

AFS Emergency Response Framework – Guidance Note

Date: 10 November 2025

Introduction and Purpose

The Aid Fund for Syria (AFS) was established to combine lifesaving humanitarian action with recovery and resilience-building across Syria. Within its [Fund Strategy 2025–2030](#), Emergency Preparedness and Response is highlighted as part of the Fund’s first pillar, *Integration & Synergy – Bridging Aid and Recovery*. This reflects the recognition that timely crisis response is essential to safeguard lives and to ensure that humanitarian assistance meaningfully supports broader recovery outcomes.

This approach has been informed by international best practices, including lessons from Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs) under UN-OCHA and the Start Fund’s rapid response and anticipatory activation windows.

Objective

The objective of this guidance is to provide the Steering Board (SB), Fund Management Agent (FMA), donors, and Fund Partners with a clear and common framework for identifying emergencies that may trigger the activation of an emergency response. By establishing agreed thresholds and steps, AFS ensures that decisions are timely and proportionate. The guidance also aims to strengthen accountability and transparency by documenting the basis for each emergency declaration, thereby reinforcing donor confidence and alignment with the Fund’s commitment to principled humanitarian action.

Principles

The process for identifying and declaring an emergency for AFS response is guided by the following principles:

- **Speed with rigour:** Emergency decisions must be taken quickly but based on verifiable evidence.
- **Alignment with AFS Strategy:** Emergency actions should directly support the broader aim of bridging humanitarian relief with early recovery and resilience.
- **Do no harm and conflict sensitivity:** Decisions must not exacerbate community tensions or undermine recovery processes.
- **Localisation and inclusion:** Syrian civil society and local actors play a central role in contextual awareness and alerts, ensuring that early signals of crises are captured from the ground.
- **Complementarity:** Emergency response is not a substitute for other actors but fills critical gaps where speed and flexibility are required, consistent with the Fund’s Nexus role.
- **Coordination:** AFS emergency response processes will be closely aligned with the Ministry of Emergencies and Disaster and Management (MEDM), Sectors, NGO Forum, and other donors/ funding mechanisms to ensure complementarity, avoid duplication, and reinforce collective coordination structures.

Step-by-Step Process

The Emergency Response Framework follows a structured pathway that links early signals with a formal SB decision to determine that emergency thresholds are met, triggering allocation of funding. This process applies equally to rapid-onset shocks, such as earthquakes or sudden displacement, and to slow-onset crises, such as drought, disease outbreaks, or conflict, which may take months to materialise. Post-activation monitoring forms an integral part of this process, ensuring that evolving conditions continue to justify activation and guiding decisions on adaptation or de-activation.

1. **Ongoing Contextual Awareness:** The AFS FMA maintains continuous monitoring of Syria’s political, social, economic, and environmental context. Inputs include partner reporting, field staff observations, open-source

analysis, and coordination with tGoS, the UN, Sectors, NGO Forum, and other donors and funding instruments. For rapid-onset crises, this provides the baseline against which sudden shocks are assessed. For slow-onset crises, it requires systematic tracking of indicators over time.

2. **Emergency Alerts by Partners and AFS Staff:** Any qualified AFS partner, or any AFS staff member, can raise an alert when they observe an incident or trend with life-saving implications. Alerts are submitted via the Grant Management System (GMS), or directly to the FMA (see Annex 1 – Emergency Alert Form).
3. **FMA Triage:** The FMA reviews alerts for accuracy and sufficiency of information. For rapid-onset crises, triage should be completed within hours, with provisional severity thresholds assigned. For slow-onset crises, triage may require repeated reviews across weeks or months, with the FMA tracking cumulative deterioration and updating the SB at regular intervals. Incomplete alerts are returned with requests for clarification.
4. **Threshold Assessment:** The FMA tests each alert against pre-agreed thresholds (see Annex 2 - Decision Thresholds Matrix). For slow-onset crises, thresholds are defined as progressive triggers, so that gradual deterioration can justify escalation before reaching catastrophic levels.
5. **Preparation of Emergency Note:** Where thresholds are met, or imminent, the FMA prepares a short Emergency Note (see Annex 3 – Emergency Note). If thresholds are not met, the situation remains under monitoring, with scheduled reporting to the SB.
6. **Request for Emergency Determination:**

The Emergency Note is shared by the Chair with the SB for a decision. Decision options are:

- Determine that an emergency exists (thresholds met) – activate emergency response and allocate funding.
- Determine conditionally, pending further evidence or triggers.
- Monitor without activation.

