



AFNS

AID FUND FOR
NORTHERN SYRIA

ANNUAL REPORT

PREPARED FOR THE AFNS STEERING BOARD

January to December 2024

2024



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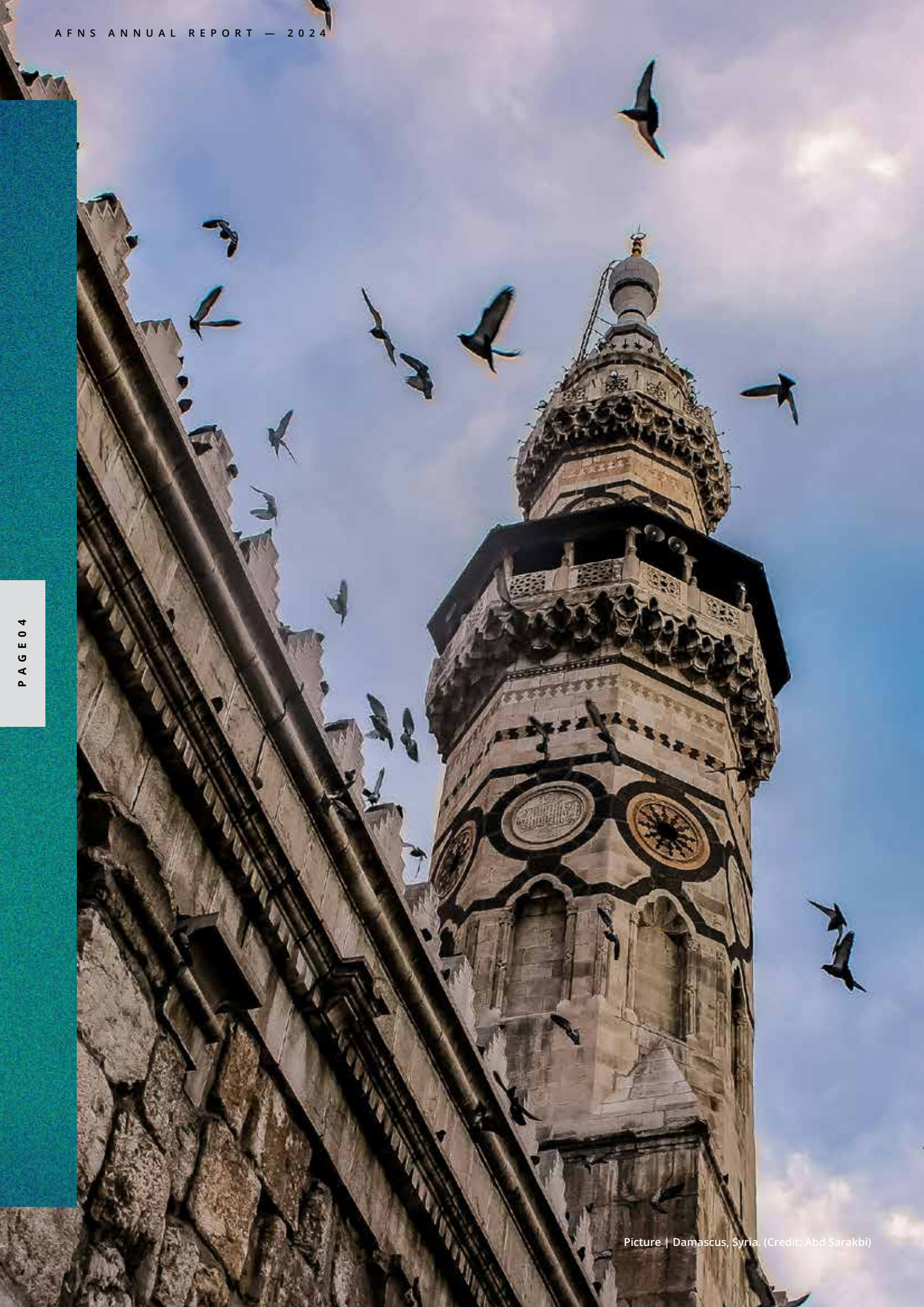
WELCOME TO AFNS's YEAR IN REVIEW



In a year of seismic change, AFNS remained a lifeline for millions across Northern Syria.

Through shifting political landscapes, deepening humanitarian needs, and historic underfunding, AFNS responded with agility, local leadership, and unwavering commitment. This review highlights the resilience of our partners, the power of coordinated action, and the growing role of AFNS in bridging urgent response with long-term recovery.

Picture | AFNS leadership at the Dostluk camp's communal space, Aleppo. (Credit: AFNS)



Picture | Damascus, Syria. (Credit: Abd Sarakbi)

ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations	IRC	International Rescue Committee
AAPCE	Accountability to Affected Populations and Community Engagement	LCD	Liquid Crystal Display
AFS	Aid Fund for Syria (formerly AFNS)	MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
AFNS	Aid Fund for Northern Syria	MREL	Monitoring, Reporting, Evaluation and Learning
AHF	Al-Sham Humanitarian Foundation	MSNA	Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
ASI	Adam Smith International	MWL	Mercy Without Limits
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance	NFI	Non-Food Items
BINAA	BINAA for Development	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management	NWS	Northwest Syria
CI	CARE International	OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
CP	Child Protection	PAC	Physicians Across Continents
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance	PDU	Partnerships & Delivery Unit
DCA	Delegated Cooperation Agreement	PFA	Partnership Framework Agreement
DD	Due Diligence	PIN	People in Need
DDCA	Due Diligence and Capacity Assessment	PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee	QFFD	Qatar Fund for Development
DQA	Data Quality Assessment	RA	Regular Allocation
DQI	Data Quality Inspection	RAATA	Ras-al-Ain – Tal Abyad (region)
DRHC	Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator	RCMO	Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement Organisation
ERL	Early Recovery and Livelihoods	SA	Special Allocation
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office	SARD	Syrian Association for Relief and Development
FMA	Fund Management Agent	SB	Steering Board
FSL	Food Security and Livelihoods	SCHF	Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund
GBV	Gender-Based Violence	SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
GESI	Gender, Equality and Social Inclusion	SG	Safeguarding
GFFO	German Federal Foreign Office	SNA	National NGO Alliance
GMS	Grant Management System	SNFI	Shelter and Non-Food Items
GoT	Government of Türkiye	SOM	Senior Officials Meeting
GoS	Government of Syria	NNGO	National NGO
HA	Human Appeal	SNL	Syrian Networks League
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace	STRC	Strategic and Technical Review Committee
HLA	Humanitarian Leadership Academy	TAS	Takaful al Sham
HNAP	Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme	TEP	Technical Evaluation Panel
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview	TPM	Third Party Monitoring
HNW	Health, Nutrition, WASH	UOSSM	Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations
HQ	Headquarters	US\$	United States Dollar
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan	WAG	Women's Advisory Group
HSOT	Humanitarian and Stabilisation Operations Team	WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham	WG	Working Group
ICCG	Inter Cluster Coordination Group	WH	White Helmets
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons	WHH	Welthungerhilfe (Deutsche Welthungerhilfe)
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation	WN	Women Now
ICVA	International Council for Voluntary Agencies		
IDA	Independent Doctors Association		
IP	Implementing Partner		

1 | LETTER FROM THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE STEERING BOARD

DEAR BOARD MEMBERS,

It is an honour to present the 2024 Annual Report for the Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS). In a year of unprecedented transformation, the role of humanitarian actors has never been more vital. AFNS remains at the forefront of efforts to provide lifesaving assistance and lay the foundations for a stable future. This report highlights the progress made in our second year as a critical funding mechanism addressing urgent humanitarian needs in Syria. It also reflects the collaborative efforts and unwavering dedication of our partners. Through these profound transformations, AFNS remains steadfast in its mission - adapting to evolving challenges, strengthening local leadership, and positioning itself as a key actor in bridging humanitarian response with long-term recovery and building the foundations for a peaceful future.

A YEAR OF PROFOUND CHANGE

The year 2024 marked a turning point in Syria's history. On 8th December, the Assad regime was overthrown, leading to the establishment of a caretaker government in Damascus and discussions on a national dialogue conference to form a diverse transitional government. While these developments offer hope, the path forward remains complex and uncertain. Restoring trust, rehabilitating infrastructure, and rebuilding homes will be a long and arduous journey, requiring not only reconstruction but also reconciliation and the restoration of social cohesion and trust after years of conflict and oppression.



Picture | Student Bilal at school in Jisr Al-Shughur, Idlib. (Credit: Syria Relief)

The return of displaced populations is hindered by widespread destruction, explosive remnants of war, and a lack of basic services and employment opportunities. The humanitarian situation remains dire, with over four million people in need in northwest Syria alone by the end of the year. At the same time, significant funding cuts in 2024 severely affected relief actors, particularly smaller, local organisations. By year-end, the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Syria was only 33% funded, leaving a staggering funding gap of US\$2.72 billion. And the future of funding for Syria remains uncertain, casting a shadow over the ability to sustain critical humanitarian efforts in the years ahead.

In this rapidly evolving context, humanitarian actors must adapt swiftly. AFNS has played a crucial role in ensuring that humanitarian aid remains not just reactive but strategically positioned to support communities through recovery and resilience-building. AFNS has risen to this challenge, ensuring that aid remains accessible and impactful despite the shifting landscape.

AFNS's IMPACT IN 2024

AFNS secured an additional US\$29.08 million in 2024, bringing the total funding received since its inception in late 2022 to US\$119.8 million. With these resources, 39 AFNS partners



delivered immediate relief and early recovery assistance to 2.42 million unique beneficiaries in 2024, including 1.25 million women and girls — a vital lifeline for families enduring extreme hardship in one of the world’s most protracted crises. This impact was made possible through support of France, Germany, Jersey, the Netherlands, Qatar, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This diverse donor backing highlights AFNS’s value as a responsive and flexible funding mechanism in a complex and rapidly evolving context.

LOCALISATION AND EARLY RECOVERY: A FIRM COMMITMENT

In 2024, AFNS reaffirmed its strong commitment to localisation, with 80.8% of funding directed to National NGOs. By empowering local organisations, we ensure that aid is effective, sustainable, and community driven. Significant progress was made in mapping local actors, and identifying and strengthening smaller community-based organisations, including women and youth-led groups. The activation of the Anchor Organisation modality further enhanced the leadership of National NGOs in aid delivery. Additionally, most AFNS-funded projects qualified as early recovery, underscoring our commitment to resilience and long-term stability.

STRENGTHENING COORDINATION AND COMPLEMENTARITY

Strong coordination has been key for AFNS in ensuring that every dollar delivers the greatest impact. Our collaboration with the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) continued in 2024. Guided by the principles of complementarity, we ensured our efforts were aligned with the HRP and maximised synergies. At the end of 2024, AFNS and the UN agreed on a complementarity framework, reinforcing our role as a strategic and adaptive funding instrument and ensuring effective coordination and alignment in their humanitarian and recovery efforts, in line with HNO/HRP processes. In 2025, we will continue to engage with evolving coordination structures and other key actors to further enhance our collective impact across Syria.

