

**ACTION
FOR
HUMANITY**

RETURNING TO HOPE:

ONE YEAR AFTER THE LIBERATION

2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One year after the political transition of 8 December 2024, Syria stands at a fragile moment of hope. Violence has declined, roads have reopened, and more than one million people have begun returning home — many for the first time in more than a decade. Families are stepping back into towns scarred by conflict, searching for safety, stability, and the chance to rebuild their lives.

Yet the reality they return to is extraordinarily difficult.

Across the country, 16.5 million people still need humanitarian assistance. Entire neighbourhoods remain in ruins. Water systems function at only half their former capacity. Hospitals and schools are overwhelmed. Many communities cannot yet provide even the most basic services — not because of conflict, but because the scale of return is outpacing recovery.

A defining challenge is the presence of explosive remnants of war. Mines and unexploded ordnance contaminate farmland, roads, schools, and homes.

In the past year alone, more than 650 explosive incidents have killed or injured hundreds of civilians, many of them children. This makes explosive ordnance not just a safety issue, but the single biggest obstacle to rebuilding Syria’s economy, infrastructure, and future.

Despite these challenges, Syrians are already driving their own recovery. Communities are repairing homes, replanting fields, reopening businesses, and supporting returning families. Action For Humanity has been at the heart of this work for over a decade. AFH has rehabilitated schools and clinics, restored water systems, supported farmers, and delivered vital health, education, and livelihood services to millions.

But the scale of need is growing faster than the support available. Early recovery is happening without the multi-year funding required to sustain it. If the international community does not act now, Syria risks losing the fragile gains made over the past year.



SYRIA ONE YEAR ON: FAMILIES STILL NEED US
ACTION FOR HUMANITY

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A MOMENT OF FRAGILE POSSIBILITY

Syria’s recovery will not be quick. But this year has shown that despite deep hardship, Syrians are ready to rebuild. With coordinated support, grounded in safety, dignity, and long-term investment, communities can begin to move from survival to recovery.

AFH stands ready to lead this work. What happens next will depend on whether the international community chooses to match the courage and determination of those returning home.

INTRODUCTION

One year on from the political transition of 8 December 2024, Syria remains one of the world’s most complex humanitarian environments. Although violence has decreased and access has opened in several areas, communities continue to feel the weight of more than a decade of conflict. Daily life is shaped by displacement, economic decline, damaged infrastructure, and weakened public services, realities that affect nearly every household.

Recent humanitarian assessments estimate that **16.5 million people** now require assistance, representing more than two-thirds of Syria’s population [1][2]. Needs are severe across all major sectors, including food security, health, WASH, education, shelter, protection, and livelihoods. Declining purchasing

power, unstable markets, and limited access to essential services continue to deepen vulnerability — particularly in communities absorbing large numbers of returnees.

These pressures directly shape the areas examined in this report: reconstruction, explosive ordnance contamination, food security, livelihoods, WASH, education, and healthcare.

Although overall hostilities have decreased, episodes of localised unrest, including the sustained violence in Suwayda throughout 2025, have continued to affect access and contribute to humanitarian need [1][2].



Over the last five years, AFH has reached more than **10 million people** across Syria with humanitarian assistance, reflecting the scale and long-term impact of our presence.

The scale of physical destruction is profound. The World Bank estimates US\$216 billion will be needed to restore infrastructure damaged since the start of the conflict [7]. Homes, clinics, schools, water networks, agricultural systems, and public buildings remain heavily degraded, leaving millions without reliable services.

Displacement continues to define the landscape. More than 7.4 million people remain internally displaced [2]. Since December 2024, over one million Syrian refugees and previously displaced people have returned to their areas of origin [2][10]. Many have come home to communities where services are overstretched, livelihoods are limited, and explosive ordnance contamination remains a daily risk [5][6].

Despite these challenges, Syrian communities and Syrian-led organisations have shown remarkable resilience. Action For Humanity (AFH), formerly Syria Relief, has been operational in Syria since 2011, maintaining one of the largest and most trusted humanitarian footprints. With deep community relationships and extensive local capacity, AFH continues to deliver multi-sector assistance while supporting pathways to early recovery.

This report outlines the current needs, ongoing challenges, and emerging opportunities across Syria’s humanitarian landscape, with a focus on reconstruction, explosive ordnance contamination, food security, livelihoods, WASH, education, and healthcare. It highlights AFH’s contributions and offers key recommendations for the international community to support Syria’s transition toward safety, stability, and renewed hope.



