



**AFNS**  
AID FUND FOR  
NORTHERN SYRIA

# AID FUND FOR NORTHERN SYRIA

# 2023

## ANNUAL REPORT



Front Cover

**Image Credit:**

Lastum Wahdakum Camp, Aldana, Idleb, 10 October 2023 (c) HiHFAD

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AAP</b>	Accountability to Affected Populations	<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>AAPCE</b>	Accountability to Affected Populations and Community Engagement	<b>LWG</b>	Localisation Working Group
<b>AFNS</b>	Aid Fund for Northern Syria	<b>MREL</b>	Monitoring, Reporting, Evaluation and Learning
<b>ASI</b>	Adam Smith International	<b>MWL</b>	Mercy Without Limits
<b>CA</b>	Capacity Assessment	<b>NFI</b>	Non-Food Items
<b>CCCM</b>	Camp Coordination and Camp Management	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>CP</b>	Child Protection	<b>NWS</b>	Northwest Syria
<b>CVA</b>	Cash and Voucher Assistance	<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>DD</b>	Due Diligence	<b>PDU</b>	Partnerships and Delivery Unit
<b>DDCA</b>	Due Diligence and Capacity Assessment	<b>PFA</b>	Partnership Framework Agreement
<b>DoC</b>	Duty of Care	<b>PMU</b>	Programme Management Unit
<b>DQA</b>	Data Quality Assessment	<b>PWD</b>	Person with Disability
<b>DQI</b>	Data Quality Inspection	<b>QFFD</b>	Qatar Fund for Development
<b>DRHC</b>	Deputy Resident Humanitarian Coordinator	<b>RA</b>	Regular Allocation
<b>ECP</b>	Education, Child Protection	<b>RAATA</b>	Ras-al-Ain – Tal Abyad
<b>ED</b>	Executive Director	<b>RCMO</b>	Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement Organisation
<b>ERL</b>	Early Recovery and Livelihoods	<b>RFP</b>	Request for Proposals
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office	<b>SA</b>	Special Allocation
<b>FMA</b>	Fund Management Agent	<b>SCHF</b>	Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund
<b>FSL</b>	Food Security and Livelihoods	<b>SNGO</b>	Syrian NGO
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence	<b>STRC</b>	Strategic and Technical Review Committee
<b>GESI</b>	Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion	<b>TOR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>GFFO</b>	German Federal Foreign Office	<b>TPM</b>	Third Party Monitoring
<b>GMS</b>	Grant Management System	<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>GoS</b>	Government of Syria	<b>USD</b>	United States Dollars
<b>HiHFAD</b>	Hand in Hand for Aid and Development	<b>VSLA</b>	Village Savings and Loans Association
<b>HLG</b>	Humanitarian Liaison Group	<b>WAG</b>	Women’s Advisory Group
<b>HNO</b>	Humanitarian Needs Overview	<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>HNW</b>	Health, Nutrition, WASH	<b>WWH</b>	Welthungerhilfe
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan		

## LETTER FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE STEERING BOARD

It is a privilege to share the 2023 Annual Report for the Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS). This report highlights our progress in establishing AFNS as a critical funding mechanism addressing urgent humanitarian needs in northern Syria. It also showcases the collaborative efforts and unwavering dedication of our partners, which have been vital to our success.

The year 2023 posed considerable challenges, most notably the devastating earthquakes in February that severely impacted northern Syria and Türkiye. These events compounded the already critical humanitarian crisis, necessitating a swift and effective response. AFNS promptly mobilised resources to provide immediate relief and support to those affected.

Established in November 2022, the AFNS was created after an exceptionally swift inception period. I commend the Fund Management Agent (FMA) for their outstanding work in setting up this multi-donor pooled fund so quickly. This rapid creation was essential for addressing urgent needs efficiently.

In 2023, AFNS saw a substantial increase in funding, with contributions rising from the initial US\$25 million provided by the UK, Germany, and the US to US\$65.75 million. This growth was made possible by continued support from our initial donors and new contributions from France, Jersey, the Netherlands, and Qatar. Such diverse support underscores the critical role AFNS plays as a responsive and flexible funding mechanism.

A cornerstone of AFNS's success is our firm commitment to localisation. By empowering local organisations, we ensure that aid is effective and sustainable. In 2023, we directed 75% of our funding to Syrian NGOs (SNGOs) and made it mandatory for partners to share overhead costs with their sub-implementing partners, reinforcing our dedication to building local capacity and resilience. This approach has been vital in fostering long-term recovery and empowering communities.

Our coordination with the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) has made progress. Guided by the principles of complementarity, we ensured our efforts were coordinated. This cooperation positioned us as a ready contingency mechanism for the SCHF, should UN cross-border access be compromised. Fortunately, despite the non-renewal of the UN Security Council resolution 2672 in July 2023, this was not required, allowing us to implement our allocations in alignment with SCHF's efforts. This collaboration underscores the strategic importance and readiness of AFNS, enabling us to provide advanced support to local actors and focus on early recovery. AFNS's ability to sign multi-year grants with our partners has been instrumental in these efforts. We are eager to continue engaging with the SCHF to further enhance our complementarity.

Our governance structure, characterised by inclusivity and collaboration, has been essential in steering our strategic direction. The Steering Board, comprising representatives from donors, International NGOs (INGOs), and SNGOs, ensures that our decisions are well-informed and reflective of on-the-ground realities. Notably, 56% of our representatives are female representatives. The activation of the Syrian Women's Advisory Group (WAG) and the endorsement of our Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy exemplify our commitment to inclusivity and equitable aid distribution.

Support from the humanitarian Clusters has been instrumental to our success. Their pivotal role ensured our allocations were synchronised with sectoral strategies and aligned with the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). This coordination was crucial in enhancing the impact of our aid delivery.

AFNS has demonstrated exceptional adaptability in responding to evolving needs. Our flexible approaches and strategies allowed us to address the immediate aftermath of the February earthquakes swiftly and efficiently. This flexibility has been critical in a dynamic humanitarian landscape, enabling us to respond to emergencies as they arise.

Over the reporting period, AFNS has established itself as a relevant, timely, and robust actor in the humanitarian response in northern Syria, reducing vulnerability and politicisation. Our innovative approaches to integrated programming bridge relief with recovery, and our strong commitment to localisation have added significant value. Providing quality funding, including multi-year grants, has been crucial in enhancing the resilience of the response and the people we assist.

Looking ahead, AFNS is committed to increasing local leadership and further strengthening the resilience of the response. We will continue to innovate in our integrated programming and localisation efforts.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all our donors, partners, Clusters, NGO coordination forums, and the dedicated humanitarian workers who have been the backbone of our efforts. Your steadfast support and commitment have been fundamental to our achievements in 2023. As we look forward, we remain dedicated to providing stability, hope, dignity, and relief to the people of northern Syria.

Together, we can continue to make a profound difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Sincerely,

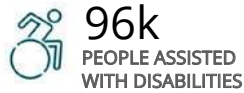


**Wolfgang Gressmann**  
Independent Chair of the Steering Board  
Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS)



Image Credit:  
Lastum Wahdakum Camp, Aldana, Idlib, 10 October 2023 (c) HiHFAD

## 2023 IN NUMBERS



The AFNS has assisted 2.4 million of the 5.56 million individuals identified in the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) as people in need in northwest Syria, covering 43.17% of the targeted population in this region. This effort is part of a larger humanitarian response across Syria, where 15.3 million people have been identified as in need, underscoring AFNS's significant role in addressing the impacts of Syria's prolonged conflict.

All 37 projects funded by the AFNS in 2023, totalling US\$58.7 million, have contributed to the three Strategic Objectives of the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). AFNS operates in alignment with the HNO, HRP, and the Cluster coordination mechanism, basing its allocation strategies on these frameworks. The AFNS project proposal template requires applicants to identify which HRP Strategic Objectives their interventions address, and this alignment is verified during the proposal review. Additionally, the AFNS Standard List of Indicators, derived from the 2022 HRP Indicators, is refined annually, with minimal changes to terminology to support multi-year trend analyses.