GOVERNANCE, ADAPTABILITY, AND FUTURE READINESS

Strong governance has been the backbone of AFNS’s success, ensuring inclusivity and strategic direction. Our Steering Board, comprising donor representatives, international NGOs, and local NGOs, ensures that decision-making remains informed by operational realities. Notably, 56% of our Steering Board members in 2024 were women, demonstrating our commitment to gender balance and diverse representation.

The past year also highlighted AFNS’s adaptability. As access and operational dynamics shifted following the fall of the Assad regime, AFNS swiftly adjusted its approaches, responding to emerging needs while maintaining efficiency and effectiveness. This flexibility remains crucial in a rapidly evolving humanitarian landscape.



Picture | Children and SARD staff celebrate the renovation of Dabiq Park, Aleppo. (Credit: SARD.)

By the end of 2024, two years since its inception, AFNS has established itself as a relevant, timely, and robust actor in the humanitarian response. Our innovative approach to integrated programming bridges relief, recovery, and resilience, while our strong commitment to localisation enhances the long-term impact of aid. Providing quality funding, including multi-year grants, has been instrumental in strengthening the humanitarian response and supporting affected communities.

LOOKING AHEAD: A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

In September 2024, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) confirmed that the consortium led by Adam Smith International (ASI) would manage AFNS's second phase until 2030. This milestone provides a solid foundation to expand our proven approaches and innovative modalities, ensuring that AFNS remains a flexible, strategic, and impactful funding mechanism for Syria's future.

In January 2025, in response to the evolving context and new opportunities for nationwide programming, the Steering Board approved the renaming of the Fund to the Aid Fund for Syria (AFS). This decision reflects our commitment to a more inclusive and needs-based approach, ensuring resources are effectively allocated across the whole of Syria. It also strengthens our role in supporting locally led solutions and long-term stability at this pivotal moment in Syria's transition.

As we move forward, AFS will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the Syrian people. We remain dedicated to bridging the gap between emergency relief, development, and peacebuilding, offering a funding model that is responsive, adaptive, and forward-looking. I extend my deepest gratitude to our donors, partners, NGO coordination forums, and the dedicated humanitarian workers who make our efforts possible. Your unwavering commitment has been the driving force behind AFS's impact.

The year 2025 will challenge our resilience and adaptability even further. But with the steadfast support of our partners and the determination of the Syrian people, we will continue forging pathways toward recovery, stability, and hope.

Sincerely,

Wolfgang Gressmann

*Independent Chair of the Steering Board,
Aid Fund for Syria (AFS)*

2 | AFNS IN NUMBERS



**US\$29.08M
CONTRIBUTED
BY DONORS**



**53 ONGOING
& NEW
PROJECTS**



**50 "QUALIFIED"
& 39 IMPLEMENT-
ING PARTNERS**



**2.42M
UNIQUE
BENEFICIARIES**



**1.25M
WOMEN &
GIRLS REACHED**



**39K
PWDS
REACHED**

AFNS provided humanitarian assistance to 2.42 million people in northwest Syria and the Ras-al-Ain - Tal Abyad (RAATA) region in 2024 through 53 new and ongoing projects implemented by 39 partners, focusing on areas identified in the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). This support contributed to the broader Syria response, where 15.3 million people were recognised as in need, underscoring AFNS's vital role in alleviating the enduring effects of the protracted crisis.

The AFNS has funded a total of 20 new projects in 2024, with a total value of US\$22.4 million, advancing the three Strategic Objectives set out in the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). AFNS allocations were guided by the HNO, HRP, and the Cluster coordination mechanism. As part of the application process, partners were required to identify the HRP Strategic Objectives their proposed interventions addressed. Alignment was verified during proposal reviews. The AFNS Standard List of Indicators, adapted from HRP, is reviewed and updated annually, with minor revisions made to ensure consistent trend analysis over time.

ASSISTANCE TO NORTHERN SYRIA

People Assisted Across Governates

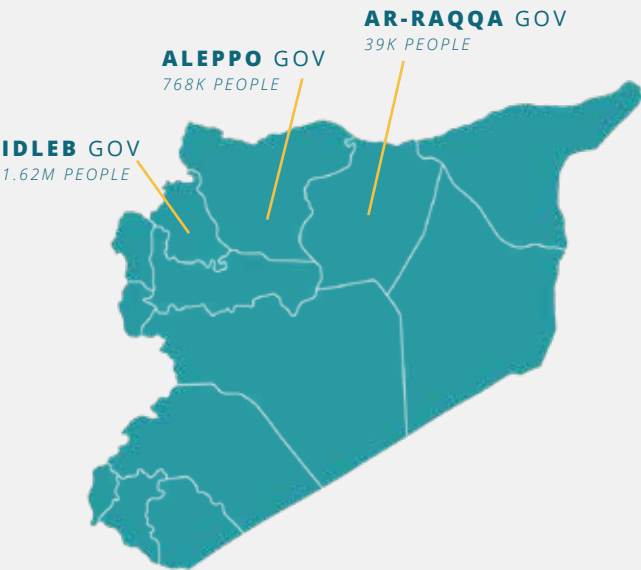


Figure 1 | Beneficiaries, for new & ongoing projects, by governorate in 2024

People Reached by Sector



Figure 2 | People assisted by sector in 2024

Types of People Assisted

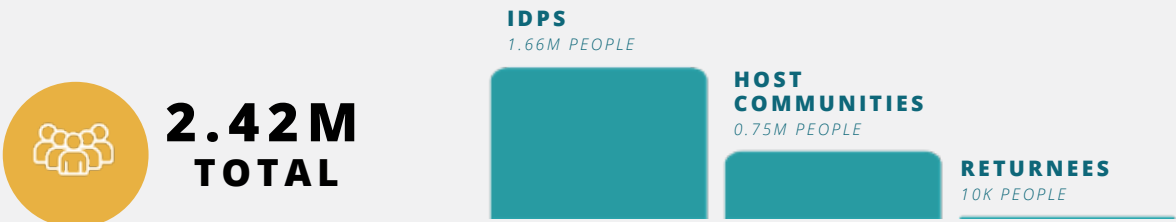


Figure 3 | People assisted by type in 2024





Funding for 2024 Projects

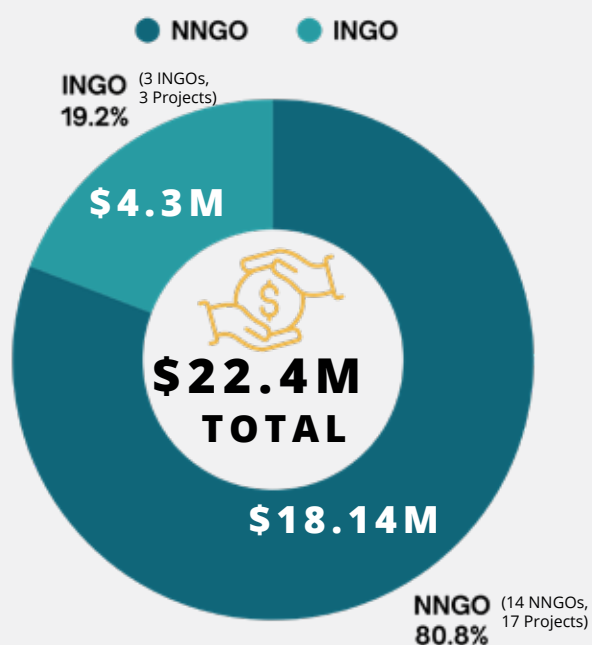


Figure 4 | Funding for new projects awarded to partners in 2024

Sector Allocations Across 2024 Projects

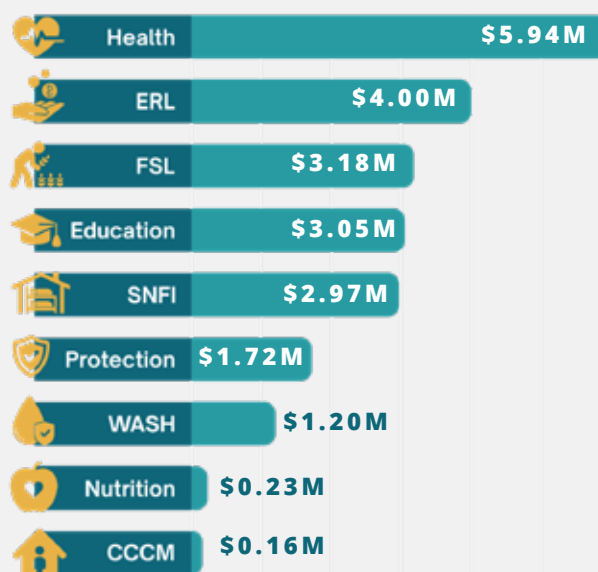


Figure 5 | Funding by sector through RA2 (Module 2) and RA3 (Envelope 2) in 2024

AFNS ACTIVITIES IN 2024: TIMELINE

JAN

The Fund Management Agent (FMA), in cooperation with the NWS NGO Forum and the Syrian National League (SNL), finalises the NGO-led nomination process for the Steering Board. CARE International and Human Appeal (INGOs) join the Board alongside the White Helmets and Women Now (National NGOs). Female representation on the Board increases to 56%. AFNS conducts capital visits to Berlin and Copenhagen to present the Fund’s achievements to the German and Danish Ministries. Three winterisation projects are launched under Module 1 of the second Regular Allocation (RA2). By the 25 January deadline, 46 applications are received under Module 2 of RA2.

FEB

The FMA completes its evaluation of 43 eligible proposals and recommends 16 for endorsement by the Steering Board, including 14 submitted by NNGOs. A 17th proposal is added using savings resulting from budget negotiations with selected applicants. This includes, for the first time under AFNS, a Health, WASH and Protection-focused project in the RAATA region. The Steering Board endorses use of the pooled fund to conduct a mapping of Community-based Local Actors (CBLAs) in northwest Syria and RAATA, in line with the Fund’s localisation strategy. The AFNS Localisation Working Group convenes to discuss the Fund’s roadmap. AFNS signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA), which allocates Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) funding to strengthen the capacity of five active AFNS partners across a range of operational and programmatic areas.

MAR

The European Parliament issues recommendations to the European Council on Syria, including a call for Member States to consider directing resources through AFNS. The Fund launches its Accountability to Affected Populations and Community Engagement (AAPCE) Strategy. Its revised Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy is further refined following input from the Women’s Advisory Group (WAG). The Clusters share a letter with the FMA outlining recommendations to streamline their engagement with AFNS.

APR

The Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) circulates a ‘Guidance Note’ to Cluster Leads on their engagement with AFNS. AFNS develops an analysis paper for its Steering Board, reaffirming its commitment to maximise coordination within the UN system while enhancing NGO participation. The FMA pauses further progress on RA2 Module 3 (Area-Based Approach or ABA) pending clarification from the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (DRHC) regarding Cluster engagement. AFNS participates in the 8th Brussels Conference on Syria, attending both the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) and the Day of Dialogue. AFNS donors, in high-level meetings with UN leadership, reaffirm the Fund’s critical role in Syria’s humanitarian response. The FMA issues a call for Expressions of Interest to map CBLAs across northwest Syria and RAATA as part of its localisation agenda.