REBUILDING

CURRENT NEEDS

Across Syria, the scale of physical damage far exceeds available resources. The 2025 Physical Damage and Reconstruction Assessment estimates £165 billion (a reconstruction bill larger than the annual GDP of countries such as Hungary or New Zealand, and more than three times Syria’s pre-conflict GDP) in required investment [7], reflecting severe damage to housing, public facilities, water and sanitation systems, roads, agriculture, and energy networks. Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Homs, and Hama remain among the hardest hit [7].

More than 7 million people require shelter support [2], including many living in partially damaged or structurally unsafe buildings. As stability improves, return rates have risen steadily. Since December 2024, over one million people have returned to their areas of origin [2][10]. However, many find themselves in neighbourhoods where essential utilities are unreliable, and core services such as healthcare, education, and water are yet to be restored.



BARRIERS AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

Reconstruction is slowed by several interconnected obstacles:

- + Rising costs and shortages of construction materials.
- + Major damage to water, sewage, electricity, and road networks [7].
- + Widespread explosive ordnance contamination prevents safe rebuilding [5][6].
- + Limited skilled labour due to displacement and economic hardship [2].
- + Significant funding gaps across the reconstruction sector [3].

These factors create a difficult environment for communities attempting to rebuild, often delaying the restoration of basic services and restricting safe return.

WHAT ACTION FOR HUMANITY IS DOING

AFH plays a central role in community-level reconstruction. The organisation conducts structural assessments, rehabilitates shelter units, restores WASH and road networks, and repairs essential community infrastructure. **Over the last 14 years, AFH has supported thousands of families to return home and rebuild their lives with dignity.** Each project is coordinated with local authorities, community committees, and technical partners to ensure that reconstruction aligns with broader service restoration.

AFH’s approach blends urgent repairs with longer-term rehabilitation, helping households regain stability, access essential services, and rebuild livelihoods.



CASE STUDY

AL TAHRIR AND
MASSA VILLAGES

Across Al Tahrir and Massa Villages, AFH rehabilitated **840 homes**, enabling families to return safely and begin rebuilding their lives. In Al Tahrir alone, 340 homes were restored alongside key utilities and community infrastructure, making it one of the first model return sites after the December 2024 transition. Together, these villages show how targeted, community-led reconstruction can drive stability and renewal in high-return areas.



WHAT IS NEEDED

Reconstruction will require:

- + Multi-year financing to enable large-scale, predictable rehabilitation.
- + Integration of utilities and essential services into every reconstruction effort.
- + Sequencing reconstruction with explosive ordnance clearance for safety [5][6].
- + Prioritised investment in return-heavy areas facing prolonged service gaps.

These steps will help create the conditions necessary for durable return and long-term recovery.



FOOD SECURITY

CURRENT NEEDS

Food insecurity in Syria remains among the highest globally. An estimated 14.56 million people are food-insecure [2], with more than 8 million reporting insufficient food intake [2].

Agricultural production has been disrupted by conflict, limited access to land, explosive ordnance, damaged irrigation systems, and consecutive years of drought [1][2]. Wheat production has fallen sharply, while food prices continue to rise far beyond the means of many households [1][2].



BARRIERS AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

Food access and availability are limited by:

- + High prices and currency instability [1][2].
- + Market disruptions and supply-chain challenges [1][2].
- + Damage to irrigation, storage, and transportation networks [2][7].
- + Restricted access to farmland affected by explosive ordnance [5][6].
- + Limited employment opportunities are reducing household purchasing power [2].

WHAT ACTION FOR HUMANITY IS DOING

AFH responds by:

- + Providing multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) to support essential needs.
- + Supporting agricultural recovery with inputs, tools, and technical guidance.
- + Strengthening local market systems through community engagement.



CASE STUDY

AGRICULTURAL
SUPPORT

In 2025, AFH supported **589 farmers** in Aleppo and Idlib with high-quality inputs, improving wheat production and strengthening local markets. AFH also provided MPCA to 2,796 households, enabling families to meet basic needs with dignity.



WHAT IS NEEDED

Food security requires:

- + Investment in agricultural rehabilitation and climate-resilient techniques.
- + Market revitalisation through small-business support.
- + Sustained cash assistance to meet urgent needs [1][2].
- + Expanded access to safe agricultural land through clearance [5][6].