The expected turnaround is 24 hours for rapid-onset crises, or at the next scheduled SB review point for slow-onset cases.

7. **Activation of the Emergency Response:** Once declared, and no objections received from MEDM, the FMA initiates the appropriate funding modality – which may include amendments to ongoing projects, top-ups, new emergency grants, or the launch of a special allocation. Eligible partners are pre-selected by geography/access and sector. In line with international best practice, partners must demonstrate operational readiness to deliver within days of allocation. This includes pre-positioned staff or civil society partnerships, systems, and supply arrangements to ensure rapid implementation of Emergency Response activities. Dedicated Emergency Response project codes and ring-fenced allocations are assigned to ensure traceability. Contracts are amended or issued with Emergency Response-specific terms. Communications are shared with Partners and donors.
8. **Implementation, Oversight, and Adaptation:** Partners implement activities, monitored by the FMA. Disbursements are tracked through dedicated emergency response activity project codes, with dashboards displaying utilisation and impact. Adjustments can be made if thresholds change.
9. **De-activation and Learning:** Once conditions fall below thresholds, or response objectives are met, the FMA, in consultation with partners, monitors and confirms that the situation no longer meets activation criteria. Based on this analysis, the FMA proposes closure of the Emergency Response activation to the SB. Closure of an activation does not automatically terminate partner implementation. Ongoing projects may continue activities that remain relevant for recovery, risk reduction, or preparedness, subject to FMA approval and available funding. A light after-action review is conducted with partners and stakeholders, and lessons are integrated into future preparedness and response planning.

This process ensures that emergency declarations are **evidence-based, timely, and linked to traceable funding decisions**, thereby reinforcing the AFS Strategy’s aim of combining lifesaving action with recovery and resilience across Syria.

Roles and Responsibilities

Stakeholder	Key Responsibilities
Steering Board (SB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides strategic oversight and final approval for emergency declarations. • Reviews Emergency Notes and decides whether to determine, conditionally determine, or monitor without activation. • Approves funding envelopes and sources (contingency, earmarked, donor top-up). • Ensures alignment with AFS Strategy 2025–2030, particularly the first pillar on <i>Emergency Preparedness and Response</i>.
Chair of the Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorises virtual decision-making processes in urgent cases. • Acts as first point of endorsement for FMA recommendations between SB meetings. • Ensures decisions are communicated rapidly to all SB members.
Fund Management Agent (FMA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains ongoing contextual awareness and monitoring of risks including coordination with relevant stakeholders. • Submit own emergency alerts if required. • Receives and triages alerts submitted by Partners and staff. • Tests alerts against decision thresholds and prepares Emergency Notes. • Coordinates closely with MEDM, UN-OCHA/Sectors, and other relevant stakeholders. • Launches and manages ER activations once an emergency is declared, including targeted calls, amendments, top-ups, or special allocations. • Monitors evolving conditions against emergency thresholds during implementation, and proposes de-activation once conditions stabilise or objectives are met. • Provides updated dashboards, reporting, and supports ER audits.
Fund Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit emergency alerts to the FMA. • Provide timely, accurate, and disaggregated data on emerging crises. • Implement activities once approved, ensuring rapid response in line with agreed objectives. • Contribute monitoring data and analysis to inform threshold tracking and potential de-activation decisions. • Participate in after-action reviews to capture lessons and strengthen preparedness.
Other Stakeholders (MEDM, NGO Fora, UN-OCHA, Sectors/Clusters, others)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide early warning data, needs assessments, situational reports, and, if available, response plans. • Share coordination updates that may inform AFS emergency monitoring. • Complement AFS activities with parallel responses to avoid duplication and maximise coverage. • Where appropriate, transitional governance entities may validate localised data or facilitate access, in line with AFS’s principled approach to engaging governance structures.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Emergency Alert Form (template and samples)

Annex 2 – Decision Thresholds Matrix

Annex 3 – Emergency Note Template

Annex 1 – Emergency Alert Form (template and samples)

Purpose: To standardise submissions when flagging a potential emergency. This form should be completed by AFS partners or staff and shared with the FMA. Provide as much verified information as possible; where data are not available, use best estimates with a clear confidence level.