MAY

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledges the Fund’s significant progress over the past year during a meeting with AFNS and donors. AFNS convenes its first roundtable discussion on trends in cross-border aid, bringing together leading analysts, senior practitioners, and policy advisors. A partner survey on funding allocations and overall impact finds that all 52 respondents recognise AFNS as a key and timely fund allocator.

JUN

The FMA reprogrammes US\$0.5 million in project savings, enabling AFNS partners to respond to a severe heatwave in northwest Syria by addressing WASH-related emergencies. The FMA completes its evaluation of two proposals for the mapping of CBLAs and recommends awarding the grant to the White Helmets and MID-MAR. UN-OCHA shares a Position Paper on complementarity between AFNS and UN mechanisms. The Fund modifies its proposal evaluation process, establishing Technical Evaluation Panels (TEPs) composed of NGO experts and internal specialists, replacing the former Strategic and Technical Review Committees (STRCs). Nominations for the new Localisation Working Group are finalised.



JUL

The newly established Localisation Working Group finalises the AFNS Anchor Organisation approach. White Helmets and MIDMAR begin mapping CBLAs across 954 communities in northern Syria. AFNS meets with the DRHC, Heads of UN Agencies, UN-OCHA, and Syria Cross Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF), agreeing that Cluster engagement will focus on allocation strategy design, while AFNS, with support from NGOs experts, will lead proposal evaluations. The Steering Board agrees to delay the RA2 Module 3 (ABA pilot) to the next Regular Allocation. AFNS hosts a second roundtable discussion on trends in cross-border aid. In collaboration with the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), AFNS launches a study on global best practices in pooled-fund programming and coordination.

AUG

The Steering Board endorses the Anchor Organisation modality, and the FMA launches a call for Expressions of Interest. Nineteen of 22 eligible AFNS partners submit applications to become anchor organisations. AFNS's innovative localisation practices are recognised during a session hosted by the UK, Switzerland, and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The SCHF requests AFNS support for nine proposals from its oversubscribed Standard Allocation. An external evaluation highlights AFNS's critical role in Syria's humanitarian response.

SEP

In alignment with the 2024 HRP, the FMA develops and the Steering Board endorses the strategy outline for the Third Regular Allocation (RA3), valued at US\$15 million. The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) confirms that the consortium led by Adam Smith International (ASI) has been awarded the FMA role for AFNS's second phase till 2030. The FMA issues a call for Expressions of Interest from NGOs experts to form a pool of experts for future TEPs. AFNS holds its third roundtable discussion, exploring practical and conceptual approaches to integrating humanitarian, recovery, and peacebuilding efforts.

OCT

AFNS develops contingency plans in response to emerging risks, including the influx of people fleeing the escalating conflict in Lebanon. The Steering Board approves the RA3 Strategy. The Local Actor Mapping is completed and presented at a conference, with a database of 1,000 community-based organisations and 477 actors mapped in greater detail. The FMA welcomes a new Executive Director. The Annual Steering Board Feedback Survey is launched.

NOV

The RA3 Strategy is officially launched on 20 November. Implementation begins for three projects under RA3 Envelope 2 that were unfunded by the SCHF, following a thorough review and budget negotiations. Fourteen partners (7 NNGOs and 7 INGOs) are selected as Anchor Organisations and a first induction meeting is held. AFNS accompanies the Turkish Red Crescent on its first cross-border mission into northwest Syria, marking a key milestone for the Fund.

DEC

The Pooled Fund Complementarity Guidance Note is finalised following a collaborative process between UN leadership and AFNS. As conflict in Syria rapidly escalates and territorial control shifts, AFNS conducts a rapid survey to assess partner capacities, plans, and challenges. The FMA explores strategic options for adapting to the evolving context, including an internal strategy workshop on 9 -10 December. Within four days of the fall of the Assad regime, the FMA recommends, and the Steering Board endorses a third envelope under RA3, totalling \$7.5 million, to deliver assistance in newly accessible areas in Aleppo and Idlib governates. The FMA receives 13 applications under RA3 Envelope 1 and 23 applications under Envelope 2. The Steering Board confirms the Chair's role for another term through December 2025. Discussions with the NWS NGO Forum Secretariat on NGO membership selection are paused due to the changing context, and the Steering Board agrees to postpone membership elections to a later date in 2025. The FMA begins planning its first mission to Damascus for early January 2025.

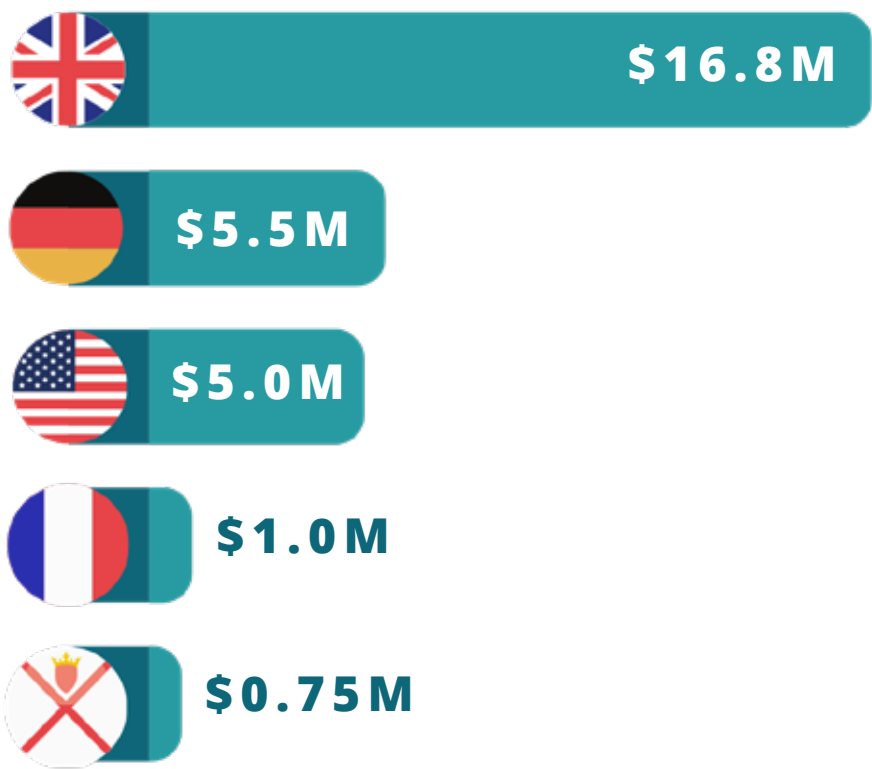


Picture | Syrian Women Empowerment Active Response (SWEAR) founder Maryam in Jisr al-Shugur, Idleb. (Credit: White Helmets)

3 | DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS

AFNS played a critical role in addressing humanitarian needs in northwest Syria in 2024, despite a decline in funding compared to the previous year. The Fund received a total of US\$29.08 million in pledges, down from US\$65.56 million in 2023. Five of the Fund’s seven donors - France, Germany, Jersey, UK and US - made new pledges in 2024. This reduction in funding reflects the broader decline in donor contributions to the Syria humanitarian response, driven in part by competing global crises such as Ukraine and Gaza, as well as an increased focus on domestic priorities among key donor governments.

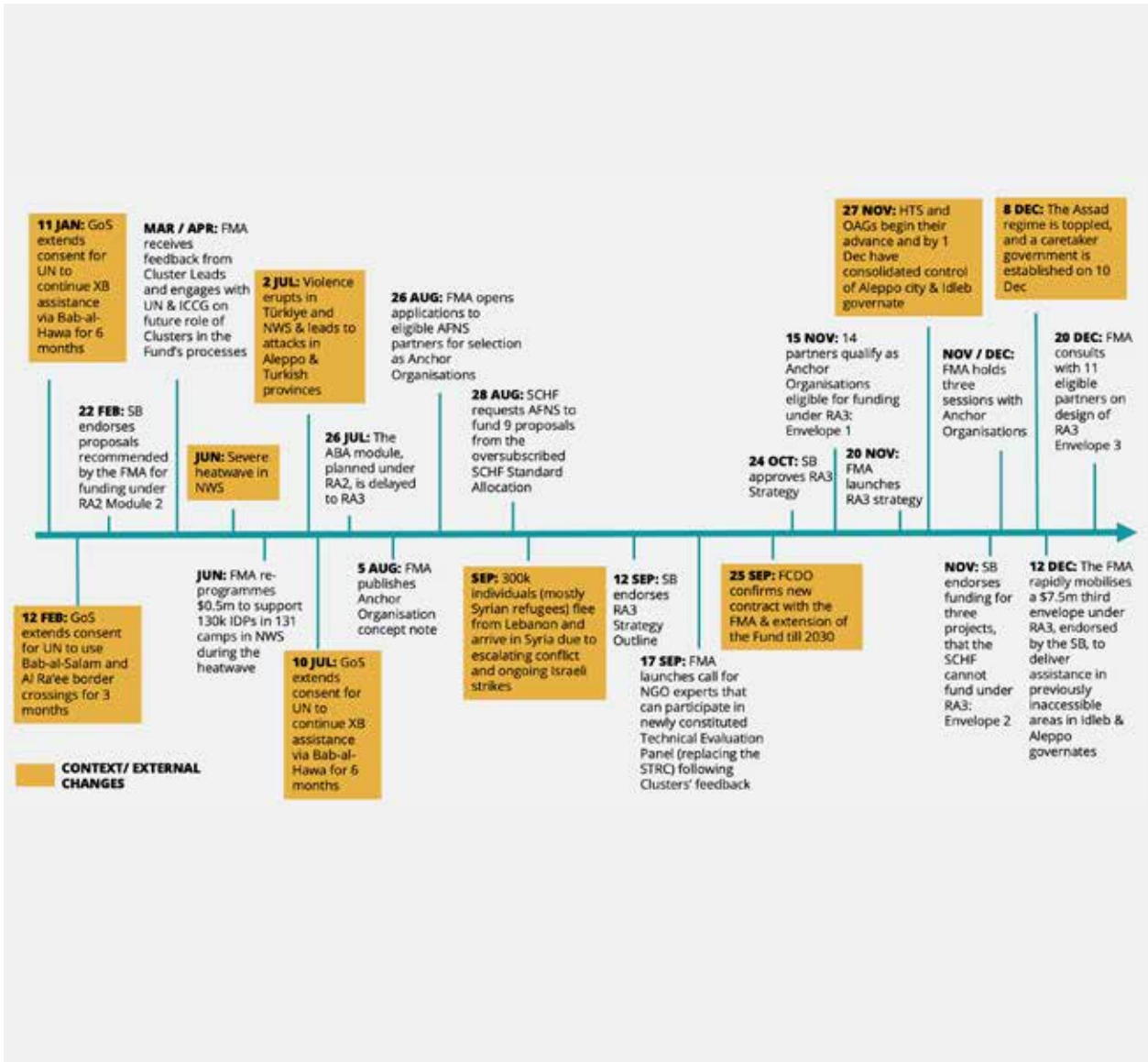
Donor Pledges in USD Millions:



4 | ALLOCATION HISTORY

In 2024, AFNS launched its Third Regular Allocation (RA3), comprising three envelopes with a total value of US\$22.5 million. As part of its overall commitments during the year, AFNS allocated US\$22.4 million to 20 projects—17 under RA2 Module 2 and 3 under RA3 Envelope 2. The Fund Management Agent (FMA) adapted allocations and refreshed contingency planning in response to key contextual developments. Most notably, following the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December, AFNS rapidly mobilised RA3 Envelope 3 (US\$7.5 million) to deliver programming in newly accessible areas. The timing of RA3 was closely coordinated with OCHA-SCHF allocations to ensure strategic alignment. The figure below depicts the timing of AFNS allocations in 2024.