These actions will help reduce reliance on emergency aid and support economic recovery.



POVERTY

CURRENT NEEDS

Poverty remains widespread after years of conflict and economic decline. Around 90% of the population lives below the poverty line, and 66% experience severe poverty (Severe poverty is defined as the inability to meet basic food and non-food needs even when all resources are devoted to essential consumption, as per UN/OCHA poverty criteria) [2]. Rising costs, limited employment, and weakened public services have pushed many once self-sufficient households into reliance on humanitarian assistance [1][2].

Women-headed households, people with disabilities, and returnee families face exceptionally high barriers to economic security [1][2]. UN OCHA reporting indicates that 1 in 4 households is headed by a woman, and these households are 20–30% more likely to experience food insecurity or negative coping strategies. People with disabilities represent an estimated 27% of the population in need and face significantly reduced access to livelihoods, services, and income-generating opportunities.



BARRIERS AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

Key constraints include:

- + Loss of land, assets, and tools [1][2].
- + Limited access to stable employment [2].
- + Disrupted agricultural production and water scarcity [1].
- + Inflation reduces the real value of wages [2].
- + Limited access to credit and financial services [2].

WHAT ACTION FOR HUMANITY IS DOING

AFH supports poverty reduction through:

- + Community-led, resilience-focused initiatives.
- + Vocational training and pathways to income generation.
- + Entrepreneurship support, including training and small grants.
- + Youth empowerment programmes.



CASE STUDY

YOUTH AND
COMMUNITY
INITIATIVES

In 2025, AFH supported 64 community-led initiatives reaching **26,000 people**. AFH also delivered entrepreneurship training to 150 youth and supported 200 vocational graduates with tools or grants. One hundred fifty young entrepreneurs received business start-up packages.



WHAT IS NEEDED

Reducing poverty will require:

- + Multi-year livelihood funding.
- + Expanded small-business support.
- + Agricultural rehabilitation.
- + Strengthened markets and value chains.
- + Integrated livelihood programming linking training, finance, and protection.



WASH ACCESS

CURRENT NEEDS

Safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services remain severely limited. 14.4 million people require WASH assistance [2], with water systems operating at 40–50% of pre-war capacity [3]. Damage to treatment plants and networks, limited maintenance, and rising demand, primarily in return areas, continue to strain services.

Many communities, including informal settlements and collective shelters, rely on unsafe or unreliable water sources [2][3].



BARRIERS AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

Constraints include:

- + Extensive damage to water and sanitation infrastructure [2][3].
- + Limited access to spare parts and repair materials [2].
- + Electricity shortages are reducing pumping capacity [3].
- + Rising demand in high-return areas [2][3].
- + Limited local maintenance capacity.

These challenges increase the risk of waterborne diseases and disproportionately affect women, children, and people with disabilities [2].

WHAT ACTION FOR HUMANITY IS DOING

AFH works to restore safe WASH access by:

- + Rehabilitating water networks, pipelines, and pumping infrastructure.
- + Restoring sanitation systems, including sewage networks.
- + Providing hygiene services and supplies.
- + Coordinating with health and education partners to ensure coverage in schools and clinics.



CASE STUDY

NORTHERN SYRIA

In Ma'arat al-Numan and Jisr al-Shughur, AFH rehabilitated key components of local water and sewage systems, restoring or improving safe water access for thousands of residents.



WHAT IS NEEDED

WASH recovery requires:

- + Multi-year infrastructure investment [3].
- + Restoration of treatment and pumping systems with reliable power [3].
- + Training and capacity-building for maintenance staff.
- + Integrated WASH–health–education programming.
- + Flexible funding for maintenance and emergency repairs.



HEALTHCARE

CURRENT NEEDS

Syria’s health system remains overstretched. 15.8 million people require health assistance [2], and nearly half of all hospitals and primary healthcare centres (PHCs) are partially or fully functional [2][3]. Rising medicine prices, staffing shortages, and weak referral systems limit access, particularly in rural and return-heavy areas.

Children, pregnant and lactating women, older people, and people with chronic illnesses face the greatest barriers to care [1][2].



BARRIERS AND CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES

The health sector is challenged by:

- + Extensive damage to hospitals and PHCs [2][3].
- + Shortages of trained medical personnel [2].
- + Rising medication costs and limited supply [3].
- + Weak referral systems.
- + High caseloads in return areas [2].
- + Disruptions to chronic disease management [1][2].