### ASSISTANCE TO NORTHWEST SYRIA

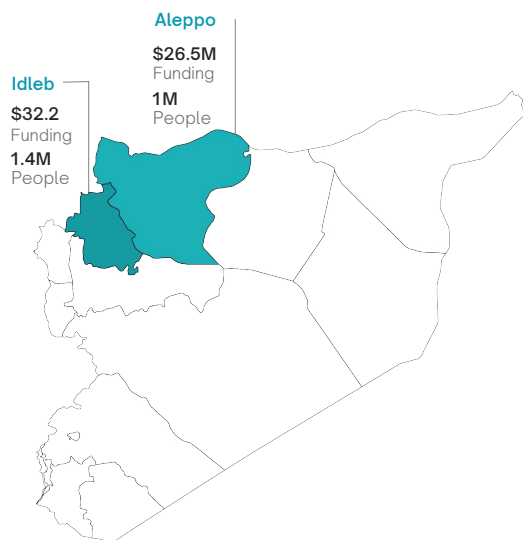


Figure 1: Funding & beneficiaries by governorate in 2023

### FUNDING TO PARTNERS AND PROJECTS

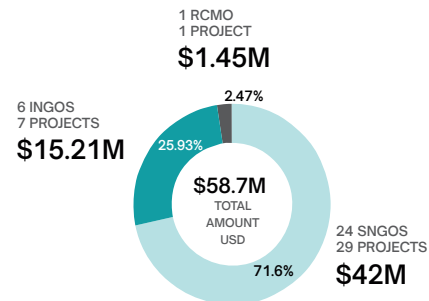


Figure 2: Funding by partner type in 2023

### FUNDING ALLOCATION BY SECTOR

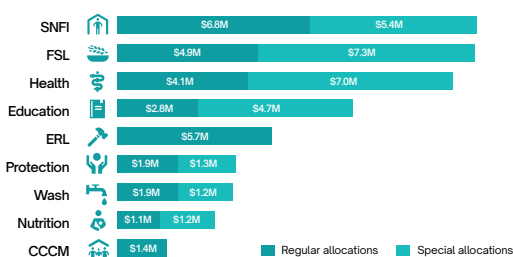


Figure 3: Funding by sector (through AFNS Regular & Special Allocations) in 2023

### BENEFICIARIES BY SECTOR

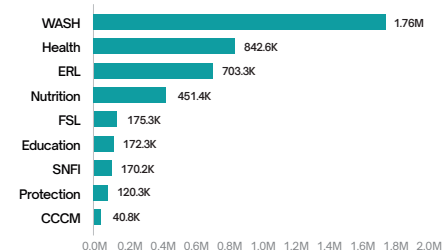


Figure 4: People assisted by sector in 2023

### PEOPLE ASSISTED BY TYPE

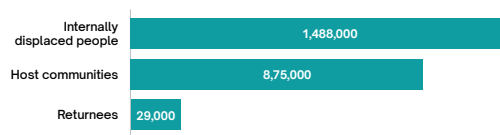


Figure 5: People assisted by type in 2023

## AFNS ACTIVITIES IN 2023: TIMELINE

The Steering Board endorses the name 'Aid Fund for Northern Syria' at the second Board meeting. The Steering Board also approves the AFNS Charter and Handbook.

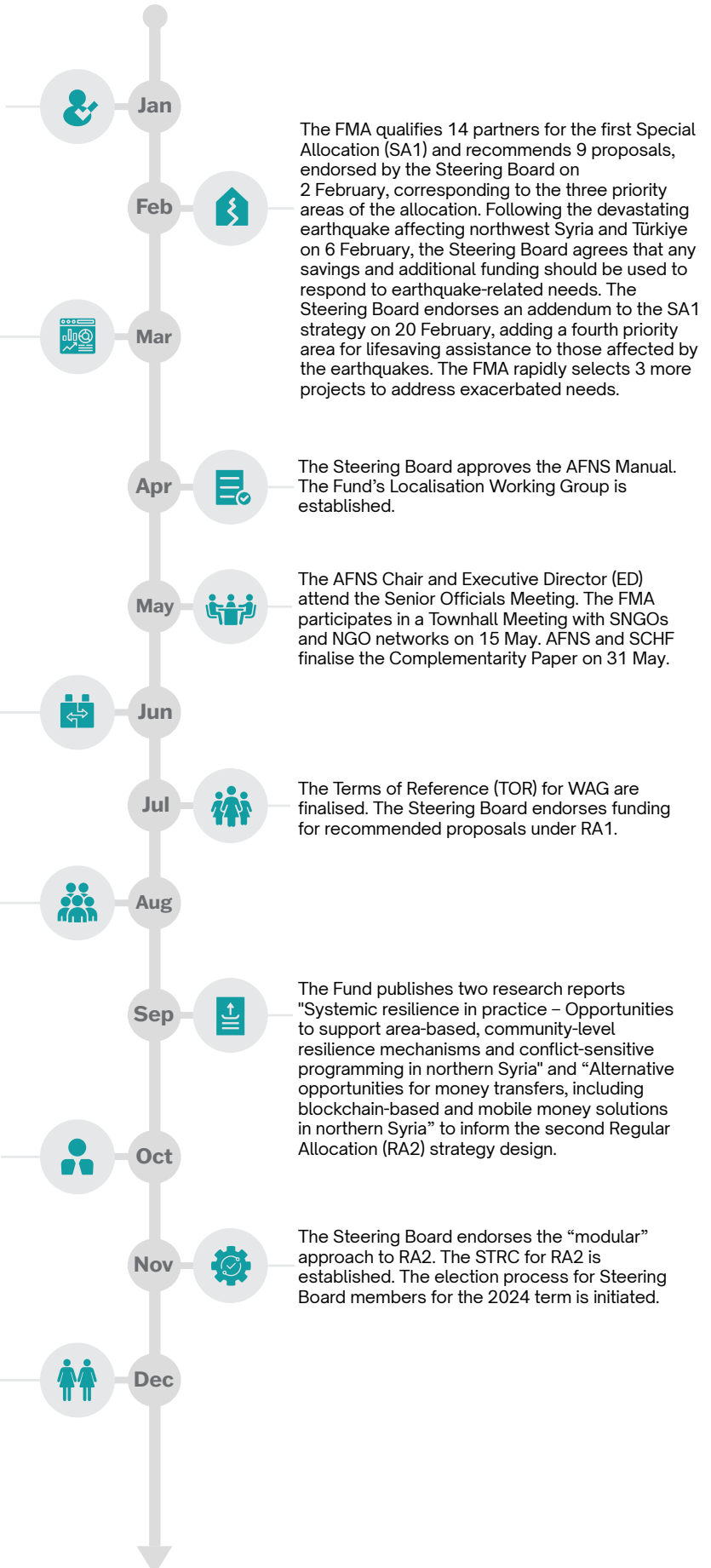
The FMA launches the AFNS website on 1st March and participates in a Townhall Meeting with SNGOs and NGO networks to provide information on the Fund's structure, governance, and processes. The FMA develops a "Lessons learnt: A northern Syria earthquake assessment response and analysis" report to guide allocation planning on 23 March. The FMA opens registration for all prospective partners to the Fund on 26 March through its Grant Management System (GMS). The Steering Board approves the first Regular Allocation (RA1) outline and activates the WAG to the Steering Board on 30 March. The Strategic and Technical Review Committee (STRC) for RA1 is also established.

The AFNS Chair and ED attend the Brussels Conference. The Deputy Resident Humanitarian Coordinator (DRHC) endorses the merger of the AFNS WAG and the Humanitarian Liaison Group (HLG) WAG.

The FMA develops the GESI and Accountability to Affected Populations and Community Engagement (AAPCE) strategies for the Fund. The Steering Board endorses the new TOR for the WAG. The UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) extends the contract with FMA by one year, until May 2025, to enable longer grants to Fund partners. The FMA launches the Arabic version of its website.

The Steering Board endorses Interim Chair Wolfgang Gressmann in the role of Independent Chair.

The Steering Board endorses the retention of two 2023 female board members for the next term, and donors nominate board members for their constituency. RA2 Module 1 is executed, and disbursements are initiated for three projects that could not be funded under the SCHF's Standard Allocation. RA2 Module 2 is launched on 20 December. The Steering Board endorses the AFNS Localisation Strategy.



## DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AFNS played a critical role in addressing humanitarian needs in northwest Syria in 2023. The fund experienced a significant increase in funding compared to 2022, rising from US\$25 million to a total of US\$65.75 million in contributions and pledges during 2023. This growth reinforced donors' recognition of the strategic importance of AFNS as a contingency mechanism.

Additional funding was secured following the devastating February 2023 earthquakes in northwest Syria and Türkiye. Throughout the year, AFNS's donor base expanded from three to seven donors, with the addition of France, Jersey, the Netherlands, and Qatar.