AFNS ALLOCATIONS IN 2024: TIMELINE



FMA expenditure from January to December 2024 stood at US\$4.73 million, representing 10.5% of the total funding committed and allocated for RA2 and RA3. 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, external evaluation, contract management costs and overheads.

The Fund’s allocations in 2024 emphasised the following priorities:



LOCALISATION

AFNS prioritised, capacitated, and funded National NGOs (NNGOs) at scale, recognising them as the backbone of the response in northern Syria. While International NGOs (INGOs) remained eligible for funding, this was limited to cases where a clear comparative advantage over NNGOs could be demonstrated. The Fund met its ambition to channel more funding to local actors: 76.52% of the RA2 allocation was directed to NNGOs, and 16 out of the 20 RA2 Implementing Partners were NNGOs. The year also marked the launch of AFNS’s Anchor Organisation modality - a key component of the Fund’s localisation strategy – with 14 organisations selected for eligibility under RA3 Envelope 1. The FMA continued to require INGO partnering with local actors to equitably share overhead costs and included a dedicated budget line for partner capacity strengthening in all grants. Allocation strategies were also informed by community consultations with affected populations in northern Syria, ensuring contextually relevant programming.



LONGER-TERM COMMITMENT

Sixteen of the 20 grants awarded in 2024 were for 12 months or longer, including five with an 18-month duration. These longer-term investments enabled more comprehensive and sustained support to affected populations. The confirmation by the FCDO of the FMA contract award to ASI and the extension of the Fund through to 2030 enabled the introduction of 24-month grants under RA3.



INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING

AFNS adopted a holistic approach that integrates multiple sectors into its programming. This approach enables partners to address a wider range of interconnected humanitarian needs in a coordinated and efficient manner—an important consideration given the continued decline in donor funding for north-west Syria. The Fund encouraged partners to collaborate with smaller sub-partners and to submit multi-sectoral proposals, thereby enhancing coordination at ground level and amplifying impact.



FLEXIBILITY

The Fund’s agility was most evident in its response to major developments in 2024:

Fall of the Assad Regime: Within just four days of the regime’s collapse on 8 December, the RA3 strategy was swiftly adapted to include a third envelope to meet urgent needs in newly accessible areas. As part of its risk-informed approach, the FMA limited this envelope to areas in Aleppo and Idleb governorates that had previously been inaccessible. On 5 December, the FMA wrote to all partners with ongoing grants to highlight the Fund’s flexibility in adjusting project activities to meet emerging needs. With the Steering Board’s endorsement, the FMA approved amendments to one grant to provide three months of operational support to the second-largest hospital in Aleppo city—an area previously beyond reach from the cross-border hub (see case on following pages).

Heatwave: In June, temperatures in northwest Syria soared to 45°C, worsening conditions for IDPs living in tents. In response, the FMA reallocated US\$0.5 million in project savings to assist over 130,000 IDPs across 131 camps. This emergency intervention provided water supply, water quality checks, and an awareness campaign to prevent sunstroke among partner staff and camp residents.

“The Aid Fund for Northern Syria (AFNS) is an important partner in the Syria response. In the last three months, AFNS’s ability to respond quickly and flexibly to needs has been a valuable asset. The Fund’s strengths are localisation, risk management, and the inclusion of women - three elements that remain essential for the future development of Syria.” —

GFFO

CASE STUDY

Flexibility in Crisis: Ensuring Continuity of Health Services in Newly Accessible Areas

Al-Razi Hospital, a major healthcare facility in Aleppo city, served 1.7 million people with essential trauma, surgical, and burn care. Until 8 December, the area remained under regime control. Following the fall of the Assad regime, the hospital came under severe strain as staff salaries were suspended, jeopardising critical services.

In line with recommendations from the Health Cluster and the newly established Ministry of Health, National NGO BAHAR—an AFNS partner under RA3 Envelope

2—alerted the Fund to the urgent need for support at Al-Razi Surgical Hospital. BAHAR submitted a project amendment, which the Fund Management Agent (FMA) reviewed and endorsed, with approval from the Steering Board. As a result, BAHAR re-programmed part of its ongoing US\$844,000 grant to ensure continuity of operations at Al-Razi. This included covering three months of salaries for 700 medical and support staff, enabling the hospital to continue delivering life-saving care.

For Dr Al-Kadi, a urological surgeon at the facility, the impact was immediate:

“
This support came at a crucial time. It allowed us to stabilise hospital operations and maintain uninterrupted access to essential care for patients.



Picture | Dr Al-Kadi at Al-Razi Hospital (Credit: BAHAR)



Picture | A doctor signing for his first salary payment (Credit: BAHAR)

Notably, in 2024, ahead of the RA3 launch, the FMA redesigned key elements of the Fund's allocation and proposal evaluation processes. This followed feedback from the Clusters and a subsequent agreement with the DRHC and ICCG that Cluster engagement would be limited to the design of allocation strategies. Proposal evaluations, by contrast, would be carried out by the FMA in collaboration with internal specialists and external NGO experts. With the Steering Board's endorsement, the FMA, replaced the Strategic and Tech-

nical Review Committee (STRC) with a new Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP). Each TEP includes AFNS representatives and up to three technical experts drawn from a pool of pre-qualified NGO Experts . To establish this pool, the FMA launched a call for NGO experts in September, which was circulated through the NWS NGO Forum and Clusters. A total of 80 applications were received, of which 62 experts were selected - 97% of whom are Syrian. The TEP will be applied for the first time under RA3.

REGULAR ALLOCATION 2

RA2 spanned 2 envelopes. Envelope 1 focused on enhancing medium to long-term impact and addressing systemic gaps in the response through integrated programming, localisation, and innovative, area-based approaches. Envelope 2 aimed to fill immediate gaps in the ongoing response by providing complementary lifesaving and life-sustaining assistance. It also included an emergency preparedness component to account for the region’s increasing volatility. RA2 allowed for project durations of up to 18 months and, for the first time, accepted proposals for activities in RAATA.

RA2 also marked the FMA’s first use of a modular approach to fund allocation. This approach enabled allocations to be launched in phases, allowing for flexibility in programming while accommodating the varying timelines of donor contributions. RA2 consisted of three modules (spanning Envelopes 1 and 2):

- Module 1** extended to projects that the SCHF was unable to fund through its Standard Allocation and had requested AFNS to consider at the end of 2023. Given the alignment of these proposals with the RA2 strategy, and following STRC scoring, three projects (totalling US\$2.43 million) were recommended and endorsed by the Steering Board.
- Module 2**, the largest component of RA2, funded 17 proposals totalling US\$20.02 million. Fourteen of these were submissions by NGOs, accounting for 78.52% of the total funding under this module.
- Module 3**, initially projected at US\$2 to 5 million and intended to pilot area-based approaches, was deferred to RA3 to allow for further coordination and alignment with other actors in the response.



Picture | Alaa attending her robotics training class at the SALAM 3 Centre in Hazano, Idleb. (Credit: WSA)

CASE STUDY

Supporting Girls to Complete Secondary School in Northwest Syria: Rayana's Story

With a US\$1.5 million grant from AFNS under RA2, the National NGO Orange launched the Etmah programme to rehabilitate 19 schools and increase enrolment in formal education in Ariha, Idleb governorate. One of the supported schools was the Computer Technology High School for Girls, which serves female secondary students. The school was at risk of closure due to repeated shelling and a lack of learning resources. Orange helped restore the facility by installing new windows and doors, reconnecting electricity, and providing essential learning tools—including computers, keyboards, and LCD screens—to support digital education.

To reduce economic barriers to education, Orange also provided US\$100 in monthly cash assistance for seven months to 85 families with daughters at risk of dropping out. Among the beneficiaries was Rayana, an eleventh-grade student whose home is 10 kilometres away. Without financial support, she could not afford safe transport to school. Today, Rayana is learning to code at the school. “School has become my second home, where I am gaining the skills to achieve my goals,” she says.

Financial support has meant that Rayana is able to continue her education:



School has become my second home, where I am gaining the skills to achieve my goals.

Picture | Students at the Computer Technology High School for Girls using their laptops in class (Credit: AFNS)

REGULAR ALLOCATION 3

The RA3 strategy initially comprised two key funding envelopes, each valued at US\$7.5 million. Envelope 1 focused on “Localisation, Resilience, and Early Recovery” through a community-based approach and was dedicated exclusively to the Anchor Organisation modality. Envelope 2 targeted “Longer-term, Locally Led, and Essential Integrated Services with a Protection Focus”. The strategy was closely aligned with humanitarian priorities outlined in the 2024 HRP and, for the first time, enabled 24-month projects following the award of the AFNS 2 contract to the FMA by the FCDO, extending the Fund to 2030.

The RA3 strategy was developed through consultations with Clusters, NGO fora, local communities, implementing partners, SCHF, and other stakeholders. It was endorsed by the Steering Board on 24 October. Later that month, AFNS presented the strategy - including the introduction of the TEP - at the NWS NGO Forum general assembly. The strategy was officially launched on 20 November with a proposal submission deadline of 30 December.

Following the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December, the FMA proposed the addition of a third envelope to RA3 to address emerging needs in newly accessible areas of Idlib and Aleppo governorates. This additional envelope, valued at US\$7.5 million, was endorsed by the Steering Board on 12 December.

ENVELOPE 1: ANCHOR ORGANISATIONS

The Anchor Organisation modality was a central pilot under AFNS’s localisation strategy. The concept note, developed by the FMA and endorsed by the Steering Board in August, outlined how AFNS would prioritise and channel funding to CBLAs through selected Anchor Organisations – trusted intermediaries that would enable CBLAs to receive AFNS support despite not meeting the Fund’s eligibility requirements for direct funding.

The FMA invited 22 eligible AFNS partners to apply for selection as Anchor Organisations. Of the 19 applicants (7 INGOs and 12 NNGOs), 14 were selected (7 INGOs and 7 NNGOs - see table below). These selected organisations were subsequently invited to apply for funding under Envelope 1.

NNGOs	INGOs
Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU)	CARE International
Ataa Humanitarian Relief Association (ATAA)	Global Communities
Hand in Hand for Aid and Development (HiH-FAD)	People in Need
Shafak	Qatar Charity
Syria Relief	Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)
Takaful Al Sham (TAS)	Welthungerhilfe
White Helmets	World Vision

Given the novel nature of the modality, the FMA held a series of orientation sessions with selected Anchor Organisations in November and December. These sessions introduced the approach, explained the use of the local actor mapping conducted by White Helmets and MIDMAR (see section on Localisation) and addressed partner queries regarding applications under RA3 Envelope 1.

Thirteen proposals were submitted by the initial deadline of 30 December. However, all contained omissions and/or errors, largely due to the unfamiliar requirements of the new Anchor Organisation pilot, which involved non-standard proposal inputs. To allow partners sufficient time to make the necessary corrections, the deadline was extended by two weeks to 16 January.

