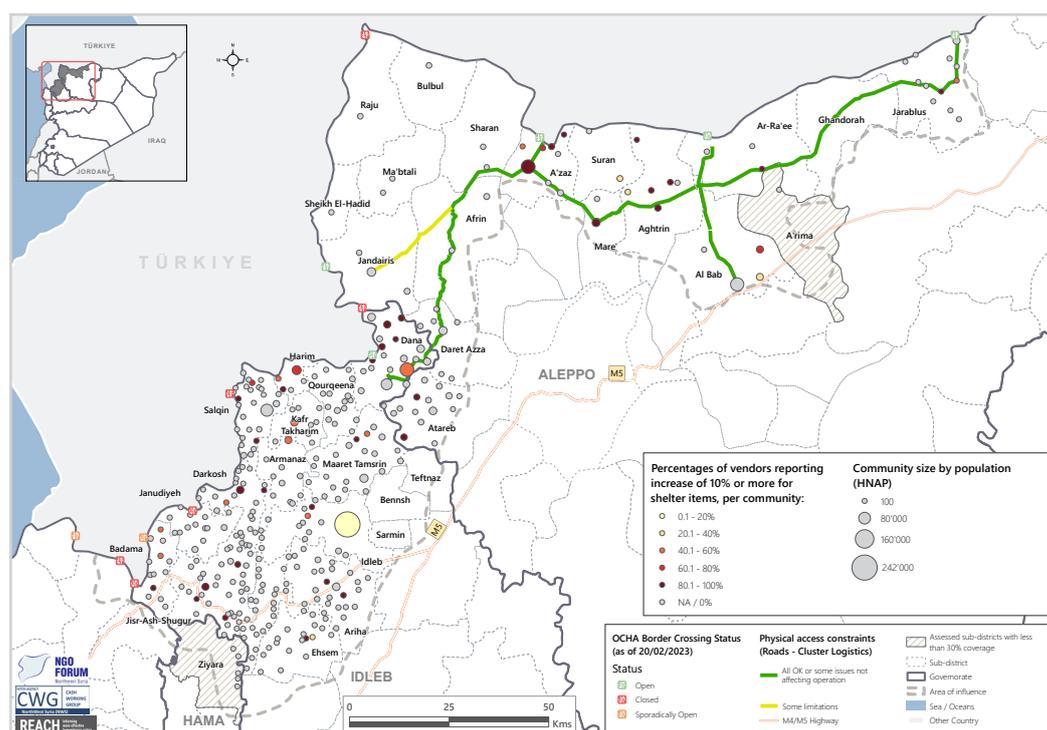
Post-earthquake market conditions, livelihoods opportunities, and food security

Northwest Syria | March 2023

KEY MESSAGES

- REACH data collected 14-16 February indicates that **markets in northwest Syria (NWS) appear resilient** following the 6 February earthquakes. Most assessed communities reported that shops were largely open; on average, shops which had closed immediately after the disaster were reopening several days later. However, this resilience should not be assumed indefinitely, given the longstanding financial pressures being faced.
- Vendors reported **market shortages and price increases for key high-demand items after the earthquake**. In particular, prices for shelter and winterization items have nearly doubled across NWS. Items most commonly facing shortages were also those most commonly reported to be imported from Türkiye.
- **Affordability of basic food and non-food items remains a challenge** for households, due to years of conflict and deepening economic crisis. REACH data found increased demand for purchases on credit and access to financial services post-earthquake, which can't be met by struggling vendors who are themselves in need of cash. This is within a broader context of economic instability and widespread poverty in NWS.

Map: Reported increases in prices of shelter items, according to the majority of interviewed vendors per community.



275,500

people* - approx. 50,000 households - are estimated to be in need of tents or emergency shelter.

484,000

people* - approx. 88,000 households - are estimated to be in need of mattresses, high thermal blankets, and clothing.

* Based on average household size of 5.5 people. See REACH RNA.

JOINT RAPID ASSESSMENT OF MARKETS (JRAM) KEY FIGURES

Following the earthquakes:

50%

of vendors reported shortages of tents in markets; **72%** reported price increases for tents.

59%

of communities reported an increased demand from customers to make purchases on credit.

2.8 days

was the average amount of time that shops were reported to be closed.

CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Two powerful earthquakes (7.7 and 7.6 magnitude) struck south-eastern Türkiye within a span of 12 hours on the 6th of February. On 20 February, two weeks after the initial disaster, another earthquake registering 6.4 magnitude struck southeast Türkiye near Antakya. Recent estimates indicate more than [50,000 people have lost their lives](#), with [more than 4,500 deaths](#) reported in northwest Syria specifically.