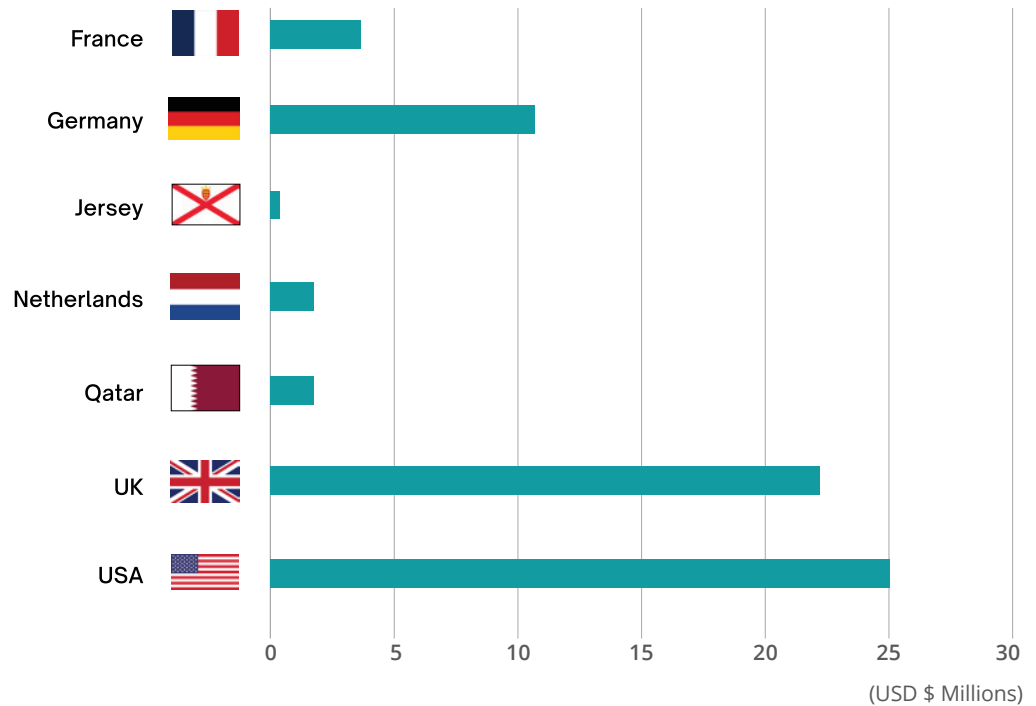


Figure 6: Donor contributions in 2023

## FUND DESIGN

### VISION AND RATIONALE

AFNS, established in November 2022, is a multi-donor pooled fund designed to ensure continuous aid delivery should the SCHF be unable to operate in northwest Syria. AFNS's operational independence from UN-negotiated cross-border access facilitates this continuity. Given the dynamic humanitarian situation in northwest Syria, donors are agreed on the necessity of maintaining AFNS as a contingency mechanism, especially if the Government of Syria (GoS)-approved UN cross-border aid extension is not renewed or is withdrawn. In such a scenario, AFNS would be the sole multi-donor pooled fund for humanitarian cross-border assistance in the region.

AFNS is also designed to complement SCHF. When SCHF can continue its cross-border operations, AFNS addresses gaps created by the limited duration of GoS consent. Key complementary objectives of AFNS include greater localisation, extended grant periods, and a focus on early recovery to enhance community resilience in northwest Syria.

AFNS allocations are based on the UN's HRP and HNO, supplemented by additional independent assessment information. This alignment ensures that AFNS's funding allocations are strategic and responsive to the evolving needs on the ground.

### GOVERNANCE DESIGN

The AFNS has four governance bodies:

- a) Steering Board
- b) Partnership Board
- c) Strategic & Technical Review Committee
- d) Fund Management Agent

**Steering Board:** The Steering Board comprises an equal number of members from the three main constituencies of the

humanitarian response, including 3 Contributing Donors, 3 SNGOs, and 3 INGOs.

The main objectives of the Steering Board are to set strategies and policies, approve allocation strategies and decisions, financial and risk management oversight, and to oversee performance. An Independent Chair convenes and chairs the Steering Board meetings. The Chair's role is to have an overview of global response needs, listen to all perspectives, and facilitate consensus decisions by the Steering Board.

**Partnership Board:** The Partnership Board is comprised of all Contributing Donors. The Partnership Board will be convened on an ad hoc basis only if required to support the Steering Board, particularly when consensus on a decision cannot be reached.

**Strategic and Technical Review Committees (STRCs):** STRCs are ad hoc committees appointed by the Steering Board for each allocation. They advise the FMA and the Steering Board on allocation strategy and approval and support the FMA in designing the allocation strategy and evaluating projects for funding.

**Fund Management Agent (FMA):** The FMA, contracted to perform its duties by the FCDO, provides administrative and operational support to deliver the mission of AFNS. It is housed at the FMA's office in Gaziantep and operates under the AFNS policy and procedural framework as adopted by the Steering Board. The FMA strives to ensure its work, its decisions and its recommendations are evidence-based; demonstrate dedication to learning, adapting and knowledge-sharing; foster innovation; and deliver value for money.

“AFNS has a unique approach in its flexibility in the representation type: it is not required for the steering board members to be directors of their organisations. The opportunity to have new faces after a decade of similar leadership could advance the ideas and recommendations of young and experienced people, especially women”

- IOD PARC, AFNS External Evaluation Report, 2024

**Syrian Women's Advisory Group (WAG):** On 23 February 2023, the Steering Board approved the TOR for the WAG. The WAG was subsequently formed and became operational in March 2023. At a UN Women workshop in May 2023, the two Women Advisory Groups for the HLG and AFNS were merged. This initiative, supported by the UN DRHC, aimed to enhance synergy, inclusivity and gender-responsiveness. The unified group now works and advocates collectively to achieve these goals.

### Fund management policies and procedures

The three main documents describing the AFNS policies and procedures are the Charter, Handbook, and the Manual. The Charter and Handbook were endorsed by the Steering Board on 24 January, and the Manual on 7 April 2023. The Manual provides detailed descriptions of the Fund's policies and procedures.

The fund management policies and procedures for AFNS were established through a detailed and inclusive process that leveraged extensive stakeholder engagement to ensure alignment with humanitarian best practices and the specific needs of the region.

This process was characterised by:

- **Formation of a Working Group:** At the inception of the Fund in 2022, AFNS formed a Fund Management Procedures Working Group comprising 21 NGOs active in northern Syria, including both SNGOs and INGOs. This group was pivotal in providing the initial guidance and framework for AFNS's fund management policies and procedures, including "Allocations and Programming", "Qualification and Financial Management", and "Risk Management and Compliance". The Working Group convened for a series of workshops in December 2022 to offer comprehensive input into the Fund's Manual. These sessions facilitated a collaborative platform for stakeholders to contribute their insights, ensuring the policies and procedures developed were reflective of the ground realities and challenges in humanitarian aid delivery within northern Syria.
- **Consultation and endorsement:** Following these workshops, the draft Manual was

shared for further consultation with the Procedures Working Group in January 2023, demonstrating AFNS's commitment to transparency and inclusivity in its procedures' formulation process. The final version of the Manual incorporated feedback from these consultations.

- **Publication and accessibility:** The endorsed Manual was subsequently published on the AFNS website, making it accessible to all stakeholders and ensuring that the Fund's management policies and procedures are transparent, well-documented, and easily accessible for reference and accountability.

### FMA MOBILISATION

An Adam Smith International Limited (ASI)-led consortium has been contracted since May 2022 by the FCDO to perform the functions of the FMA following a competitive tender process. In 2023, this consortium's contract was extended to May 2025, with a second extension to May 2026 underway by the end of year. The primary reason for these extensions is to enable longer grants to AFNS implementing partners from RA1 onwards.

In 2023, there was extensive activity for recruiting the remaining FMA staff. Over the course of the year, 20 FMA staff were recruited, including 8 field staff based in northern Aleppo and greater Idlib in northwest Syria. Towards the end of 2023, the FMA revised its organisational chart based on lessons learnt and partner feedback. The changes focused mainly on streamlining partner management and bolstering security management and field oversight. Notably, by the end of 2023, over 70% of the FMA team were Syrians,

### Analysis of AFNS governance structures

The International Council for Voluntary Agencies published a report in February 2024 that includes a comparative analysis of the governance models of four pooled funds, including AFNS. The report highlights the following strengths of AFNS governance bodies, contributing to best practices in Country Based Pooled Funds in terms of 'participation', 'project review and selection', 'localisation' and 'collaboration':

- Equal representation of donors, SNGOs, and INGOs, ensuring a 'voice' for all key humanitarian actors in the Steering Board, along with having an Independent Chair with no voting power.
- Access, through the STRCs, to expertise of individuals with Syria experience whether through the FMA or through the Clusters.
- A 'neutral' independent FMA that cannot access grant funding.

### The AFNS Grant Management System (GMS)

The FMA fully configured the GMS in the first quarter of 2023. Since 26 March 2023, organisations have been submitting applications to register with the Fund through the GMS. As of the end of 2023, the FMA is processing applications on an on-going basis. Throughout the year, the FMA worked closely with Fund partners to train them on use of the GMS. The GMS is utilised as a single workflow tool for all activities related to the Fund, including registration, due diligence and capacity assessments, disbursements, narrative, financial and risk reporting, project amendments and more.

providing a deep understanding of local security, political, cultural, and programming contexts. Additionally, about one-third of the FMA team were women, with deliberate efforts made in the second half of the year to increase the recruitment of women. Both measures align with AFNS's commitment to greater localisation and GESI.

Furthermore, policies and procedures for the ASI Türkiye platform, including finance, operations, and Duty of Care (DoC) both inside northwest Syria and Türkiye, were established. These DoC policies and procedures were critical to the FMA's rapid and timely response to the 6 February earthquake. All AFNS staff were accounted for within ten minutes of the earthquake, and ASI facilitated the evacuation of staff to safer areas. The FMA quickly switched to remote working arrangements pending office relocation from a high-rise to an earthquake-resistant building in April.