ENVELOPE 2: MULTI-SECTORAL PROGRAMMING

Of the US\$7.5 million allocated for Envelope 2, US\$2.4 million was used for projects that the SCHF was unable to fund through its oversubscribed Standard Allocation. SCHF requested AFNS support for nine such proposals. The FMA reviewed these and advanced three for funding, in September 2024, based on their alignment with the RA3 Envelope 2 strategy. All three selected proposals were submitted by NNGOs (one of these is showcased in the case study below). An additional 23 proposals were submitted by AFNS partners by the 30 December deadline to access the remaining US\$5.1 million available under this envelope.

CASE STUDY

Supporting Sustainable Livelihoods: Ahmad's Story

Ahmad, from Idlib, worked as an auto electrician until 2016, when a bomb blast left him partially paralysed. Unable to continue working, he struggled to support his family, including his three children. Determined to regain his independence, he opened a small kiosk repairing mobile phones. However, with limited skills and resources, he faced challenges in offering a full range of services.

In November 2024, National NGO Al-Sham Humanitarian Foundation (AHF) launched a vocational training programme for persons with disabilities, supported by a US\$550,000 grant from AFNS under RA3 Envelope 2. The programme, delivered through the Sham Centre for Physical Therapy and Prosthetics, aims to equip 100 persons with disabilities with practical skills to access employment opportunities. Fifty selected trainees will also receive a US\$1,300 grant to purchase materials and equipment for income-generating businesses.

Ahmad is currently enrolled in the two-month training course, attending four hours of instruction per day, five days a week. The programme is set to conclude in March 2025. Through the training, he has gained new skills, including repairing charging circuits, lighting circuits, and replacing screens. Once his training is complete, Ahmad plans to expand the services offered at his kiosk.

"Before the training, I did not have all the skills to repair phones and sometimes had to take them to another shop for help. Now, I can fix them myself and apply what I have learned in my work," Ahmad says.



Pictures | Ahmad, a beneficiary of RA3 Envelope 2 receiving vocational training in phone repair (Credit: AFNS)

ENVELOPE 3: CRITICAL NEEDS IN NEWLY ACCESSIBLE AREAS

Envelope 3 was rapidly mobilised following the fall of Assad to deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance and support resilience, recovery, social cohesion, and wellbeing of affected populations through integrated, multi-sectoral programming. The envelope prioritises engagement with community-based organisations and civil society and aims to strengthen local systems for essential service provision.

To ensure a rapid yet risk-aware response, the FMA adopted several key measures under Envelope 3:

- Geographic Focus:** The Envelope was limited to previously inaccessible areas within Aleppo and Idlib governates.
- Grant Parameters:** The maximum grant value was set at US\$1.5 million, with a maximum project duration of nine months.
- Partner Eligibility:** Only AFNS partners with partner performance scores above 75% were eligible to apply.
- Co-Creation Approach:** On 20 December, the FMA convened the 11 eligible AFNS partners for a consultation to design the envelope. Partners advocated for a locally led, resilience-building, area-based approach and the delivery of community-wide services to maximise effectiveness in newly accessible areas.
- Two-Stage Proposal Process:** Partners were first invited to submit a concept note outlining the proposed geographic scope, stakeholder coordination, sectoral focus, core activities, risk mitigation strategies, and plans for engaging with local markets. A follow-up consultation will be held to discuss common risks and operational considerations before partners are invited to submit full proposals by the end of January 2025.
- Adapted Project Life Cycle:** All Envelope 3 projects will include a one-month inception phase. During this period, partners will carry out needs assessments (in the absence of a nationwide Multi-Sector Needs Assessment) and community consultations to validate the relevance of proposed activities in a fluid and rapidly evolving context.



Pictures (from top to bottom) | Mental health awareness session held in Haritan Maternity and Paediatrics Hospital, Aleppo. (Credit: HiHFAD)

Kfar Benni School head teacher Ramadan with his students, Idlib. (Credit: Bonyan)

Student Sanaa in the classroom in Idlib. (Credit: SADAD)

5 | OTHER PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS & ACHIEVEMENTS

BROAD PARTNER BASE

By the end of 2023, a total of 52 organisations had been registered as qualified partners of AFNS. One additional organisation was registered in 2024, and the FMA is in the final stages of signing Partner Framework Agreements (PFAs) with three more. However, following detailed Partner Performance Assessments – conducted in line with the Fund’s accountability framework - three existing partners saw their Capacity Scores fall below the 50% threshold. As a result, the total number of qualified partners at the end of the reporting year stands at 50.

The FMA temporarily closed the partner registration window at the end of the year. This decision was driven by two factors: recent context changes, including the evolving requirements of the Syrian transitional government (which may impact future partner eligibility criteria); and limited funding availability, which limits clarity on the timeline for the next allocation.

Of the 50 currently qualified AFNS partners, 36 (72%) are National NGOs, reflecting the Fund’s commitment to expanding both the quantity and quality of funding directed to local actors.

Qualified Partners

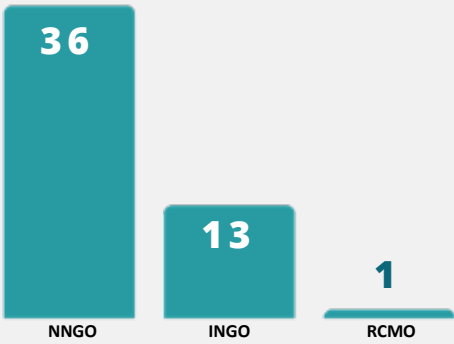


Figure 6 | AFNS qualified partners (Type)

PARTNER CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

The FMA provides ongoing financial and technical advice to AFNS partners during implementation to strengthen their capacity. In addition, it supports capacity development through several targeted approaches:

Special Conditions in Partnership Framework Agreements (PFAs): Based on findings from Capacity Assessments (CAs), Special Conditions are included in PFAs to identify areas where partners must build capacity to qualify for higher levels of funding. Partners are required to develop a time-bound capacity building plan to address these conditions. To support this, the FMA allows for dedicated capacity strengthening budgets of up to US\$10,000 within each grant. This demand-driven approach is designed to give partners agency in their own development and provide clear incentives to achieve tangible improvements. A total of 511 Special Conditions have been attached to the PFAs signed with qualified partners to date (see graph below). In 2024, approximately US\$120,300 - used almost exclusively by NGOs – was allocated to address these capacity needs. This draws on lesson learned, recognising that traditional, supply-driven training approaches have largely failed to deliver meaningful capacity gains in most NGOs over the past decade.

Safeguarding Focused Workshops and Peer-to-Peer Learning: The Fund’s Safeguarding Adviser led nine workshops in 2024, bringing together Safeguarding Focal Points from implementing partner organisations. These sessions enabled partners to exchange best practices on critical aspects of programming, delivery, and risk management.

Learning and Reflection Workshops: Facilitated by the Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) provider, these workshops offered feedback to partners on improving programming quality. A total of 31 workshops were held with AFNS partners in 2024 (see section on risk for more detail).



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Special Conditions

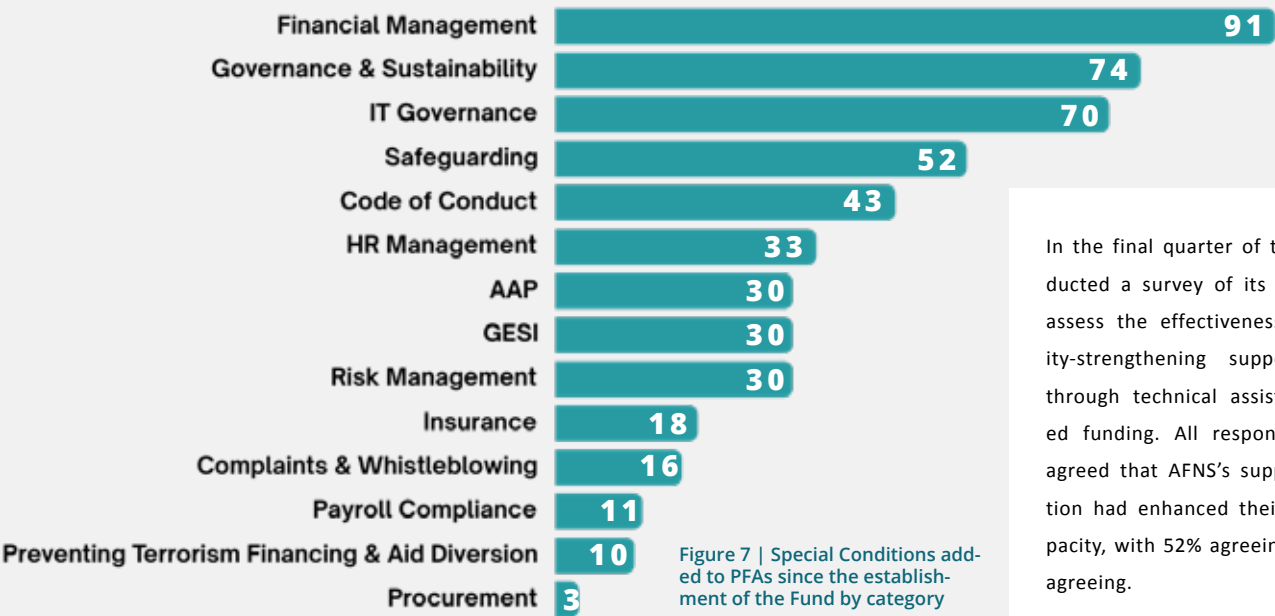


Figure 7 | Special Conditions added to PFAs since the establishment of the Fund by category

In the final quarter of the year, AFNS conducted a survey of its direct partners to assess the effectiveness of AFNS’s capacity-strengthening support - particularly through technical assistance and dedicated funding. All respondents unanimously agreed that AFNS’s support and collaboration had enhanced their organisation’s capacity, with 52% agreeing and 48% strongly agreeing.

LOCALISATION

AFNS places localisation at the core of its governance, strategies, partnerships, and programming (see figure below for more details). In May, the Fund was recognised for its innovative localisation practices during a session hosted by the governments of the UK, Switzerland, and Denmark. This recognition, highlighted in a report shared on the AFNS website, underscored several key practices – including the Anchor Organisation modality, equitable cost-sharing between INGOs and local partners, and dedicated investments in partner capacity strengthening.

AFNS’s Emphasis on Localisation



GOVERNANCE

- The Steering Board comprises an equal number of members from the three main constituencies of the humanitarian response, including three Syrian NGOs.
- The Board is advised by a Women’s Advisory Group (WAG), consisting of women working in the humanitarian response both in Syria and Türkiye.
- The Fund Management Agent (FMA) is made up predominantly of Syrian nationals (66%)



STRATEGIES

- The Localisation Strategy lays out how the Fund will increase the quantum of funding to local actors through the development of an ‘Anchor Organisation approach’ where larger international and local NGOs form consortia with smaller local women-led and Community Based Organisations (CBOs).



PROPOSALS

- Partners must develop socially inclusive proposals informed by community consultations with intended beneficiaries at the local level.
- Proposals are evaluated by Technical Evaluation Panels that include NGO experts from across the response. The FMA established a pool of 62 NGO experts at the end of 2024, the majority of whom are Syrian (97%).