WHAT ACTION FOR HUMANITY IS DOING

AFH strengthens access to essential health services through:

- + Rehabilitating primary healthcare centres.
- + Operating mobile medical units in underserved areas.
- + Providing integrated nutrition services.
- + Supplying medicines, equipment, and clinical tools.
- + Training health workers and strengthening emergency response capacity.

In 2025, AFH deployed 52 medical staff, delivered 115 surgeries and 723 consultations, and trained 137 healthcare workers, strengthening frontline capacity in high-return areas.



CASE STUDY

HEALTH SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

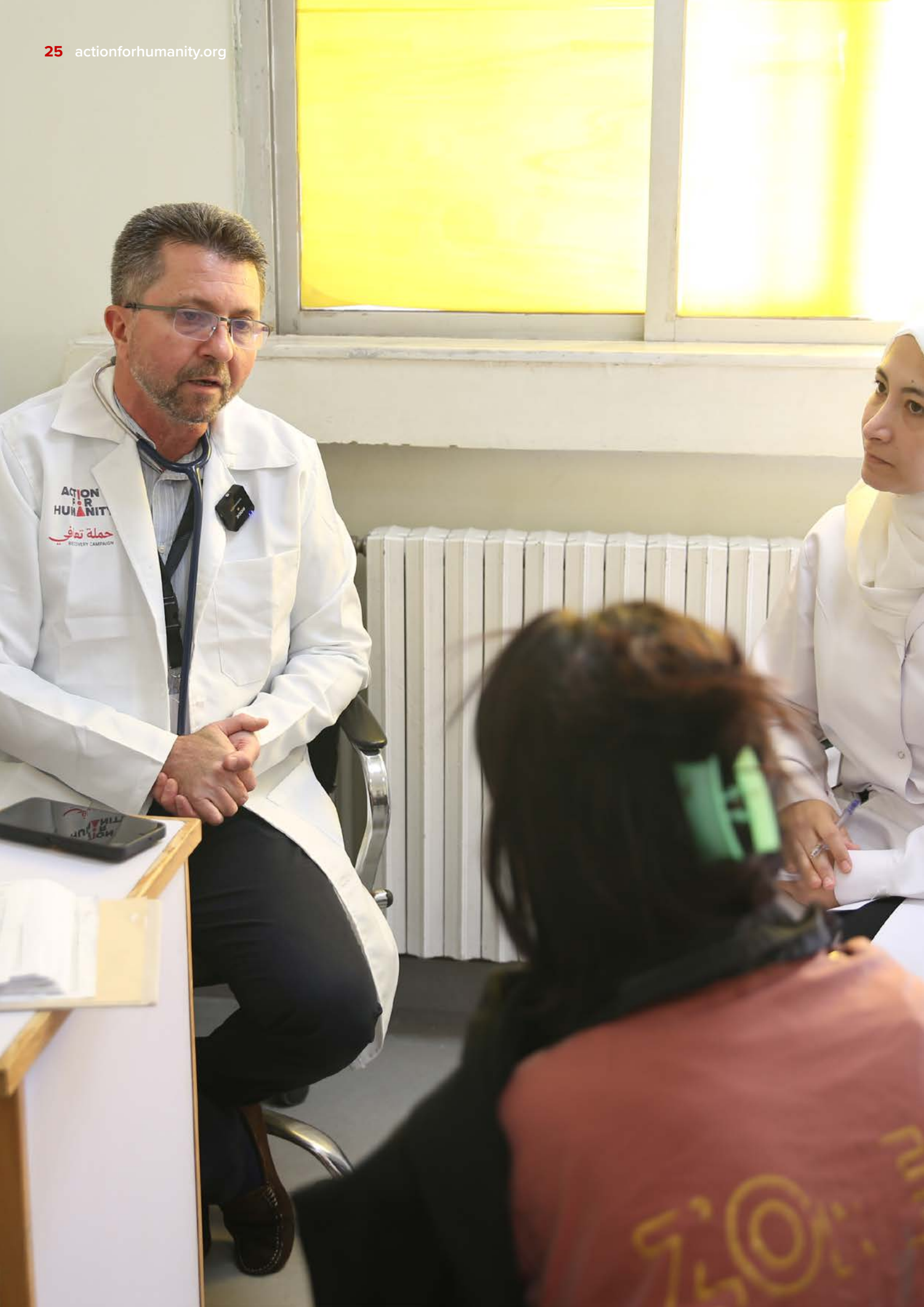
In 2025, AFH rehabilitated multiple primary healthcare centres across Syria, restoring vital facilities now serving thousands of people each month. Across PHCs and mobile clinics, our teams provided **132,811 consultations**, covering paediatrics, reproductive health, communicable diseases, and emergency care.