## COMPLEMENTARITY

AFNS closely coordinated with the SCHF throughout 2023, taking the following steps to harmonise efforts and maximise humanitarian impact in northern Syria:

**Concept paper on complementarity:** A foundational step was the agreement on a concept paper between AFNS and SCHF in May 2023, outlining a framework for ensuring their operations complement each other. This document serves as a crucial guide for both entities, detailing how to achieve a coordinated and harmonised approach to humanitarian response. It was agreed to update this paper with an addendum in December 2023 to further clarify complementarity between both funds.

**Strategic alignment and integrated planning processes:** AFNS aligns its strategic objectives and funding allocations with those identified by the SCHF to ensure complementary rather than duplicative efforts. This alignment is facilitated through regular strategic coordination meetings and integrated planning processes that involve representatives from both funds. These meetings and processes allow for open dialogue on strategic priorities, allocation plans, and operational challenges, incorporating feedback and insights from the SCHF. Additionally, the involvement of Clusters in the strategy design of both funds ensures that the identified priorities are informed by a comprehensive understanding of the humanitarian landscape, further fostering opportunities for complementary action.

# ALLOCATION HISTORY

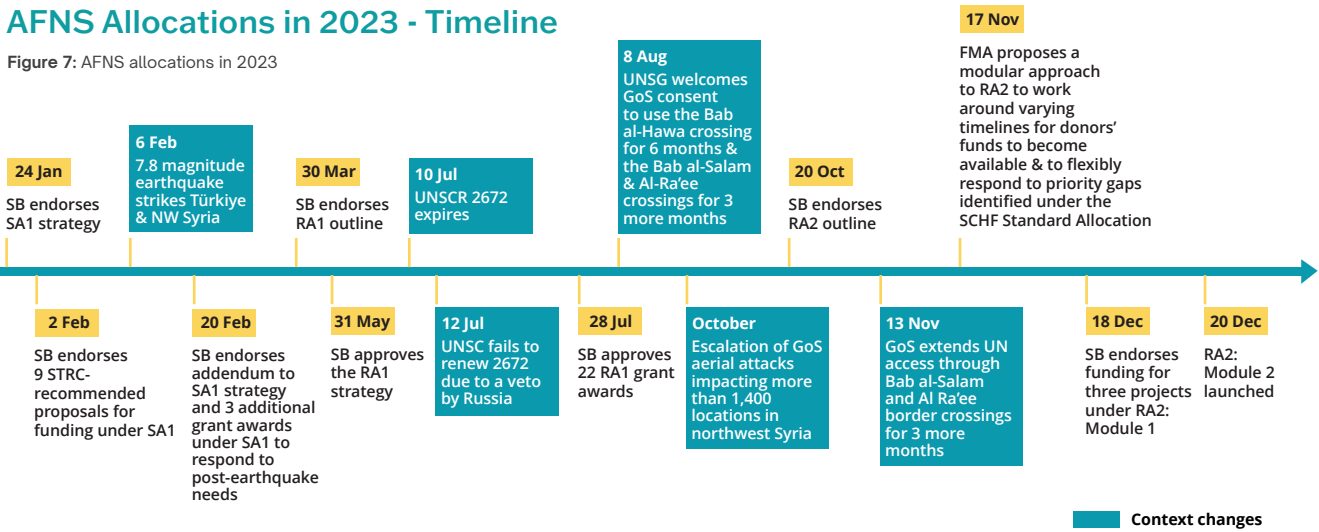
AFNS launched one Special Allocation (SA1), one Regular Allocation (RA1) and two modules of its second Regular Allocation (RA2) totalling US\$78.66 million and committed US\$58.66 million to partners to implement 37 projects under SA1, RA1, and RA2 Module 1 in 2023. The figure below summarises key contextual changes during the year. The FMA adapted its allocations and refreshed contingency planning to respond to these changes.

The Fund’s allocations in 2023 emphasised:

- **Localisation:** AFNS prioritises, capacitates, and funds SNGOs at scale. SNGOs are the backbone of the response in northwest Syria. While INGOs are also eligible for partnership with the Fund, this is only in cases where they can demonstrate a comparative advantage over SNGOs. The Fund delivered on its ambition to direct greater funding to SNGOs, increasing funding from 70% of the SA1 allocation to 88% of the RA1 allocation over the course of 2023.

## AFNS Allocations in 2023 - Timeline

Figure 7: AFNS allocations in 2023



Significant developments included the devastating February earthquakes affecting northwest Syria and southern and central Türkiye, the expiration of the UNSCR 2672, and the emergence of the GoS consent model for UN access in northwest Syria. The figure above depicts the timing of AFNS allocations in 2023. The FMA coordinated the timing of both RAs with SCHF allocations.

FMA expenditure from the establishment of the Fund at the end of 2022 to 31 December 2023 stood at US\$4.56 million, representing 7.7% of the total funding awarded across SA1, RA1 and RA2 Module 1 (US\$58.66 million). It is important to note that FMA expenditure as reported is comprehensive and entails **all** costs associated with the management of the pooled fund, **including** staff, accommodation, travel, GMS, website, communications, research, fund audit,<sup>1</sup> external evaluation, contract management costs and overheads.

Seven out of 11 of the SA1 implementing partners and 19 out of 22 RA1 implementing partners were SNGOs. From RA1 onwards, the FMA made it mandatory for international implementing partners applying for funding in partnership with local partners to equitably share overheads. Additionally, the FMA specified a separate budget line in each partner’s budget for capacity strengthening activities. Allocation strategies from RA1 onwards have also been informed by community consultations with affected populations inside northwest Syria to ensure they are relevant.

- **Longer-term commitment:** 26 of the 37 grants awarded in 2023 were for 12 months or longer, enabling more comprehensive and sustained support for those affected. The extension of the FMA contract in August 2023 enabled 18-month-long grants under RA2.

<sup>1</sup> Excluding costs of individual grant audits conducted by independent third-party auditors.

"The Funds' strategic value was particularly evident since the majority of the assistance was localised with an unparalleled 75% of all funding allocated to local organisations. Support to local and national responders is essential for the Netherlands to assist the most vulnerable because of their presence on the ground before, during and after a crisis and their knowledge and insight into the specific context".

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ), Netherlands

- **Integrated programming:** AFNS adopts a holistic approach by integrating various sectors in its programming. This ensures a comprehensive response that addresses a broad spectrum of interrelated humanitarian needs in a cost-effective manner, vital in the context of declining donor funding for northwest Syria. AFNS encourages partners to collaborate with smaller sub-partners and submit proposals that cover multiple humanitarian sectors. This enhances coordination at ground level and amplifies the impact of AFNS projects.

- **Flexibility:** The Fund's agility was evident in the rapid adaptation of SA1 to meet critical needs in the aftermath of the devastating February earthquakes through modifications to 9 recently awarded projects and funding

to 3 additional projects. The first of these projects began within 11 days of the earthquakes. The Fund's flexibility was further enhanced by adopting a modular approach to allocations for the first time under RA2. This enabled the second RA to be launched in phases depending on the availability of funding, thereby working around the constraints posed by the different times at which donors contribute to the Fund. The utility of the modular approach is showcased in the rapid execution of Module 1 of RA2, whereby funding was directed, at the request of SCHF, to 3 projects and partners that could not be funded under the SCHF's Standard Allocation at the start of December 2023 to meet critical lifesaving needs, including ahead of the harsh winter months.

Figure 8: WATAN staff accept blood donation from a member of the community (Photo credit: WATAN)



## SPECIAL ALLOCATION 1

The SA1 strategy initially comprised of three priority areas: 1) Multipurpose Cash; 2) Health, Nutrition and WASH, and 3) Education and Child Protection. It was conducted as a limited competition with 14 out of 15 partners “qualified” for funding after successfully clearing the Fund’s Due Diligence and Capacity Assessment (DDCA) process. Nine proposals, recommended for funding by the STRC, were endorsed by the Steering Board at the start of February.

Following the 6 February earthquake, a fourth priority area was rapidly added to SA1: *Additional Emergency Lifesaving Assistance*. The Fund redirected US\$24 million initially allocated for SA1 and programmed an additional US\$4 million to provide crucial support for the earthquake response. The 9 recommended proposals were adapted by partners to respond to needs in the aftermath of the earthquake and 3 additional proposals were funded through SA1. A total of 12 projects through 11 implementing partners were, therefore, financed under the US\$28.1 million SA1.

AFNS demonstrated a rapid and proactive response to address post-earthquake needs and gaps, highlighting the dedication of its donors and Steering Board to deliver humanitarian aid that is timely, people-centred, and responsive to demand.

## Innovating to address blood supply needs following the 2023 earthquake

Following the February 2023 earthquakes, the demand for blood products in northwest Syria increased by 20%. The lack of a centralised facility to test, track, and distribute blood products resulted in shortages in areas with critical needs. In response, AFNS provided WATAN, one of its Syrian implementing partners, with a US\$1.3 million grant to establish a centralised blood bank.