Template

Field	Information Provided
Date and time of alert submission	Record when the alert is submitted (day/month/year, time, and time zone).
Submitted by (organisation / staff member / contact details)	Provide the organisation name, staff member responsible, and reliable contact details.
Location(s) affected (Governorate, District, Community)	Specify administrative divisions and main communities affected.
Type of emergency (Rapid-onset / Slow-onset)	Select the relevant option.
Description of incident or trend	Summarise the nature of the crisis in plain language (what happened, how it is developing).
Estimated population affected	Provide best estimates, disaggregated by gender, age, and displacement status if available.
Source of population data	Indicate whether the numbers come from verified assessments, partner estimates, community reports, etc.
Immediate risks and priority needs observed	Describe the main risks to life, health, and wellbeing and the top priority needs.
Services and sectors disrupted	Tick the affected sectors: <input type="checkbox"/> Health <input type="checkbox"/> WASH <input type="checkbox"/> Food Security <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Protection <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter/NFI <input type="checkbox"/> Livelihoods/Markets <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify).
Access constraints	Note any physical (e.g. roads), security, or administrative barriers to response.
Evidence and confidence level	List supporting evidence (reports, photos, assessments, community inputs). Rate confidence as High / Medium / Low and briefly justify (e.g. High – verified partner assessment; Medium – multiple unverified reports; Low – anecdotal).
Organisations currently responding	Identify actors present and the type of support provided.
Coordination status	Note any engagement with clusters, NGO fora, or local authorities.
Main gaps identified	Describe where needs remain unmet or responses are insufficient.
Estimated AFS support requirements	Suggest sectors, activities, approximate funding needs, and timeframe.
Urgency level	Tick the relevant option: <input type="checkbox"/> Critical within 72 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Developing over weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify).
Recommendation from Partner	Tick the relevant option: <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> Escalate <input type="checkbox"/> Request determination.

Sample A: Rapid-Onset Emergency

Field	Information Provided
Date and time of alert submission	15 September 2025, 09:45 (GMT+2)
Submitted by	Humanitarian Action Group – Emergency Coordinator: Khaled Mansour, khaled.mansour@hag.org, +963 000 111 222
Location(s) affected	Idlib Governorate, Ariha District, three neighbourhoods
Type of emergency	Rapid-onset
Description of incident or trend	Flash floods caused by heavy rains on 14 September 2025 inundated three urban neighbourhoods. Houses collapsed, electricity lines damaged, and hundreds of families displaced overnight.
Estimated population affected	Approx. 6,500 (51% female, 49% male, 2,200 children under 18, 1,000 newly displaced sheltering in schools)
Source of population data	Local civil defence report (14 September), partner rapid assessment (15 September)
Immediate risks and priority needs observed	Risk of disease from stagnant water, urgent need for shelter, safe water, food, and medical care for injured
Services and sectors disrupted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Health <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WASH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Food Security <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Protection <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Shelter/NFI <input type="checkbox"/> Livelihoods/Markets
Access constraints	Main access road flooded, secondary routes blocked by debris. Security otherwise stable.
Evidence and confidence level	WH report (14 September), partner assessment (15 September), photos of collapsed houses. Confidence level: High – multiple independent reports and photo evidence.
Organisations currently responding	Humanitarian Action Group (food and blankets), Local Civil Defence (rescue), International Relief Committee (mobile health team)
Coordination status	Emergency WASH Cluster convened (15 September). Coordination with municipal council ongoing.
Main gaps identified	No emergency shelter kits, contaminated water supply, insufficient medical care, food stocks running low
Estimated AFS support requirements	USD 750,000 for 3 months: shelter kits, water purification, food baskets, repair of electricity lines
Urgency level	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Critical within 72 hours <input type="checkbox"/> Developing over weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Recommendation from Partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> Escalate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request emergency determination