WHAT IS NEEDED

Health recovery requires:

- + Rehabilitation and expansion of PHCs and hospitals.
- + Strengthened mobile clinic networks.
- + Rebuilt referral pathways.
- + Workforce development and retention strategies.
- + Integrated health–WASH–nutrition programming.
- + Long-term investment in medicines and diagnostics.



SUMMARY

A year after the political transition, Syria stands at a critical turning point. Violence has decreased, and access has improved, but the scale of damage, service gaps, and economic hardship continues to define humanitarian and recovery needs [1][2][3].

One of the report’s central findings is that the primary driver of needs in 2025 is no longer conflict intensity, but the scale and speed of population return. Over one million people have returned home since December 2024, placing immense pressure on already weakened services and infrastructure [2][10].

Another defining insight is that explosive ordnance contamination is now the single largest structural barrier to recovery, limiting reconstruction, agriculture, school reopening, and safe return [5][6].

Across all sectors, early recovery is being led by communities, local authorities, and Syrian organisations like AFH. But these efforts remain significantly underfunded. Without sustained, multi-year support, early gains risk being lost [3][9].

A further critical finding is the severe underfunding of early recovery and reconstruction. While the UK and other donors have increased support in specific sectors, current financing remains far below the scale required to stabilise high-return communities. A targeted, multi-year funding strategy — coordinated with local authorities and Syrian-led organisations — is essential to prevent reversals in progress and sustain early recovery gains.

KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE


ISSUE	SUMMARY
Primary driver of needs	Rapid return of over one million people since Dec 2024 is outpacing service capacity [2][10].
Major structural barrier	Explosive ordnance contamination limits reconstruction, agriculture, school reopening, and safe return [5][6].
Service capacity crisis	Water, health, and education systems operating at 40–50% of pre-conflict levels [2][3].
Economic vulnerability	90% live in poverty; 66% in severe poverty; women-headed households and people with disabilities remain disproportionately affected [1][2].

Underfunded early recovery

Local recovery happening organically but donors have not matched the scale required [3][9].


NINE INTERNATIONAL ASKS

To support Syria’s transition toward stability, AFH calls on donors and policymakers to:




1. Make explosive ordnance clearance a prerequisite for reconstruction and agriculture

Fund clearance, survey, and risk education at scale and integrate safety assessments into all infrastructure and livelihood projects.




2. Prioritise high-return areas for multi-sector investment

Align funding with return patterns to stabilise WASH, health, education, and markets.




3. Support coordinated, multi-year early recovery packages

Move beyond fragmented projects toward integrated, multi-sector programming.




4. Rebuild essential public services with predictable financing

PHCs, schools, power systems, and water networks require long-term rehabilitation plans.




5. Restore the workforce

Invest in teachers, health workers, engineers, and technicians essential to recovery.




6. Strengthen Syrian-led organisations

Provide flexible funding and strategic partnerships that elevate local leadership.




7. Link agricultural recovery with clearance efforts

Unlock agricultural potential by ensuring safe access to farmland.



8. Revitalise markets and livelihoods

Scale up cash assistance, small-business support, and agricultural inputs.



9. Adopt integrated programming

Link WASH with health, education with protection, and reconstruction with livelihoods to maximise impact.

A coordinated, forward-looking approach centred on clearance, reconstruction, and sustainable early recovery is essential to support families returning home and rebuild the foundations of a stable, dignified future.

OUR HISTORY IN SYRIA

Action For Humanity, formerly Syria Relief, has operated in Syria since 2011. Founded by members of the Syrian diaspora, the organisation emerged to meet urgent community needs during the early years of the conflict and to reach people cut off from assistance.

Over the past decade, AFH has built one of the largest operational footprints in the country, delivering life-saving services in some of the hardest-to-reach areas. Its long-term presence has enabled strong partnerships with communities, local authorities, technical bodies, and humanitarian actors.

AFH’s work spans:



EDUCATION

Rehabilitating schools and supporting teachers.



HEALTH

Operating mobile clinics and supporting PHCs.