This network connects 9 blood banks with 56 hospitals and health facilities in northwest Syria. WATAN supplied blood to over 1,250 patients injured in the earthquakes and provided hospitals with 5,000 blood bags every month. This supported transfusions for 8,541 patients suffering from massive blood loss.

All Health Cluster partners were invited to register their blood products with the network, enhancing its effectiveness and durability. Additionally, WATAN procured 4 mobile blood banks using AFNS funding, aiming to bolster future emergency responses and address blood donor fatigue. The centralised blood bank offers all participants in the supply chain access to real-time information about the availability of blood products, ensuring timely and efficient distribution to meet urgent needs.

"The Fund demonstrated effective flexibility and coordination in adapting its first Special Allocation to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance across multiple sectors. Despite facing challenges around... temporary team displacement, the Fund was able to quickly allocate additional funding and adjust project design and focus to address earthquake needs".

UK Foreign,  
Commonwealth and  
Development Office  
(FCDO)

## REGULAR ALLOCATION 1

Integrated programming is a key priority for AFNS to enable greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness in a context of declining funding for northwest Syria. The RA1 outline was approved by the Steering Board on 30 March 2023, spanning the following six priority areas: 1) Shelter, Non-Food Items (NFI) and WASH; 2) Early Recovery, (urban) Livelihoods and WASH; 3) Health, Nutrition and WASH; 4) Food Security and (rural) Livelihoods; 5) Education, Child Protection and WASH; and 6) Protection, Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence.

The strategy was informed by 41 community consultations including women and youth groups. A total of 22 projects were funded through this allocation totalling US\$28.1 million.

RA1 continued to balance lifesaving humanitarian assistance along with assistance focused on resilience and early recovery, as showcased in the three case studies below.

### Keeping warm in the winter: Lifesaving assistance in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps

Abu Ahmed, originally from Homs, saw his life turned upside down by the war in Syria. Forced to flee his home in 2014, he and his family moved across Syria, finally settling in a tent in Al-Naeemiyah Camp in Dana, northern Idlib. The tent offers little protection from the



Figure 9: Keeping warm with AFNS support in IDP camps (Photo credit: HiHFAD)

cold weather for Abu Ahmed's four young children. "During the winter, the cold seeps into our bones. We look for straw, trash, and plastic bags to burn to keep warm," he says, fearing the loss of one of his children to the cold.

Hand in Hand for Aid and Development (HiHFAD) provided winter cash assistance to families residing in IDP camps through an RA1 project. Each of 2,043 families received US\$150, helping 9,123 men, women, and children living in these camps stay warm in the harsh winter months.

Among the camps that benefited from this project is Al-Naeemiyah Camp. With the



Figure 10: RA1 beneficiaries Abu Ahmed with his children (Photo credit: HiHFAD)



Figure 11: RA1 beneficiary Muhammad  
(Photo credit: Orange & WHH)

assistance, Abu Ahmed was able to buy wood and suitable heating materials to keep his family warm. "I thank God this winter cash assistance came at the right time," he says.

### Boosting livelihoods & resilience in northwest Syria: Muhammad's story

Muhammad, a farmer from Azaz district in northern Aleppo, supports his six children along with his sister's three children. Muhammad lost his leg during the war in 2014, and the conflict caused significant damage to his land, making cultivation immensely challenging. The INGO Welthungerhilfe (WHH), in partnership with SNGO Orange, supported 540 farmers in northwest Syria through a 12-month, US\$1.4 million project funded under RA1. The project provided technical training on modern farming methods and financial support for the purchase of fertilisers and pesticides. Muhammad was one of 175 beneficiaries in his village who

received a US \$300 voucher, which he used to cultivate beans on his land.

"The income I earned helped me meet the needs of my family and to plant summer crops," Muhammad notes. The project enabled forward planning and will help Muhammad increase his farm's output in a more sustainable way in future.

### The road to recovery: Rehabilitation of the Qah-Atmeh road

Abdulrahman is an ambulance driver from Dana in Idlib. The poor condition of the Qah-Atmeh road posed major challenges for him in quickly and safely transporting patients to hospitals and clinics for treatment. Abdulrahman notes, "Speed is crucial in my job, but the potholes on Qah-Atmeh road forced me to drive slowly, causing delay and additional pain to patients".



Figure 12: RA1 beneficiary Muhammad's harvest  
(Photo credit: Orange & WHH)



Figure 13: The recently repaired Qat-Atmeh road (Photo credit: BINAA)

Years of conflict, combined with recent floods and sewage runoff damage from nearby IDP camps, had left Qah-Atmeh road dangerously dilapidated, limiting the mobility of local populations and their access to key health services. AFNS awarded a US\$1.9 million grant focused on Early Recovery, Livelihoods, and WASH through its first RA in 2023 to the SNGO BINAA Organisation for Development. This grant covered repairs to the 3-kilometer Qah-Atmeh road, one of the only two roads connecting the northern and southern

regions of northwest Syria.

The newly renovated road serves 100,000 people, including 50,000 IDPs, living in the three villages and 25 IDP camps around the road, connecting them to seven major medical facilities.

For Abdulrahman, the road has profoundly improved his ability to do his work. Indeed, the road is vital to supporting the livelihoods of many in the area.



Figure 14: RA1 beneficiary Abdulrahman at work on the Qat-Atmeh road (Photo credit: BINAA)

## REGULAR ALLOCATION 2

RA2 spans 2 envelopes. Envelope 1 focuses on enhancing medium to long-term impact and filling systemic gaps in the response through integrated programming, localisation, and innovative approaches. Envelope 2 aims to fill immediate gaps in the current response by offering complementary lifesaving and life-sustaining assistance, including an emergency preparedness component, accounting for the region's increasing volatility.

RA2 has a maximum duration for projects set at 18 months, reflecting the Fund's dedication to multi-year funding. For the first time, it will accept proposals for activities in the Ras-al-Ain – Tal Abyad (RAATA) corridor. RA2 also represents the FMA's first use of the modular approach to an allocation (endorsed by the Steering Board on 17 November). This approach enables an allocation to be launched in phases, allowing for flexibility in programming while working around constraints posed by the different times at which donors contribute to the Fund. Unlike in previous allocations, the FMA provided detailed guidance, including examples, on integrated programming across target sectors and how to make project activities more gender-responsive to partners as part of the RA2 strategy. RA2 comprises of three modules spanning Envelopes 1 and 2.

- **Module 1:** Extends to projects that the SCHF could not fund through its Standard Allocation and requested AFNS to consider funding. Given the proposed projects' alignment with the RA2 strategy and following scoring by the STRC, 3 projects (amounting to US\$2.43 million) were recommended to and endorsed for funding by the Steering Board on 18 December. All 3 projects included winterisation components, providing timely assistance to affected populations in the winter months.

- **Module 2:** Projected at US\$20 million, was launched on 20 December 2023 following Steering Board approval. It forms the bulk of RA2. Qualified partners will submit proposals at the end of January 2024, and the FMA will recommend proposals for Steering Board endorsement in February 2024.

- **Module 3:** Projected at US\$2 to 5 million, is designed to pilot area-based approaches in the second half of 2024.

### Life-saving assistance: Complementing the SCHF

At the age of 75, Maryam is the sole caretaker of her husband and two grandchildren. Her husband is visually impaired following an illness. Along with the family's multiple



Figure 15: RA2 Module 1 beneficiary Maryam with her grandchildren (Photo credit: WHH)

displacements due to the conflict, they face considerable financial difficulties.

AFNS awarded a US\$973,000 grant under Module 1 of its second Regular Allocation to the INGO WHH to implement a multipurpose cash assistance project. This project, which SCHF could not fund through its Standard Allocation, delivers life-saving support to local populations, including in Raju in Afrin where Maryam and her family reside.

Maryam’s family is one of 500 of the most vulnerable families who will receive a monthly amount of US\$100 over eight

rounds to help them navigate economic shocks in their day-to-day life.

Maryam allocates up to US\$20 each month for medicine, US\$10 for access to water, and the rest to pay off her debts to local shops and to buy basic food items, and occasionally fruits and meat to nourish her family. Maryam notes that she wants “to live a decent life like any other family” and that this assistance has been a “lifeline” that has restored a sense of normalcy and dignity to her, and her family’s lives.



Figure 16: RA2 Module 1 beneficiary Maryam with her husband (Photo credit: WHH)

## OTHER PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

### BROAD PARTNER BASE

A total of 52 partners were registered as “qualified” partners of the AFNS during the year, with Partnership Framework Agreements (PFAs) signed with 31 of these. As of the end of 2023, the FMA is processing applications on an ongoing basis. Notably, 39 or 75% of these partners are SNGOs, showcasing the Fund’s ambition to make greater and higher quality funding available to local actors.