Sample B: Slow-Onset Emergency

Field	Information Provided
Date and time of alert submission	1 September 2025, 14:30 (GMT+2)
Submitted by	Example Relief Organisation – Field Officer: Samira Hassan, samira.hassan@example.org, +963 000 000 000
Location(s) affected	Rural Homs Governorate, Talbiseh District, four surrounding villages
Type of emergency	Slow-onset
Description of incident or trend	Severe drought over the past four months has led to widespread crop failure and water shortages. Communities increasingly rely on unsafe water sources. Malnutrition among children under 5 is rising in local clinics.
Estimated population affected	Approx. 18,000 (52% female, 48% male, 40% children under 18, 3,200 IDPs in temporary shelters)
Source of population data	Partner rapid assessment (28 August 2025) and health facility reports
Immediate risks and priority needs observed	Lack of safe water, food insecurity, rising child malnutrition, risk of waterborne disease
Services and sectors disrupted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Health <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WASH <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Food Security <input type="checkbox"/> Education <input type="checkbox"/> Protection <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter/NFI <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Livelihoods/Markets
Access constraints	Roads accessible but fuel shortages limit transport. Administrative delays in cross-line aid approvals.
Evidence and confidence level	Partner rapid assessment (28 August), WFP market monitoring, photos of dried canals. Confidence level: Medium – based on partner assessment and facility reports, not yet cross-verified.
Organisations currently responding	Example Relief Organisation (water trucking to 3 villages), International Medical Care (basic health consultations), local community groups (food parcels)
Coordination status	Issue raised in WASH Cluster meeting (25 August). Limited engagement of local governance committees.
Main gaps identified	Insufficient safe drinking water (coverage 40%), no nutrition-specific interventions, medicine shortages
Estimated AFS support requirements	USD 500,000 over 3 months for water purification, emergency nutrition supplies, and fuel for water pumps
Urgency level	<input type="checkbox"/> Critical within 72 hours <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Developing over weeks <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Recommendation from Partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor <input type="checkbox"/> Escalate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Request emergency determination

Annex 2 – Decision Thresholds Matrix

Purpose: The thresholds below are intended as reference points to guide decision-making. They are **not rigid cut-offs, but indicative values** to support timely, evidence-based determinations. The SB may consider **proportional impact** (relative to local population size), **combinations of multiple indicators across domains**, and **credible forecasts** showing imminent deterioration. **Precautionary determinations** are encouraged where trends point to thresholds being exceeded.

Best Practices: Based on Start Fund (anticipatory activation) and CBPF reserve allocation approaches, adapted to Syria's population profile.