PARTNERSHIPS

- It is mandatory for international implementing partners who have applied for funding in partnership with local partners to equitably share overheads.

“The AFNS meets and exceeds localisation agenda objectives via its localisation strategy and Anchor Organisation modality, setting the standards for others to follow.”
— FCDO

The AFNS Localisation Strategy, endorsed by the Steering Board in December 2023, is designed to transfer power and funding to local actors - ensuring assistance in northern Syria is locally led, people-centred, community-driven, flexible, sustainable, collaborative, and inclusive. The strategy outlines five objectives:

- to secure equitable partnerships and enhance collaboration among local actors
- to facilitate knowledge and capacity sharing between actors
- to increase the flow of funding to local actors
- to improve the quality of funding for local actors
- to ensure decision-making and leadership are locally led

In March, the FMA supported the development of new Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Localisation Working Group. Candidates for the new Working Group were confirmed in the first half of the year and included NGOs, donors, UN staff, current and former Steering Board members, and AFNS partners along with the Lead, Co-lead, and Coordinator of the Partnership Working Group of the NWS NGO Forum.

The Working Group met three times during the year to finalise the ToR for the local actor mapping (see below) and the Anchor Organisation approach.

During the year, the FMA also actioned recommendations of its localisation strategy as follows:

- **Local Actor Mapping:** The Steering Board endorsed the use of the pooled fund to support a comprehensive mapping of Community-Based Local Actors (CBLAs) in northwest Syria and RAATA to inform the Anchor Organisation approach. Following a restricted call for Expressions of Interest issued to 15 partners, a US\$127,000 grant was awarded in June to the White Helmets, in collaboration with MIDMAR. The initiative established a database of 1,000 CBLAs and mapped 477 organisations, including 303 in Idleb, 154 in Aleppo, and 20 in RAATA. These included youth-led (129), women-led (81), network-based (9), and general community-based organisations (258), operating across sectors such as health, psychosocial support, food security, and education. Of the mapped CBLAs, 128 were assessed in greater detail. The results were presented at a workshop in October, attended by approximately 150 representatives from NNGOs, INGOs, Clusters, and donors. The final report and accompanying dashboards (in both English and Arabic) are available on the AFNS website. A public version of the dashboard includes non-sensitive data for all 477 CBLAs. An expanded version, with additional detail on the 128 CBLAs assessed in depth, was shared exclusively with Anchor Organisations to support consortium development and partner identification under RA3 Envelope 1.
- **Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) Pilot:** The Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) secured funding from the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) to support AFNS's localisation agenda through targeted partner capacity strengthening. In mid-2024, the Fund Management Agent (FMA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with HLA and identified five National NGOs (NNGOs) to participate in the pilot. Each organisation was matched with a senior humanitarian leader from HLA's mentor network, who engaged directly with the CEOs to support strategic leadership and governance. Participating organisations received tailored in-person and online support from senior HLA humanitarian leaders.

“AFNS has demonstrated strong commitment to localisation in 2024, notably by implementing the Anchor Organisation strategy and mapping the local actors in northwest Syria. This unique approach enhances the effectiveness of its funding by strengthening local actors who are deeply embedded in their community and best positioned to address local challenges.” —

Ministère des Affaires Étrangères



Picture | The White Helmets research team presenting findings (Credit: The White Helmets)

GENDER EQUALITY & SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

AFNS continued to prioritise Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) across its governance, strategy, and programming in 2024. As noted in Section 2 on AFNS figures for 2024, AFNS assisted 1.25 million women and girls and 39,000 persons with disabilities (PWDs) in 2024—these figures represent the unique number of women, girls, and PWDs supported. Since the launch of RA1, the FMA has consistently consulted women, girls, PWDs, the elderly, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) inside northwest Syria in the development of allocation strategies.

AFNS is also committed to advancing female representation within its own governance structures. In 2024, 56% of the Steering Board members were women. The Board was advised by a Women’s Advisory Group (WAG) composed of women engaged in the humanitarian response in both Syria and Türkiye. 43% of roles in the FMA were staffed by women by the end of 2024. The FMA also delivered on its commitment to increase female participation within its Partnerships and Delivery Unit (PDU), where four out of seven roles were held by women at year-end.

The AFNS GESI Strategy outlines how GESI should be embedded in Fund operations and partner programming to make the humanitarian response in northwest Syria more gender-responsive and gender-transformative. The strategy is informed by the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), global gender frameworks, and the gender analysis conducted by UN Women following the February 2023 earthquake.

- **Due Diligence and Capacity Assessments (DDCA):** Prospective partners are assessed for their commitment to GESI in both policy and programming.
- **Allocation Strategy Design:** The FMA consults with marginalised groups to identify priority areas.
- **Proposal Development:** Partners must demonstrate local-level consultation with women, girls, and other marginalised groups, and commit to reaching those groups in project implementation.
- **Proposal Review:** The Technical Evaluation Panel (TEP) evaluates proposals, including their strengths in addressing GESI.
- **Reporting:** Partners are required to disaggregate data on reach and impact by gender and other marginalised characteristics.
- **Third Party Monitoring (TPM):** The Fund’s TPM analytical framework assesses access and inclusion, specifically whether vulnerable groups are being targeted and can access services, and the extent to which their needs have been addressed. TPM-led learning and reflection workshops include follow-up with partners on GESI-related action points.

To further sharpen the Fund’s focus on GESI in 2024, the FMA:

- Organised **peer-to-peer learning sessions** on GESI-sensitive and responsive programming. Seven sessions were held—three in Türkiye and four in Syria—with a total of 72 participants (31 women and 41 men).
- Introduced **one-on-one GESI-focused meetings** with partners to discuss findings related to Special Conditions and Partner Performance Assessments. Six such meetings were conducted during the year.
- Included **sector-specific guidance** for applicants under RA3 on what constitutes GESI-sensitive and responsive programming.
- Mandated the inclusion of a **GESI plan** in all RA3 proposals.

See on the following pages for two case studies that illustrate how AFNS partners are prioritising GESI in Fund-supported projects.

CASE STUDY

Boosting Women's Economic Empowerment through the Provision of Childcare: Baraa's Story

As part of its US\$1.4 million grant under RA2, National NGO SARD launched a cash-for-work programme targeting vulnerable individuals, including women and persons with disabilities. Recognising that childcare responsibilities often prevent women from participating in such opportunities, SARD provided free childcare services to enable 18 women to take part in the programme.

One of the participants was Baraa, a mother of four from Killi in Idlib. As the sole breadwinner for her family—including a child with a medical condition—Baraa struggled to secure a stable income to meet rising household and medical expenses, particularly in a context where job op-

portunities for women remain limited.

With her children safely cared for in the childcare centre, Baraa was able to participate in the cash-for-work initiative, contributing to the cleaning and maintenance of local markets and schools. The US\$150 monthly income she earned allowed her to pay for her child's medication and cover essential household needs.

"With my children in safe care, I could finally focus on work without worry. It made my job easier and gave me peace of mind," she says.



Baraa participated in the cash-for-work initiative:

“With my children in safe care, I could finally focus on work without worry.”

Picture | Baraa with her sons (Credit: SARD)

CASE STUDY

Process Innovations to Improve Access Humanitarian Assistance: GESI-Responsive Programming by Mercy Without Limits (MWL)

When launching its winterisation programme—which included both cash and in-kind assistance—National NGO Mercy Without Limits (MWL) identified significant access barriers for many recipients. Beneficiaries were required to travel long distances to reach banks, available only in Aleppo. This posed particular challenges for elderly people, women, and persons with disabilities, especially during harsh winter conditions and long queues. Additionally, verifying that cash had been received and withdrawn by the intended beneficiaries placed a heavy burden on MWL staff.

To address these challenges, MWL invested part of its US\$1.97 million grant from AFNS under the first Regular Allocation (RA1) to introduce digital innovations that enhanced both accessibility and accountability in its cash distribution processes.

With AFNS support, MWL introduced a mobile cash distribution system and established sheltered collection points in hard-to-reach areas of Arin and Jindires. E-cards were issued to 1,000 families, allowing beneficiaries to tap their cards on MWL's mobile devices for instant identity verification, balance checks, and secure cash disbursement—significantly reducing wait times and travel burdens.

“The process is significantly better than before. It saves us from the hardship of waiting at the bank,

away from the heat and cold,” shared Fatima, a programme recipient.

MWL also developed a QR code system to streamline the distribution of in-kind assistance, such as hygiene and winter kits. Each beneficiary received a printed QR code linked to their individual allowance. This system enabled MWL staff to quickly confirm eligibility and distribute items efficiently. Hygiene kits included essentials such as toothpaste, shampoo, and detergent, while winter kits provided blankets, mattresses, and heaters.

These process innovations have strengthened MWL's ability to deliver aid more effectively, while improving accessibility and preserving the dignity of recipients.

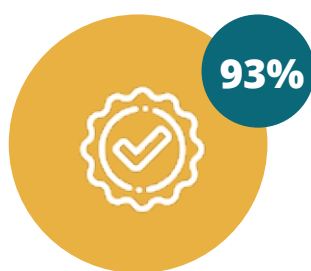
Fatima, a programme recipient:

“The process is significantly better than before. It saves us from hardship of waiting at the bank, away from the heat and cold.”

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS (AAP)



93% of people assisted reporting that they have been consulted about their needs



93% of people assisted reporting that humanitarian assistance is delivered in a safe, accessible, accountable, and participatory manner



90% of people assisted reporting knowledge on how to report safeguarding incidents

The Accountability to Affected Populations and Community Engagement (AAPCE) Strategy was developed by the Fund Management Agent (FMA) in August 2023, in consultation with AFNS partners, key stakeholders, and the inter-agency AAP Taskforce. The strategy aims to ensure that AFNS delivers assistance that is accountable to affected populations and that communities are actively engaged in the design and implementation of response efforts. It also promotes the integration of AAPCE principles and practices across AFNS partnerships and programming.

AAPCE is operationalised in the following ways:

- **Due Diligence and Capacity Assessments (DDCAs):** The partner eligibility and selection process include specific AAPCE questions in the assessment templates. This supports the identification of accountability-related capacity gaps and informs capacity strengthening plans to improve partner performance and risk management.
- **Allocations:** Community consultation sessions are held to gather insights and address knowledge gaps. These consultations shape each allocation strategy to ensure it is responsive to the needs and priorities of affected communities.
- **Project Proposals:** All proposals must include AAP plans and be grounded in comprehensive needs assessments. These assessments identify community needs, preferences, and priorities, disaggregated by age, gender, disability, and other vulnerabilities.
- **Implementation:** Partners are required to establish or adapt community committees to support the implementation of AFNS-funded projects. In 2024, the FMA developed a standard Terms of Reference (ToR) template for community committees and supported partners in appointing AAPCE focal points. In October 2024, an AAPCE Community of Practice was launched and convened three times during the year.
- **Monitoring:** Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) and field visits include direct consultations with communities to assess the quality and relevance of partner performance and project delivery.
- **Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms:** Partners are required to establish or strengthen inclusive, safe, accessible, and responsive mechanisms for community feedback and complaints. In parallel, the Fund maintains and strengthens confidential channels for staff, partners, and community members to report concerns, including incidents of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH), ensuring these are handled in a safe and accountable manner.