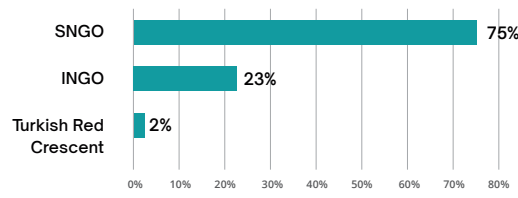


Figure 17: AFNS qualified partners (Type)

### PARTNER CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

The FMA provide financial and technical advice to AFNS partners during implementation to strengthen partner capacity. Additionally, it strengthens partner capacity through:

- **Special Conditions:** Attached to PFAs with partners, these specify areas identified through Capacity Assessments (CAs) where capacity needs to be strengthened to qualify for higher levels of funding. Partners establish a time-bound capacity strengthening plan to address these Special Conditions. The FMA allows for dedicated budgets of up to US\$10,000 in grant awards to finance these capacity strengthening investments. This approach is designed to give partners agency in the strengthening of their capabilities and provides a clear incentive to achieve tangible enhancements. A total of 282 Special Conditions have been attached to the PFAs signed with qualified partners (see graph opposite).

During 2023, approximately US\$235,500 was used, almost exclusively by the Fund’s SNGO partners, to address these Special Conditions. This approach was developed based on the lesson that more traditional supply-driven/training approaches to capacity building have generally failed to deliver genuine improvements in most NGOs for more than a decade.

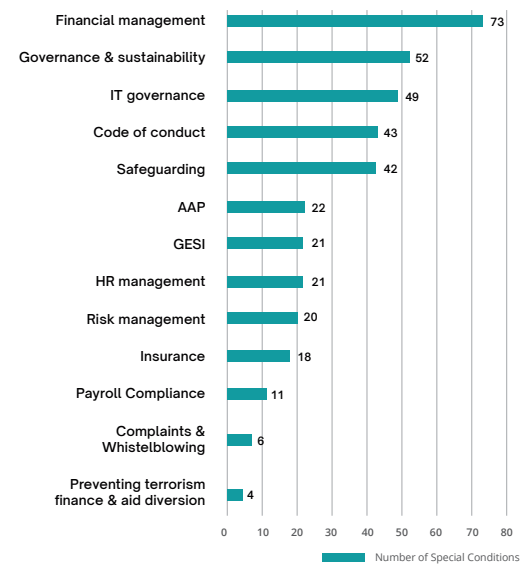


Figure 18: Special Conditions added to PFAs signed in 2023 by category

"Partners... have praised AFNS's early assistance during allocations ... Small AFNS-funded NGOs have valued support on women's protection, MEL, data follow-up, and safeguarding, seeing these processes as systematic capacity building"

- IOD PARC, AFNS External Evaluation Report, 2024

**\$235,515**

spent by AFNS SA1 and RA1 implementing partners for capacity strengthening

- **Safeguarding workshops and peer-to-peer learning events:** Conducted at regular intervals to share best practices on critical aspects of programming, delivery and risk management. A total of 11 workshops were led by the Fund’s Safeguarding Lead, with the Safeguarding Focal Points from implementing partners’ organisations in 2023.

- **Learning and Reflection workshops:** Facilitated by the Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) provider to advise on improvements to programming. Twenty-two workshops were held with SA1 and RA1 partners in 2023 (See page 27 for more detail).

## LOCALISATION

AFNS emphasises localisation in its governance structures, strategies, partnerships and programming. See figure below for more details.



Figure 19: AFNS's emphasis on localisation

"It is fair to conclude that AFNS's initiatives have undoubtedly strengthened the role of local and national NGOs"

- IOD PARC, AFNS External Evaluation Report, 2024

Significantly, in 2023, the FMA engaged external consultants (the Share Trust team) to help develop the Fund's Localisation Strategy. The FMA adopted a collaborative approach to the development and validation of the strategy, from the outset, through the establishment of a Localisation Working Group (LWG). This 15-member group comprised a cross-section of key stakeholders from across the Syrian humanitarian response, including SNGOs, INGOs, donors, the UN, and FMA staff. The FMA held 2 extensive meetings with the LWG on the draft strategy in October 2023. This group's voices and perspectives are reflected in the final strategy, which sets the strategic direction for the Fund and strengthens its identity as a complementary mechanism to the SCHF.

## GENDER EQUALITY & SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

As noted on page 6, AFNS assisted 1.28 million women and girls and 960,000 persons with disabilities (PWDs) in 2023 across SA1, RA1, and RA2 Module 1. Since RA1, the FMA has been consulting women, girls, PWDs, the elderly, and IDPs inside northwest Syria, for the development of AFNS's allocation strategies.

AFNS is committed to greater female representation in its own governance bodies, with 56% of the AFNS Steering Board reconstituted at the end of 2023 being female. As noted on page 9, since March 2023, the AFNS Steering Board is also advised by a WAG, consisting of women working in the humanitarian response in Syria and Türkiye. This group, later merged with the HLG WAG, conducts research into the specific needs of Syrian women and girls and presents findings to the Steering Board to inform allocation strategies and funding decisions. As noted on page 11, one-third of the FMA team comprises of women, with a commitment to increase this number in 2024, particularly in the FMA's Partnerships and Delivery Unit (PDU).

The FMA developed the AFNS GESI strategy in July, which was approved by the Steering Board in August 2023. The strategy was informed by the Core Humanitarian Standard and global gender frameworks, along with a recent gender analysis conducted by UN Women following the February earthquakes. The AFNS GESI strategy outlines how GESI should be embedded in the Fund's operations and partners' programming to make the northwest Syria humanitarian response more gender responsive and gender transformative.

- Due Diligence and Capacity Assessment (DDCA):** Prospective qualified partners are assessed by the FMA for their commitment to GESI in their policies and programming.

- Allocation strategy design:** The FMA consults with marginalised groups to identify and develop priority intervention areas.

- **Proposal development:** Partners are required to show that they have consulted with women, girls and marginalised groups at the local level in the development of project activities and commit to reaching beneficiaries from marginalised groups.
- **Proposal review:** The STRC evaluates proposal strengths including on GESI.
- **Reporting:** Partners are required to disaggregate reporting on impact and reach by gender and other marginalised groups.
- **Third Party Monitoring (TPM):** The Fund’s TPM analytical framework includes a specific focus on access and inclusion, assessing whether vulnerable groups are being targeted and can access services, and to what extent the needs of vulnerable groups (women, PWDs and others) have been considered in the project activities. Subsequent TPM learning and reflection workshops explicitly address these with implementing partners, and action points are followed up on by the FMA.

See below a story showcasing how GESI is prioritised by AFNS implementing partners in AFNS-supported projects.

### Supporting women’s livelihoods: Khadouj’s story

Khadouj is a farmer and the primary breadwinner for her three sons and two daughters, following the death of her husband eight years ago.

AFNS awarded a grant of US\$954,000 in 2023, under its first RA, to the SNGO ONSUR



Figure 21: Khadouj with ONSUR staff  
(Photo credit: ONSUR)

for an innovative project that supported wheat farmers, flour millers, and bakeries, across the wheat value chain to provide bread to IDPs in Idlib. The project had an integrated focus on the interlinked Food Security, Livelihoods, and Nutrition sectors.

The design of the project considered the gendered dynamics of economic insecurity and included women-headed households, divorcees, and survivors of gender-based violence amongst its beneficiaries. Khadouj was one of 153 women from whom ONSUR purchased wheat for onward distribution to flour millers and bakers. Khadouj used the US\$405 she earned from selling a ton of wheat to meet immediate expenses and invest in essential materials for the next harvest. “I am deeply grateful for this project. It has allowed us to return to cultivating our land,” Khadouj notes.



Figure 20:  
RA1 beneficiary Khadouj  
(Photo credit: ONSUR)



**Figure 22:** ONSUR staff delivering bread baked with wheat purchased from farmers to a female beneficiary in an IDP camp (Photo credit: ONSUR)

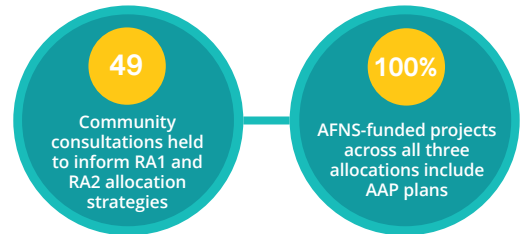
ONSUR then distributed bread, made from wheat harvested by Khadouj and others to 35,492 beneficiaries in IDP camps, 17,524 (or 49%) of whom were women and girls.



## ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS (AAP)

The Accountability to Affected Populations and Community Engagement (AAPCE) Strategy was developed by the FMA in August 2023 in consultation with AFNS partners, stakeholders, and the inter-agency AAP Taskforce. This strategy ensures that AFNS provides aid that is accountable to affected populations and involves communities in the design and implementation of response efforts. Furthermore, it encourages the adoption of AAPCE principles and practices among AFNS partners. AAPCE is prioritised in AFNS partnerships and programming as follows:

- **Due Diligence and Capacity Assessment (DDCA):** The partner eligibility and selection process incorporate AAPCE questions in the assessment templates. This supports AFNS in the evaluation of accountability capacity gaps and creating capacity strengthening plans to support implementing partners to improve their partners' capacity performance ratings.



