



An Interview with Lorena Nieto, Senior Protection Cluster Coordinator, Northwest Syria

World Humanitarian Day 2024

Amidst ongoing widespread conflicts, emergencies and protracted humanitarian crises, both civilians and humanitarians, as well as infrastructure, continue to be attacked in a violation of human rights and universally accepted international laws.

On this World Humanitarian Day, the need to #ActForHumanity is essential. As we continue to deliver life-saving assistance and protection, protection colleagues share how they are acting for humanity through their work – building effective and accountable institutions, strengthening collaboration and advocacy, and promoting safer and more inclusive societies.

Building Legal Capacity and Safeguarding Mental Health

The crisis in Syria is the world’s largest in terms of displacement. Now in its fourteenth year, more than 7.2 million are internally displaced.

Inside the country, the north-west region hosts about 3.4 million IDPs. *“In our response, we are trying to identify how we can guarantee funding, find longer-term solutions and consider innovative ways to address specific risks,”* shares Lorena Nieto, Protection Cluster Coordinator for Northwest Syria in Gaziantep, Türkiye.



Session with displaced women on legal, housing, land and property, and psychological needs in Idlib governorate. Northwest Syria, May 2023 © Shafak Organization

Leading the protection cluster in the northwest, UNHCR works with 116 partners, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, and other UN agencies. *“Around 72% of our partners are Syrians and many of them have been impacted themselves by the challenges faced,*



including the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes and the increase in attacks on civilians and infrastructure due to the escalation of hostilities since October 2023,” says Lorena.

One of the priorities is building humanitarians’ knowledge of international laws and their principles. *“As we are responding to a protracted situation rather than an emergency, we are driving partners to the understanding of the protection response as a tool towards human rights respect and preservation,”* explains Lorena.

In this context, the transitional justice mechanisms that have been established for Syrian victims and survivors are key. *“These mechanisms, which are a set of measures to address the restitution of human rights violations when a country transitions from conflict into a more peaceful system, are determinants to reach peaceful coexistence, reconciliation, access to justice and truth, and ensure that violations will not happen again,”* adds Lorena.



Visit to an internally displaced people camp to assess protection risks in Northern Aleppo governorate. Northwest Syria, March 2024 (click to enlarge) © Shafak Organization

Our Syrian partners also face the challenge of not being able to live in their country, to be accountable for providing protection services to their own people inside; at the same time, they face all the tensions, war-related impacts and adverse effects of climate change – directly or through their families in Syria. This constant pressure and concern, combined with an increasingly hostile environment, has significantly affected their mental health.

The Protection Cluster is supporting its partners by safeguarding their mental health and ensuring they have safe spaces to share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

“Acting for humanity is understanding that the person who is in front of me is a human being first,” remembers Lorena. *“Humanitarians need to have the same tools we aim to provide to the people we work with and for and be sure that they are also supported and cared for.”*