15 Community consultations held to inform RA3 allocation strategy



All AFNS-funded projects across all three allocations include AAP plans

See the case study on the next page for how a community committee supported an AFNS-funded project in Al-Jabal Camp, Idlib.

CASE STUDY

Promoting Community-Led Solutions and Social Cohesion in Al-Jabal Camp

In Al-Jabal Camp, Idleb—home to 875 internally displaced persons (IDPs)—many residents rely on livestock rearing as a primary source of income. Among them is Abu Khaled, who depends on his sheep to support his family.

However, the placement of livestock pens within residential areas was creating growing tensions. Camp residents raised concerns about odours, insect infestations, and constant noise. More critically, the pens attracted wild animals—including snakes, stray dogs, and wolves—posing serious health and safety risks.

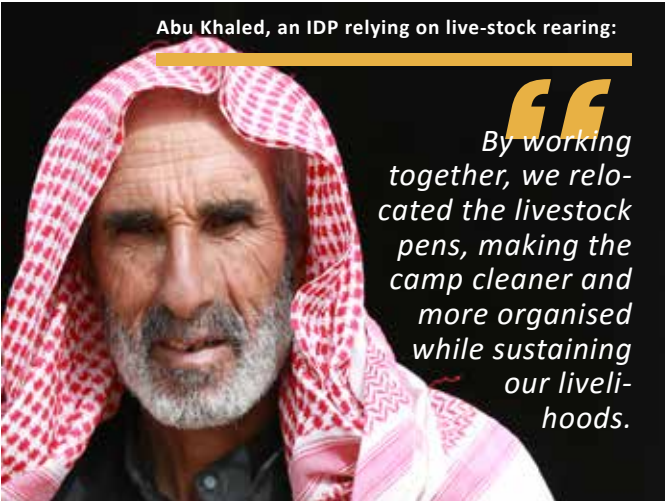
Recognising the need for a community-led solution, National NGO BINAA launched a camp improvement project in March 2024 with a US\$1.75 million grant from AFNS under RA2. A community committee was formed, comprising the camp manager and three

trusted individuals selected by residents to act as intermediaries between the community and BINAA.

The committee convened daily meetings to build consensus around key issues, including the challenge of livestock management. Through these consultations, the community proposed relocating the livestock pens to a designated area outside the housing zone—aiming to improve sanitation while protecting livelihoods.

With support from BINAA, the community took ownership of the process. The committee collaborated with livestock owners, including Abu Khaled, to agree on the new site, reorganise the camp layout, and mobilise residents to construct enclosures, move animals, and promote better animal management practices.

Picture | Abu Khaled, a livestock owner in Al-Jabal camp (Credit: BINAA)



RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE TO INFORM STRATEGY AND PROGRAMMING

The AFNS Research Strategy sets out the Fund's approach to generating evidence to guide both its long-term direction and short-term programming. It aims to produce macro-level analyses of humanitarian needs to inform the Fund's medium- and long-term purpose, followed by identifying micro-level priorities for innovative interventions that bridge the gap between emergency response and recovery.

The strategy focuses on **seven** core research areas:

1. **Long-term Vision for Syria:** Exploring short-, medium-, and long-term scenarios and strategies to support sustainable recovery, peacebuilding, and social cohesion in northwest Syria.
 2. **Analysis of Drivers of Humanitarian Need:** Investigating the root causes of the protracted crisis at a macro level.
 3. **Better Definition of Key Terms:** Clarifying concepts such as localisation, resilience, wellbeing, and social cohesion in the Syrian context, and identifying local actors and systems the Fund can support in these areas.
 4. **Research on Humanitarian Needs, Risks, and Resilience Factors:** Deepening understanding of the structural drivers of instability and humanitarian crises in northwest Syria.
 5. **Contextual Analysis:** Conducting localised, in-depth studies of specific communities, sectors, and population groups.
 6. **Rapid Analysis of Emerging Shifts:** Monitoring real-time changes in the context to inform strategic investments, programme design, and donor engagement.
 7. **Innovative Use of Technology:** Exploring the role of technology in addressing humanitarian and recovery challenges, particularly in improving access to financial services and supporting economic recovery.
- The Fund commissioned the following research initiatives in 2024:
- **Critical Crossroads – Key Trends in Cross-Border Aid Response:** The study emphasised the need for a shift from emergency relief to early recovery programming in northern Syria, with a focus on Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding (HDP) Nexus programming. It underscores the importance of supporting locally driven initiatives and adopting area-based approaches to strengthen localisation efforts. Additionally, the study provides evidence-based insights to inform donor support strategies, ensuring that future interventions are both sustainable and impactful. These insights informed the design of the RA3 allocation, which offers up to 24 long-term projects.
 - **Advancing the Aid Fund for Syria's Strategic Approach: Lessons from Humanitarian Pooled Funds:** This report, prepared by ICVA, summarises best practises from eight humanitarian pooled funds worldwide, focusing on complementarity, localisation, and bridging emergency response with early recovery. It offers practical insights for strengthening resilience, coordination, and local leadership in Syria's evolving humanitarian context.
 - **Roundtable Series on the Future of Aid in Syria:** AFNS convened three high-level roundtable discussions bringing together leading analysts, senior practitioners, and policy advisors to examine evolving trends and strategic challenges in the Syrian response. These closed-door sessions provided space for structured reflection and debate on key issues including the transition from emergency relief to early recovery, the future of cross-border aid, and the integration of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts (the HDP Nexus). Participants also explored opportunities for locally led recovery, the role of pooled funds in enabling flexible and coordinated responses, and the implications of political shifts on humanitarian access and programming. Insights from these roundtables informed the RA3 strategy and were shared with Steering Board Members and Observers, positioning AFNS as a platform for dialogue and evidence-based adaptation in a rapidly changing context.

6 | RISK MANAGEMENT



Picture | Mental health worker Sami consulting a patient at Salqin Hospital, Idlib. (Credit: SAMS)

The Fund’s governance model ensures that affected populations are represented, while providing donors with confidence that their contributions are used responsibly. Preventing the misuse of funds remains a top priority for AFNS. The Fund’s banking arrangements and payment processes are fully compliant with international sanctions and counter-terrorist financing regulations. In addition, AFNS adheres to the standards for fund- and grant-level monitoring outlined in the AFNS Manual.

The Fund’s accountability and risk management framework is built on the following core principles:

PARTNER QUALIFICATION

The FMA adopts a ‘quality at entry’ approach to partner management by applying a robust DDCA process. This process assesses both the current capacity and future potential of prospective partners, while identifying key areas for improvement. Throughout project implementation, the FMA continues to monitor partner performance and engages with partners to review progress on capacity enhancement efforts.

Partners that successfully complete the Fund’s qualification process are eligible to submit proposals in response to AFNS allocations. The qualification process includes the following steps:

- **Sanctions Screening:** Organisations and key individuals are vetted through NAVEX Global against UK, US, EU, and UN sanctions lists.
- **Capacity Assessment:** Partners submit self-assessments through the Grant Management System (GMS), which the FMA verifies via desk review of supporting documentation, staff interviews, and office visits. Assessments cov-

er the following areas: governance, risk management and compliance, financial management, procurement, human resources, project management, organisational sustainability, and the organisation’s commitment to safeguarding, IT and cyber security, AAP, GESI, and localisation.

- **Reference Checks:** The FMA obtains references from the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF), donors, and large NGOs.
- **Scoring and Eligibility:** Each applicant receives a score based on the DDCA findings. Applicants scoring 50% or higher are deemed qualified and complete the process by signing a Partnership Framework Agreement (PFA) and the AFNS Code of Conduct. The final Capacity Assessment (CA) score determines the grant ceiling, and the level of monitoring applied to the partner.



GRANT IMPLEMENTATION

- **Risk-Aligned Disbursement:** The FMA ensures that all grant payment terms and disbursement cycles are tailored to each partner's expenditure forecast and the risk profile of the partner. Low-risk partners may receive funding in fewer, larger tranches, while higher-risk partners receive smaller, more frequent disbursements. The FMA closely monitors budget execution and adjusts disbursement schedules if there are significant deviations from planned expenditure.
- **Dedicated Grant and Relationship Management:** Each partner is assigned a single focal point from the FMA's PDU to manage the relationship. This focal point provides day-to-day support and coordination and works closely with the FMA's Field Team to consolidate findings and recommendations from visits to partner offices and activity sites inside Syria.
- **Systematic Reporting and Feedback:** Partners are required to submit narrative and financial reports, including inception, quarterly delivery, and final completion reports. These reports capture progress, challenges, risks, and impact. The FMA reviews and provides written feedback on all submissions. Financial reports are reviewed prior to each disbursement. Where expenditure is significantly off-track, disbursements may be reduced or deferred accordingly.
- **Robust Incident Reporting & Investigation Protocols:** The FMA has established clear guidelines for partners to report incidents or allegations related to safeguarding and aid diversion. The FMA's Leadership Team, Safeguarding Lead and Aid Diversion Coordinator oversees and supports the investigation of such cases. The FMA is committed to transparency and collaboration, and keeps the Steering Board informed of ongoing investigations concerning fraud, diversion, or misappropriation.
- **Continuous Partner Performance Assessment:** Partner performance is regularly reassessed during implementation using a structured performance scorecard. These assessments inform updates to a partner's capacity rating, which may result in adjustments to grant ceilings or the intensity of monitoring requirements. In 2024, the FMA completed 52 Partner Performance Assessments—10 for SA1, 23 for RA1, and 19 for RA2 projects.



Picture | Small business owners presenting their goods at a business fair organised by WHH in Afrin, Aleppo. (Credit: AFNS)

MONITORING

AFNS employs a range of monitoring and verification tools to ensure data quality and programme integrity across all grants. These include:

- Data Quality Inspections (DQI):** Conducted quarterly by the FMA’s Monitoring, Reporting, Evaluation and Learning (MREL) Unit, these assessments review partner-submitted data on the Grant Management System (GMS) against the Fund’s Results Framework. In 2024, a total of 137 DQIs were completed: 16 for SA1, 64 for RA1, 56 for RA2, and 1 for RA3.
- Data Quality Assessments (DQA):** Separate from DQIs, the FMA commissions a Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) provider to independently verify the integrity, validity, timeliness, precision, and reliability of a sample of partner-reported raw data. DQAs are especially critical for partners with lower capacity scores but may also be triggered as required by the FMA. One DQA was completed

for an SA1 partner during the reporting period.

- Field and Spot Checks:** A team of nine Field Officers regularly visit project sites to verify reported activities. These checks use Mobile Data Capture technology—including timestamps, GPS coordinates, and photographic evidence—to validate partner reporting. Collected data is analysed by the FMA. In total, 477 field visits were conducted: 49 for SA1, 237 for RA1, 190 for RA2, and 1 for RA3.
- Third-Party Monitoring (TPM):** In 2024, the FMA further strengthened its TPM approach in collaboration with the Fund’s TPM provider. All AFNS grants require at least one TPM visit, regardless of the partner’s risk rating. Each TPM cycle culminates in a Learning and Reflection Workshop facilitated by the TPM provider and attended by both the FMA and partner staff. A total of 31 TPM exercises were completed in 2024: 14 for RA1 and 17 for RA2.