- **Allocations:** Community consultation sessions are conducted to collect key insights and fill knowledge gaps. This information guides and fine-tunes each allocation strategy, ensuring alignment with the specific needs and priorities of the communities.

- **Project proposals:** Proposals must include AAP plans supported by comprehensive needs assessments. These assessments highlight the target community's needs, priorities, and preferences, disaggregated by age, gender, disability, and other vulnerabilities.

- **Implementation:** Partners must establish or adapt community committees in the management of AFNS-funded projects.

- **Monitoring:** TPM and field monitoring includes field visits and consultations with communities to evaluate the quality of projects and partner performance.



Figure 23: RA1 beneficiary Rehab  
(Photo credit: IYD)

- **Feedback and complaints mechanisms:** Partners establish or strengthen inclusive, safe, accessible, and responsive mechanisms for receiving and handling community feedback and complaints. The Fund also establishes or strengthens safe and confidential feedback and complaints channels accessible to staff, partners and communities to encourage whistleblowing and reporting of concerns of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment.

### Community-led Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs): Rehab's story

Women-led households in northwest Syria face major financial vulnerabilities due to the ongoing conflict, displacement, limited livelihood opportunities, and conservative social norms and mobility. IYD, an AFNS SNGO partner, is supporting access to finance for such women via the setup of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) through a US\$2 million grant awarded under RA1. These 15 to 20-member VSLAs showcase community participation in the design and implementation of projects, a critical aspect of AAP, with community members collectively setting the rules relating to the frequency and amount of savings to be deposited by each member of the association along with when and how members can access these savings.

Thirty-six-year-old Rehab is a divorcee who learnt about these VSLAs from a friend who suggested she join one to restart her hairdressing business, which she had before

the conflict, to support herself and her elderly mother. Rehab made small payments into the saving fund at regular intervals. "When it was my turn, I got US\$60 and invested the amount in buying supplies for my beauty salon and setting aside a room in my home for it," she said. This access to finance has enabled Rehab to relaunch her business, providing some economic security moving forward.

## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The FMA shared the AFNS Research Strategy with the Steering Board at the end of March 2023. The strategy defines AFNS's approach to deliver macro-level analyses of humanitarian needs to inform AFNS's medium and long-term purpose and direction, followed by identifying micro-level priority areas for innovative interventions that bridge the gap between humanitarian needs and recovery efforts.

The Fund's research strategy covers seven research areas:

- **Long-term vision for Syria:** To explore short-, medium- and long-term scenarios and strategies for a sustainable recovery, peacebuilding and improved social cohesion in the northwest of Syria.
- **Analysis of drivers of humanitarian need:** To investigate root causes of the protracted crisis at a macro level.
- **Better define key terms:** To contribute to a better understanding of localisation,

resilience, wellbeing, and social cohesion in the context of the protracted crisis in Syria and to identify local actors and systems that the Fund can support in these areas.

- **Research on humanitarian needs, risks, and resilience factors:** To deepen the understanding of the factors that contribute to ongoing instability and humanitarian crises in northwest Syria.
- **Contextual analysis:** To conduct localised, in-depth studies of individual communities, programmatic sectors, and population groups.
- **Rapid analysis of emerging shifts:** To monitor changes in the region to inform investments, strategy, and donor engagement.
- **Innovative use of technology:** To assess the role of technology in addressing humanitarian and recovery challenges, identifying opportunities for strategic investments, particularly, to investigate the potential of innovative technologies to improve access to financial services and contribute to economic recovery.

The Fund commissioned the following research studies in 2023 (available on the AFNS website):

- **"Lessons Learned: A northern Syria earthquake assessment and response analysis":** Work on this report commenced

immediately post-earthquake and informed the RA1 strategy. It was the first report to provide a comprehensive overview of the emergent needs and lessons learned from the disaster response. Widely recognised and referenced, this report has been cited in several research papers and acknowledged by the inter-agency Assessment and Analysis Working Group as one of the most informative reports for shaping further research and response strategies.

- **"Systemic Resilience in Practice: Opportunities to support area-based, community-level resilience mechanisms and conflict-sensitive programming in northern Syria":** Focused on sustainable actions during the protracted crisis, this study informed RA2, particularly the Area-Based Approach, by providing insights for long-term resilience building in conflict affected areas.

- **"Alternative opportunities for money transfers, including blockchain-based and mobile money solutions in northern Syria":** A study exploring innovative money transfer methods specific to the northern Syria context. Conducted in collaboration with several key Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) actors, including the inter-Cluster Cash Working Group, this report offered detailed analysis and recommendations for adopting new financial technologies in humanitarian settings.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

The Fund's governance ensures that affected populations are represented while giving donors the assurance that their funds are used appropriately. Preventing the misuse of funds is a top priority for AFNS. The AFNS's banking arrangements and payments processes comply with international sanctions and counter terrorist financing regulations, adhering to the standards for Fund and grant-level monitoring detailed in the AFNS Manual. The Fund's accountability and risk management framework is premised on:

### PARTNER QUALIFICATION

The FMA adopts a "quality at entry" approach to partner management, by deploying robust DDCA processes to assess the partner's current capacity and its potential, as well as the main areas for improvement. Through implementation, the FMA continuously assesses partner performance and works with them to review their progress in implementing capacity enhancements. Partners that have successfully completed the Fund's qualification process are eligible to submit proposals in relation to each allocation. During the qualification process, the FMA:

- Vets organisations and key individuals on NAVEX Global against various UK, US, EU and UN sanction lists.
- Assesses and verifies capacity self-assessments (submitted on the GMS) through a desk review of evidence provided by applicants, interviews with members of their staff and visits to applicants' offices. Partner capacity is assessed in the following areas: governance, risk management and compliance, financial management, procurement, people management, project management, organisational sustainability, and their commitment to safeguarding, IT and cyber security, AAP, GESI and localisation.
- Obtains reference checks from SCHF, donors, and large NGOs.
- Assigns a score to each applicant based on Capacity Assessment (CA) findings. Applicants scoring 50% or above complete the qualification process by signing a PFA and

the AFNS Code of Conduct. The CA scores determine the grant ceiling and monitoring regime applicable to the partner.

### GRANT IMPLEMENTATION

- **Risk-aligned disbursement:** The FMA ensures that all grant payment terms, and disbursement cycles reflect the initial expenditure forecast and the partner's risk profile. Low-risk partners may receive disbursements in fewer, larger tranches compared to riskier partners. The FMA monitors budget execution carefully and amends disbursement schedules if budget execution significantly deviates from plan.

- **Dedicated grant and relationship management:** Each partner is assigned a single focal point from the FMA's PDU to manage the relationship. The focal point provides the partner with day-to-day support and liaises with the FMA's Field Team daily to collate any findings and recommendations arising from field visits to office and activity locations inside Syria.

- **Systematic reporting and feedback:** The FMA requires narrative and financial reporting from implementing partners. This includes inception, delivery (quarterly) and completion reporting to communicate progress, risks, challenges, and impact. The FMA reviews and provides feedback on these reports. Financial reports are required prior to disbursement. These are reviewed by the FMA and, where the partner's spending is substantially off-track, disbursements are reduced or deferred.

- **Robust incident reporting and investigation protocols:** The FMA has clear guidance for partners to report safeguarding and aid diversion allegations or incidents. The FMA Leadership Team, Safeguarding Lead, and Aid Diversion Coordinator support and oversee investigations. The FMA is committed to addressing concerns around fraud, diversion, or misappropriation and informs Steering Board members about ongoing cases.

- **Continuous partner performance assessment:** During implementation, the FMA periodically re-evaluates partner

"AFNS staff and partners described the Due Diligence and Capacity Assessment (DDCA) process as lengthy... but were unanimously convinced of its relevance and effectiveness"

- IOD PARC, AFNS External Evaluation Report, 2024

performance using a performance scorecard. These scores inform ongoing updates to the partner's capacity rating, potentially leading to adjustments in the grant value ceilings and monitoring regimes applied to them.