WASH

Restoring water and sanitation networks.



FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

Providing cash, agricultural support, and livelihood programmes.



SHELTER AND RECONSTRUCTION

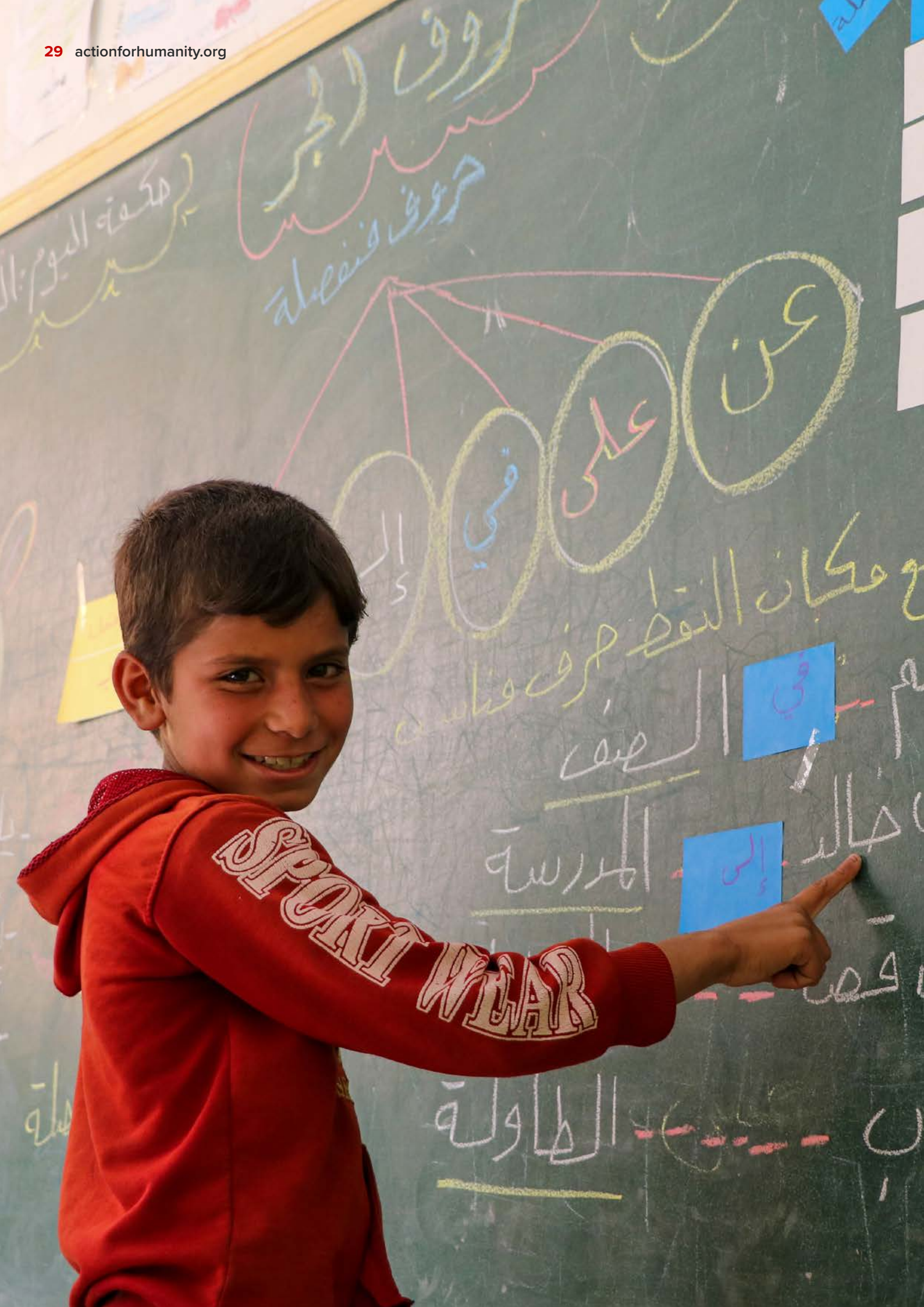
Repairing homes and community infrastructure.



PROTECTION

Delivering psychosocial support, child protection, and risk education

AFH’s commitment to community-led, locally driven programming remains at the heart of its work. As Syria enters a period marked by higher returns and early recovery opportunities, AFH continues to play a vital role in supporting stability, resilience, and long-term development.



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