

The impact of funding cuts in Idlib

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Since the beginning of 2019, inter-military operations between the armed opposition factions, and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS - Organization for the Liberation of the Levant) have led to HTS's control of the bulk of the province while its civic administration, the Salvation Government controls services.

This situation led donor organizations to suspend their work and activities; stopping the support provided to their local partners despite an official announcement by the Salvation Government not to interfere in the work of civil society organizations.

This paper attempts to monitor the impact of the suspension of support on the humanitarian situation in the province.

I. Introduction

The province of Idlib and the surrounding countryside of rural Hama and Aleppo, hosts 3.5 million people, of which 1.5 million are estimated to be displaced. This region has been a destination for all recent displacements in Syria in line with agreements between the Syrian Government and opposition factions in Daraa, Eastern Ghouta, Rural Damascus, and Homs.

After the expansion of HTS's control over the province, many donor organizations suspended their activities for local organizations and stopped funding. This includes the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and German INGO Arche noVa that supports the medical sector in the north of Syria, which both announced the suspension of their support. Also, Expertise France stopped supporting the medical sector, and Local Development Organization (LDO) suspended its work in supporting the local councils in the province.

II. The impact of suspending support on the medical sector

The suspension of support for the medical sector has led to the suspension of work of more than 179 medical points including hospitals, medical centers, and blood banks. Support for the salaries of medical personnel, supply of medicines, medical laboratories, and medical equipment has stopped. In addition:

- GIZ suspended its work, which covers 47 facilities in the southern countryside of Aleppo and the north of Syria.
- The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) suspended its support which covers 28 facilities.
- The Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM) was affected by the suspension of its funding but its team continued to work voluntarily.
- The Economic Funds and Abilities Development Association (EFADA) has shifted its support from the medical sector to the agricultural sector
- RELIEF International has stopped its work in big hospitals and turned their support to small health centers.

Dr. Abd (member of UOSSM) confirmed that medical support for his organization has been suspended since mid-January and that they were still working but voluntarily, with severe shortages of medicines and medical equipment

This suspension has influenced the population in north-west Syria (approximately 300,000 beneficiaries per month, according to the Idlib Health Directorate), who rely almost entirely on free medical services provided by the operating organizations and hospitals receiving support. In addition, the decision to stop the support didn't exclude pregnant women and children who have also been affected.

The suspension of the work of medical centers has forced many people to travel long distances and take security risks to reach the nearest active medical point for treatment.

III. The impact of suspending support on the relief sector

The suspension of the work of around 44 relief organizations in the camps on the Syrian-Turkish border including Al Karama, Atma camps, Ataa Camp, West Salqeen camps, Hama camps, and Deir Ballut camp, in addition to unregistered camps, has had a significant impact on the population, which depends almost entirely on the support provided. This includes food baskets, financial vouchers, meals, hygiene baskets and flour. The 44 relief organizations stopped their work at different times.

Ahmad, an IDP in Atma camp, confirmed the cessation of food aid and humanitarian aid provided to IDPs since the beginning of 2019 at a time when they desperately need help. This has led to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the camp.

IV. The impact of suspending support on the local councils

A significant number of local councils have stopped performing their role in providing services to citizens after the cessation of support and the suspension of funding by a number of donor organizations, including LDO, which provides salaries to workers in local councils.

V. The impact of suspending support on the education sector

The educational sector is considered to be one of the most affected sectors in the country, especially in the refugee camps in the north of Syria. According to the statistics of the Camps Management Institution there are no more than 45 schools across 1,039 camps. These schools do not meet all the educational needs of students and there are areas completely marginalized from education services.

As the number of organizations supporting education have stopped their activities, the situation has worsened. Organizations such as Syria Relief, Mercy Without Borders, Karam, Violet, Orange, Watan, Qabas, and Olive Branch, suspended their work in the north of Syria for a month before resuming again. However, this has increased the concerns of populations in the region.



Khaled, a teacher at a school in Jabal al-Zawia, said that stopping the support for his school, which has more than 570 students and 27 teachers, has greatly affected the educational process of the students. "We are still working voluntarily, but some teachers are unable to continue their work which has led to a shortage of educational staff."

Finally

The Syrian Civic Platform considers that those first and foremost affected by the suspension of support for the basic sectors of health, relief, and education, are civilians. Any suspension of support for these sectors will result in a humanitarian crisis in the north of Syria. Based on that, we recommend the following:

- Donor governments and international organizations need to take steps to restore support to key sectors and take appropriate action to ensure that assistance is delivered to civilians in the north-west of Syria.
- We call upon all international organizations to continue their humanitarian role and not to link their work to political and military variables.
- We also call on the United Nations Fund to continue and increase the support given to the increasing population density in Idlib province, especially after the recent displacements.
- We call upon the local parties not to interfere in the work of the organizations and to allow them to carry out their activities in order to meet the humanitarian needs of the population.