## MONITORING

- **Data Quality Inspection (DQI):** The FMA conducts quarterly data quality inspections through its MREL Unit when partners submit data on the GMS to report against the Results Framework. These assessments are especially crucial for partners with lower capacity scores. A total of 62 DQIs were completed (33 for SA1 and 29 for RA1 projects) in the reporting year.
- **Data Quality Assessment (DQA):** The FMA conducts additional data quality assessments, for longer grants awarded to partners with lower capacity scores, through its TPM provider. The TPM checks the integrity, validity, timeliness, precision, and reliability of a sample of partners' raw data. One DQA of an SA1 partner was completed during the reporting period.
- **Field and spot-checks:** The Field Team conducts regular visits to project sites. The FMA verifies the integrity of their field reports using Mobile Data Capture technology (timestamps, GPS coordinates, and photographs). The field data is analysed by the FMA. A total of 136 field visits (91 for SA1 and 45 for RA1) were conducted in the reporting period.
- **Third party monitoring (TPM):** During the year, the FMA designed a rigorous TPM process with the Fund's TPM provider. The FMA mandates a minimum of one TPM visit per grant even for low-risk partners. TPM processes culminate in a Learning and Reflection Workshop facilitated by the TPM provider and attended by the FMA and partner

staff. These workshops are highly valued by the Fund's partners, especially SNGOs, for their focus on learning and improvement (evidenced by TPM feedback surveys completed by partners at the end of each visit). A total of 22 TPMs were completed in the reporting year (12 for SA1 and 10 for RA1).

## EXTERNAL AUDITS

- **Project audits:** An external audit is conducted for each grant to provide independent assurance on the use of funds and to identify financial and operational weaknesses with recommendations for improvement. Some larger, high-risk grants will also be subject to interim audits. The FMA completed the procurement process for audit firms between September and November 2023, selecting two reputable firms from a total of seven applicants. Grant audits will commence in 2024, starting with completed SA1 grants.
- **Fund audits:** The Fund is to be externally audited annually by an international firm to ensure overall compliance and financial integrity. During the reporting year, the FMA contracted auditors to complete the Fund-level audit for 2022 to 2023. The auditors completed the audit and issued a "clean" audit report for the Fund in September 2023.
- **External evaluation:** The frequency of these is determined by the Chair to the Steering Board in conjunction with the Board (per the AFNS Manual). The independent evaluator is selected through a competitive process based on rigorous criteria. The evaluation assesses the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, impact, and sustainability of the Fund, aligning with the principles outlined in the AFNS Charter. The FMA initiated the procurement of the evaluator in November 2023 with a submission deadline of January 2024.

## COMMUNICATION

### STEERING BOARD COMMUNICATION

Eight Steering Board meetings were held in 2023. The FMA also developed and shared regular Situation Reports (SitReps) to keep Board members informed between the meetings. This practice began following the February earthquakes and has continued since. A total of 21 SitReps were shared with Steering Board members and Donor Observers.

### EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The FMA undertook the following activities to externally communicate progress and developments on the Fund in 2023:

- Launched the AFNS website on 1 March 2023, followed by an Arabic version of the

website on 14 August 2023. A total of 4,400 users accessed the AFNS Website between January and December 2023.

- Developed multiple Progress and Allocation Overview dashboards, populated using data from the GMS and accessible on the AFNS website, to identify gaps and analyse the contribution of AFNS-funded projects to the humanitarian response in northwest Syria.

- Attended two Townhall Meetings organised with the northwest Syria (NWS) NGO Forum in March and May 2023 to disseminate information regarding the Fund's governance, policies, procedures and allocations to local organisations and partners.

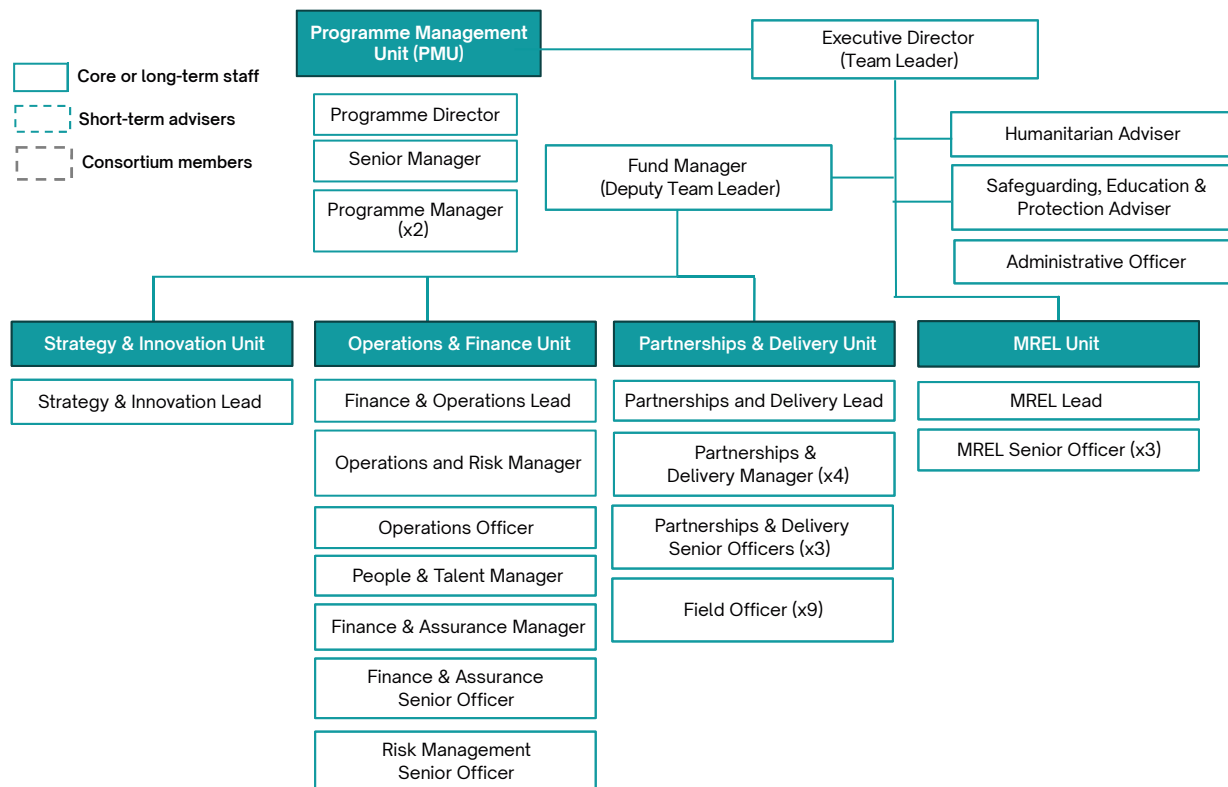
- Developed a newsletter for partners to share Fund progress and updates.

# ANNEXES

## AFNS STEERING BOARD MEMBERSHIP IN 2023

Stakeholder	Organisation
Chair	Independent
Donor	UK
Donor	USA
Donor	Germany/ France
Syrian NGO	Mercy Without Limits (MWL)
Syrian NGO	Physicians Across Continents (PAC)
Syrian NGO	Violet
International NGO	International Rescue Committee (IRC)
International NGO	People in Need (PIN)
International NGO	Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)

## FUND MANAGEMENT AGENT (FMA): ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



Short-term technical experts and advisers (e.g., communications, research, GESI, security, education, nutrition, protection cash etc.)

## AFNS PARTNERS

Name	Type
1. Equity and Empowerment	SNGO
2. Human Appeal	INGO
3. MIDMAR Organization	SNGO
4. SYCAC	SNGO
5. White Helmets	SNGO
6. Women Now	SNGO
7. Sened Organisation	SNGO
8. MedGlobal	SNGO
9. Elaf for Relief and Development	SNGO
10. International Humanitarian relief (IHR)	SNGO
11. White Hands	SNGO
12. Syrian American Medical Society Foundation (SAMS)	INGO
13. Social Development International (SDI)	SNGO
14. Olive Branch	SNGO
15. World Vision	INGO
16. Syria Relief and Development (SRD)	SNGO
17. INSAN Charity Organization	SNGO
18. Global Communities	INGO
19. Relief International	INGO
20. ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLDWIDE	INGO
21. Shafak Organisation	SNGO
22. Hand in Hand for Aid and Development (HiHFAD)	SNGO
23. Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU)	SNGO
24. Bonyan	SNGO
25. SARD	SNGO
26. ATAA Humanitarian Relief Organisation	SNGO
27. Nasaem Khair Organisation (NKO)	SNGO
28. Physicians Across Continents (PAC)	SNGO
29. Al-Sham Humanitarian Foundation	SNGO
30. Woman Support Association (WSA)	SNGO
31. Ghiras Al-Nahda	SNGO
32. BAHAR	SNGO
33. ONSUR	SNGO
34. BINAA for Development	SNGO
35. The MENTOR Initiative	INGO
36. Ihsan Relief and Development	SNGO
37. Sadad	SNGO
38. Action for Humanity / Syria Relief	SNGO
39. Violet	SNGO
40. Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations (UOSSM)	INGO
41. Orange	SNGO
42. IYD	SNGO
43. Muzun for Humanitarian and Development	SNGO
44. Mercy Without Limits (MWL)	SNGO
45. Turkish Red Crescent	RCMO
46. Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (WHH)	INGO
47. Takaful Al Sham (TAS)	SNGO
48. People in Need (PIN)	INGO
49. WATAN	SNGO
50. CARE Türkiye	INGO
51. Independent Doctors Association (IDA)	SNGO
52. GOAL	INGO



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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