Threshold Domain	Rapid-Onset Indicators	Slow-Onset Indicators	Suggested Reference Values for Emergency Determination
Human Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sudden displacement in the range of 5,000–20,000 people within 72 hours to 7 days, or proportionally severe relative to local population Multiple waves of displacement within 14 days Destruction or loss of about 20–25% of housing in affected community Overcrowding in collective sites beyond safe capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New or secondary displacement affecting about 5–10% of the local population over up to 3 months, or repeated short-term displacement cycles Sustained increase in illness beyond seasonal norms (for example, rising cases of waterborne disease or respiratory infections reported by partners) Reports of worsening child malnutrition from health or relief actors Sustained out-migration from an area over 1–2 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine emergency if displacement reaches these ranges or is proportionally severe in smaller governorates Consider combined triggers where moderate displacement coincides with essential service failure or protection risks Use precautionary determination where credible forecasts or conflict dynamics indicate imminent large-scale displacement
Essential Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water, electricity, or healthcare disrupted for more than 72 hours in urban areas or 1 week in rural areas About half or more of health facilities in a district closed or operating at reduced capacity Major water points or networks non-functional for at least 1 week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to safe water consistently below about 15 litres per person per day for over 1 month Credible reports of school closures or attendance dropping by more than 30% for 2 or more consecutive weeks Widespread shortages of essential medicines reported across a significant share of health facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declare if disruption directly affects about 20,000 people, or smaller but highly vulnerable groups (for example IDPs, besieged or hard-to-reach communities) Activate early if service functionality trends suggest imminent collapse
Protection Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credible signals of escalating conflict likely to displace civilians Credible reports of mass detention or widespread intimidation Sudden increase in reported incidents of gender-based violence Closure of safe spaces or denial of access to protection services Forced displacement linked to conflict affecting several thousand people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documented pattern of movement restrictions, targeting of minorities or returnees, or child protection concerns (such as separation, recruitment, or early marriage) sustained over several months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine if grave violations are credibly reported by at least two independent sources Consider precautionary action if patterns show rapid escalation even if numbers are not fully reached
Markets and Livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staple food prices rising by about 50% or more within 2 weeks Fuel prices rising by about 40% or more within 2 weeks Main trade route cut off for at least 1 week, preventing market restocking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustained food price inflation of about 20% or more across 3 months Loss of at least half of a seasonal agricultural harvest Reports from traders that essential goods cannot be restocked for 3 weeks or longer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine if food insecurity is likely to affect about 30% or more of the population Consider determination where smaller populations face extreme vulnerability due to combined shocks
Early Warning / Environmental Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flash floods, earthquakes, wildfires, or epidemics reported by credible monitoring sources Rapid loss of about 25% or more of agricultural land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forecast drought or flood expected to affect about 50,000 or more people in a governorate within 3 months Epidemic signals above normal thresholds, such as clusters of cases reported by multiple health facilities over 2 or more weeks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine anticipatorily if forecasts show high probability of major humanitarian impact Consider precautionary activation to pre-position support

Annex 3 – Emergency Note Template

Purpose: To provide the SB with a standard, concise summary for deciding on an Emergency Threshold Determination.

Section	Information Required
1. Basic Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date of submission; Prepared by (FMA) • Reference number (ER-XX/Year) • Type of emergency (Rapid-onset / Slow-onset)
2. Incident Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short description of the incident or trend • Locations affected (Governorate, District, Community) • Timeline of key events or developments
3. Population Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated population affected (with gender/age/displacement breakdown if available) • Source of population data (verified / estimate / anecdotal) • Displacement levels and trends
4. Thresholds Triggered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of relevant domains from Decision Thresholds Matrix (Human Impact, Essential Services, Protection Risks, Markets/Livelihoods, Early Warning) • Specify indicator values (e.g. “20,000 displaced in 5 days”, “GAM > 15%”)
5. Services and Sectors Affected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specify disrupted services (WASH, Health, Food Security, Education, Protection, Shelter/NFI, Livelihoods) • Describe severity of disruption (e.g. “Water access <15 litres/person/day in affected villages”)
6. Current Response and Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations currently responding and type of support • Coordination mechanisms engaged (clusters, NGO fora, local authorities) • Gaps identified in existing response
7. Funding Needs and Proposed AFS Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated AFS support requirements (amount, sectors, timeframe) • Proposed funding source (contingency allocation, earmarked donor funding, top-up request)
8. FMA Recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of FMA assessment • Options for SB decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determine emergency leading to funding release ○ Conditional determination (potential funding release, pending further evidence) ○ Monitor without activation and funding release
9. Risk and Access Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key security, access, or compliance issues to consider for implementation
10. Proposed Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If emergency determined: engagement with pre-selected partners, indicative timeline for contracting and disbursement • If conditional or no emergency determined: monitoring plan and reporting frequency

Notes for Use

- The FMA should complete the Emergency Alert Form (**2-3 pages**).
- Data from **Emergency Alert Forms** and additional assessment data provide raw inputs.
- Validation against **Decision Thresholds Matrix** ensures evidence-based justification.
- This note becomes the **formal record** of SB emergency decisions, supporting traceability and donor accountability.