The earthquakes have caused significant destruction, such as collapsed residential buildings and damage to critical infrastructure including gas pipelines. Widespread damage to homes and energy infrastructure is particularly concerning given the [harsh winter conditions](#) currently felt in these areas.

Understanding market dynamics in northwest Syria has become critically important as humanitarian organisations work to determine how to procure, transport, and deliver urgent assistance to people in need while facing access and transit challenges. One key consideration right now is the viability of cash assistance, to mitigate some of the logistical challenges associated with in-kind aid.

To inform cash and market-based programming, REACH conducted a **Joint Rapid Assessment of Markets (JRAM)** from 14 to 16 February, in collaboration with the NWS Cash Working Group and NWS NGO Forum.

PRE-EARTHQUAKE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Syria has experienced an economic collapse since the start of the conflict. The country has seen its [GDP decline](#)

[dramatically](#), along with a depreciation of the Syrian pound, rising prices, and diminished livelihoods opportunities. Most Syrians inside the country - [90% - now live below the poverty line](#).

Over the last decade, Syria's economy became increasingly interlinked with that of its neighbours, Lebanon and Türkiye. In particular, [Lebanese banks and financial service providers](#) have been relied upon for facilitating cash flows, deposits of capital, and remittance transfers.

The 2019 economic crisis in Lebanon therefore had [significant implications](#) for already-weakened economic conditions inside Syria, coupled with ripple effects from the war in Ukraine over the last year. Syrians have consequently faced an ever worsening depreciation of their own currency, as well as the Lebanese pound and Turkish lira, and soaring prices for food, fuel, and other basic necessities.

Northwest Syria remains one of the hardest-hit parts of the country, not only economically, but more broadly in terms of weakened or destroyed infrastructure, a lack of basic services, and public health risks - most notably a [high vulnerability to the ongoing cholera outbreak](#) in the country.

POST-EARTHQUAKE MARKET FUNCTIONALITY

Within this context of longstanding economic hardship and recurrent disruptions to market functionality, **the JRAM found markets to be relatively resilient post-earthquake**. Out of prior necessity, many vendors have become adept at dealing with sudden damage to shops, supply chain blockages, and price fluctuations. Following the earthquakes, **most communities reported that either all or most vendors**

in the marketplace were still operating.

Specific areas did still see a higher proportion of closures, notably in Harim district and Jandaris and Janudiyeh sub-districts, all located along the border with Türkiye. Yet even among communities that did report some degree of shop closures, **the average length of time before reopening was only 2.8 days** - reflecting a remarkable degree of resilience given the level of damage and destruction, but also signalling a lack of viable alternatives for

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vendors due to the financial ramifications of a prolonged closure. Assuming or relying upon the resilience of markets, vendors, or crisis-affected Syrians more generally should therefore not replace or delay immediate humanitarian assistance.

Although markets have largely remained operational, the JRAM found that item availability and pricing were less consistent. **Shortages of shelter and winterisation items were most commonly reported, namely tents, tarpaulins, blankets, and liquified petroleum gas.** Vendors selling these items also reported price increases. These high-demand items were also most commonly reported to be imported from Türkiye, as they are more complex to manufacture and often have to be imported either commercially or as aid.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Following the earthquakes, the JRAM found that **demand for credit has reportedly increased, but capacity to supply credit has decreased.** Similarly, hawalas and specialised currency exchange shops were reported to be operating in over two-thirds of assessed communities, but around one-third of assessed communities reported that these financial service providers (FSPs) had little to no capacity to meet increased demand. The limited functionality of FSPs has significant implications for both vendors, who are struggling to offer credit to customers, and to consumers, who are less able to purchase items if credit is unavailable, or if they are unable to access

cash from remittances or humanitarian assistance.

The lack of adequately functioning financial services is particularly concerning given the limited availability of US dollars inside the country. In the context of the ongoing economic crisis, where the Syrian pound and Turkish lira depreciated quickly, aid actors and some commercial traders switched to using the US dollar as a more stable way to keep assets. However, due to stockpiling and wear and tear on old banknotes in circulation, US dollars are becoming much harder to obtain. As a result of both these longstanding factors and the added shock of the earthquakes, **two key pathways for communities to receive cash - through hawalas or by receiving physical cash in hand - are currently facing constraints.**

Table: Percentage of vendor KIs reporting price increases, market shortages, and item imports from Türkiye for high-demand items.

| Item | Increased price** | Market shortages | Imported from Türkiye |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Blankets | 92% | 46% | 45% |
| Tents | 72% | 51% | 44% |
| Plastic sheets/ tarpaulin | 72% | 41% | 47% |
| Gas | 52% | 45% | 55% |

** Vendor KIs selling the item category were asked which specific products have increased most in price since the earthquakes.