EXTERNAL AUDITS

- Project Audits:** Each AFNS grant is subject to an external audit to provide independent assurance on the use of funds and to identify financial or operational weaknesses, along with recommendations for improvement. Larger or high-risk grants may also undergo interim audits. The FMA completed the procurement process for audit firms at the end of 2023, selecting two reputable firms to carry out these assignments. Grant audits commenced in 2024, and final audit reports were issued for 10 interim and final audits during the reporting year (see below).

Partner	Allocation	Audit (type)
Independent Doctors Association (IDA)	SA1	Final
Hand in Hand for Aid and Development (HiHFAD)	SA1	Final
SHAFAK	SA1	Final
CARE Türkiye	SA1	Final
Ataa Humanitarian Relief Association (ATAA)	SA1	Final
Takaful Al Sham (TAS)	SA1	Final
Physicians Across Continents (PAC)	RA1	Interim
People in Need (PIN)	SA1	Final
Turuncu Dernegi (Orange)	RA1	Interim
Insani Sam Dernegi (AHF)	RA1	Interim

- Fund Audits:** The Fund is externally audited on an annual basis by an international audit firm to ensure compliance, financial integrity, and accountability. During the reporting year, the FMA contracted auditors to complete the Fund-level audit covering the 2023-2024 period. The auditor was finalised in August 2024, resulting in an unqualified (“clean”) audit opinion.
- 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 concluded the procurement of the evaluator (IOD PARC) and work on the evaluation commenced in the first quarter of 2024. The final evaluation report was shared with the Steering Board in August. It found that AFNS has played a crucial role in the humanitarian response in northern Syria, particularly in prioritising localisation and ensuring coordination with other humanitarian actors. AFNS was commended for its flexibility, responsiveness, and ability to address critical gaps in the humanitarian landscape.



Picture | Aleppo East Road. (Credit: Wolfgang Gressmann)



Picture | SADAD staff train a female farmer on agricultural practices, Aleppo. (Credit: SADAD)



Picture | AFNS leadership discussions with the White Helmets team, Aleppo. (Credit: Wolfgang Gressmann)



Picture | Preschool teacher Mohamad teaches in a rehabilitated classroom in Dabiq, Aleppo. (Credit: SARD)

7 | COMMUNICATION



STEERING BOARD COMMUNICATION

Eight Steering Board meetings were held in 2024, including two special sessions focused on the RAATA region and on enhancing complementarity with the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF). To ensure continued information flow between meetings, the Fund Management Agent (FMA) prepared and shared regular Situation Reports. A total of 11 Situation Reports were circulated to Steering Board members and Donor Observers during the year.



IN A LANDSCAPE SHAPED BY COMPLEXITY AND CRISIS, HOW WE TELL THE STORY OF AID MATTERS. COMMUNICATIONS AT AFNS ISN'T JUST ABOUT VISIBILITY—IT'S ABOUT TRANSPARENCY, TRUST, AND AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF THOSE DRIVING CHANGE ON THE GROUND.

Picture | Sanaa learning at her school in Idlib.
(Credit: SADAD)

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The FMA undertook several activities in 2024 to externally communicate progress and developments related to the Fund:



01

WEBSITE

Regularly updated the AFNS website, which was accessed by approximately 5,800 users between January and December 2024.



02

DASHBOARDS

Developed multiple Progress and Allocation Overview dashboards, populated with data from the Grant Management System (GMS) and made publicly available on the AFNS website. These tools help identify funding gaps and analyse the contribution of AFNS-funded projects to the humanitarian response in northwest Syria.



03

TOWNHALLS

Participated in a Townhall Meeting hosted by the NWS NGO Forum in October 2024 to share information on the RA3 strategy with local organisations and partners.



04

NEWSLETTERS

Produced and shared three newsletters with partners, highlighting key updates and Fund progress.



05

CONTENT

Developed content and case studies to mark key international days, including:

- International Education Day (24 January)
- International Women's Day (8 March)
- 2023 earthquake anniversary (6 February)
- World Refugee Day (21 June)
- International Youth Day (12 August)
- World Humanitarian Day (19 August)
- International Day of Peace (21 September)
- World Teachers' Day (5 October)
- World Mental Health Day (10 October)
- International Day of the Girl Child (11 October)
- International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December)

ANNEX

AFNS STEERING BOARD MEMBERSHIP IN 2024

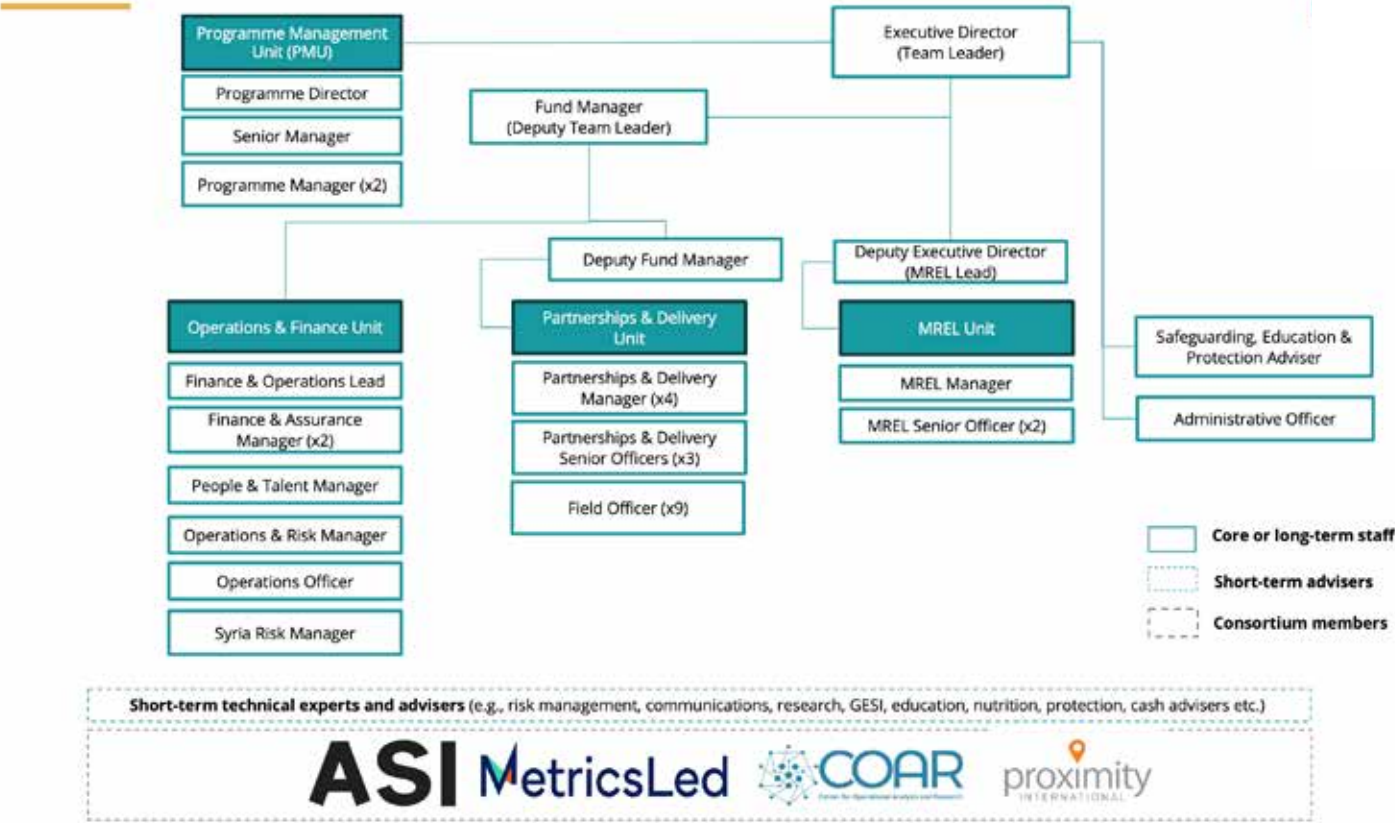
Stakeholder	Organisation
Chair	Independent
Donor	UK
Donor	USA
Donor	Germany / France
National NGO	Mercy Without Limits (MWL)
National NGO	White Helmets (WH)
National NGO	Women Now (WN)
International NGO	International Rescue Committee (IRC)
International NGO	CARE International (CI)
International NGO	Human Appeal (HA)



Picture | Water system renovations in Al Bab, Idlib. (Credit: IYD)

FMA ORGANISATIONAL CHART

FUND MANAGEMENT AGENT (FMA): ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



AFNS PARTNERS (AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2024)

No.	Name	Type
1	Equity and Empowerment	NNGO
2	Human Appeal	INGO
3	MIDMAR Organization	NNGO
4	Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SYCAC)	NNGO
5	White Helmets (WH)	NNGO
6	Women Now for Development (Women Now)	NNGO
7	Sened Organization	NNGO
8	MedGlobal	NNGO
9	Elaf for Relief and Development	NNGO
10	International Humanitarian Relief (IHR)	NNGO
11	White Hands Association	NNGO
12	Syrian American Medical Society Foundation (SAMS)	INGO
13	Social Development International (SDI)	NNGO
14	Olive Branch	NNGO
15	World Vision	INGO
16	Syria Relief and Development (SRD)	NNGO
17	INSAN Charity Organization	NNGO
18	Global Communities (GC)	INGO
19	Relief International (RI)	INGO
20	Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW)	INGO
21	Shafak Organization	NNGO
22	Hand in Hand for Aid and Development (HiHFAD)	NNGO
23	Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU)	NNGO
24	Bonyan International Organization	NNGO
25	Syrian Association for Relief and Development (SARD)	NNGO
26	ATAA Humanitarian Relief Foundation	NNGO
27	Nasaem Khair Organisation (NKO)	NNGO
28	Al-Sham Humanitarian Foundation	NNGO
29	Woman Support Association (WSA)	NNGO
30	Ghiras Al-Nahda	NNGO
31	Bahar Organization	NNGO
32	International Association for Relief and Development (ONSUR)	NNGO
33	BINAA Organization for Development	NNGO
34	The MENTOR Initiative	INGO
35	Ihsan Relief and Development	NNGO
36	Sadad Humanitarian Organization	NNGO
37	Syria Relief	NNGO
38	Violet Organisation	NNGO
39	Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations (UOSSM)	INGO
40	Orange Organization	NNGO
41	Humanitarian Relief Organization (IYD)	NNGO
42	Muzun for Humanitarian and Development	NNGO
43	Mercy Without Limits (MWL)	NNGO
44	Turkish Red Crescent (TRC)	RCMO
45	Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (WHH)	INGO
46	Takaful Al Sham (TAS)	NNGO
47	People in Need (PIN)	INGO
48	CARE International (CI)	INGO
49	GOAL Global	INGO
50	Amal Organization for Relief and Development	NNGO

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DURATION COVERED:
January to December 2024

PREPARED FOR:
AFNS Steering Board

WEB:
www.afns.org

ANNUAL
REPORT
2024