MARKET IMPACTS ON FOOD SECURITY & LIVELIHOODS

JRAM data indicates that some of the areas most heavily impacted by the earthquakes, such as Harim, Jandaris, and Sheikh Al Hadid sub-districts, also **reported little to no availability of basic food items in markets**. Marketplaces and potentially also road networks in these areas are likely to have seen the most damage, reducing the ability to provide food to surrounding communities. Local food production capacity in these areas is also insufficient.

Elsewhere, the primary issue remains affordability, even when food items are available. The [January round](#) of REACH humanitarian situation monitoring reiterates an ongoing challenge in Greater Idleb: pre-earthquake, most assessed communities reported that **households could not afford essential food items although markets were present**. The affordability issue is likely to be compounded by decreased availability of credit from vendors, and limited access to cash due to FSPs reporting an inability to meet current demands for cash transfer services.

The data also found that the primary reported challenge faced when feeding babies and young children under two years in the two months prior to data collection was **the high price of suitable foods such as formula**. Post-earthquake, the JRAM also found that 31% of communities reported limited availability of infant formula, further compounding the issue and likely impacting the nutritional intake of infants and young children throughout the winter.

Limited access to livelihoods - already a barrier to covering basic needs pre-earthquake - also signals the **need for immediate assistance in order for many households to meet urgent needs now**. This is particularly so for Syrians working in agriculture, where inputs might be less available. As [incomes were previously reported to be insufficient to cover the cost of living](#), households were employing coping strategies like purchasing food on credit or borrowed money, relying on less preferred or less expensive foods, and using money that would have been allocated to other needs. Without further assistance, these coping strategies may become overstretched, **leading households to resort to more severe means of coping**.

LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT TO MONITOR

The post-earthquake market situation and food security context in northwest Syria remains dynamic, depending on how several key factors evolve. Moving forward, it will be important for aid actors to consider:

Market functionality over the longer term:

- Ability of consumers to obtain what they need from local markets
- Vendor capacity to maintain stocks and regain access to products facing shortages
- Availability of imports of in-demand items from Türkiye, and any impacts of cross-border access constraints on supply chains

Capacity for local food production:

- Sufficiency of winter crop yields for locally consumed food items, particularly in rural areas that were less directly impacted by the earthquakes
- Capacity for ongoing production of cash and subsistence crops, which pre-earthquake were heavily relied upon by host community households
- Adequacy of water infrastructure, particularly after any earthquake-related damage, to support food production

Evolution of coping strategies:

- Capacity of households to afford food and basic necessities in light of ongoing financial sector challenges, in particular reduced access to credit or remittances
- Potential increase in consumption-based coping strategies or other severe strategies, if reliance on social networks is overstretched and coping mechanisms are exhausted.

REACH JRAM METHODOLOGY

The JRAM was conducted using a vendor 'key informant' (KI) methodology. Interviews were conducted with 3,395 vendors across 375 assessed communities in northwest Syria. Data collection took place from 14-16 February 2023. Enumerators interviewed 10-12 vendors per market, depending on the size of the community. The sampling approach prioritised the selection of vendor KIs who sold key basic commodities; other vendors were also included in the sample to provide information about market conditions in the community.

It is important to keep in mind that **all findings and estimated figures are intended to provide an indicative picture of the situation in assessed communities only**. Findings should therefore not be generalised across the population or the region. Further details regarding the assessment methodology can be found on pages 15-16 of the full [JRAM situation overview](#).

More REACH data and analysis on post-earthquake conditions in northwest Syria:

- [Rapid Needs Assessment \(RNA\) situation overview](#): In-depth overview of the RNA findings, providing key data for coordination and emergency response actors on the ground.
- [RNA global brief](#): Provides quick, top-line takeaways from the RNA to summarize the situation two weeks after the 6 February earthquakes.
- [RNA HTML analysis file](#): Provides additional analysis of the RNA data, aggregated to the NWS and sub-district levels.
- **RNA datasets**: The complete community-level data from the RNA is publicly available in [English](#) and [Arabic](#).
- [JRAM situation overview](#): In-depth overview of the JRAM findings, providing key data for aid actors developing cash-based programming.
- [JRAM + RNA Community and sub-district level dashboards](#): For easier exploration of individual indicators of interest and visualisation of the results at community or sub-district levels.
- [JRAM dataset](#): The complete community-level data from the JRAM is publicly available.

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).