



Smarter Data, Better Aid

The humanitarian helpdesk transforming information management in Syria

In a sub-district of Idlib, northwest Syria, field coordinator for NGO Bahar Organization, Ahmad is using QGIS software to map out local households and basic services currently provided in the area.

Ahmad and his team have only recently developed the skills to collect and analyse data in a more effective way. A few months ago, things were very different:

“At the time, several organisations were working in this rural area, but coordination was limited, and information was often out of date. It was hard to keep track of who was where and what services they were receiving. Support didn’t always reach everyone, especially those who had just returned or were living slightly outside the main village areas.”

Coordinated support for critical data challenges

In Syria, fragmented information management systems and limited capacity pose a hidden but critical challenge to aid delivery.

Sanctions under the previous regime blocked many organisations from accessing advanced global information management tools and consequently smaller NGOs can lack the technical capacity to produce and visualise standardised data. The collapse of central government services, the merger of external coordination hubs, and a rapid inflow of humanitarian actors

since the end of the war, have made it harder to build a coherent data ecosystem that provides a shared understanding of needs.

Ahmad’s team received training through the Syrian Information Management Response Hub, a consortium funded by the H2H Network. Four member organisations—MAP Action, CartONG, iMMAP and Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team — have pooled their expertise to set up a technical helpdesk that provides bespoke support to Syrian organisations to help them effectively manage, analyse and use the data they collect. More than 100 organisations have already

“Partners appreciate the flexibility of the approach and the responsiveness of our support – the opportunity to receive tailored technical assistance rather than just generic support. We’re able to go beyond training to help them develop information management plans, harmonise tools and understand humanitarian data standards and protocols.”

Berhudan Mustafa, Project Manager for CartONG



received support and many more have requested help.

Ahmad explains the impact of the support received from the hub.

“Before the training, I used to collect information and just share it in reports or spreadsheets – it was frustrating to collect information but not always be able to use it effectively. Now, I can use data to highlight gaps and make sure support reaches the right people.

“In one instance, we worked with our field team to map where households were located and what services were being provided. As we did this, we realised that a group of around 40–50 households on the edge of the area had recently arrived but were not included in any planned distributions.

“We shared this information and the map in a local coordination meeting. Based on that, those households were included in the next distribution and received food and basic supplies. For many families, this made a big

difference at a time when they had very little.”

Beyond the help desk, the consortium is developing a Syrian humanitarian data package that consolidates different data sources into one dashboard under the Ministry of Emergency and Disaster Management, which will be accessible to all organisations working where the survey is conducted.

A unique solution to a complex problem

“This type of collaboration around information management technical support is the first in Syria,” explains Berhudan Mustafa, Project Manager for CartONG. *“Partners appreciate the flexibility of the approach and the responsiveness of our support – the opportunity to receive tailored technical assistance rather than just generic support. We’re able to go beyond training to help them develop information management plans, harmonise tools and understand*

humanitarian data standards and protocols.”

This technical support is having a profound impact in the real world, as Berhudan explains:

We supported an organisation working in the health sector which didn’t have a unique ID for tracking patients. Imagine if you cannot easily follow up the services being provided for the same patient or for referrals to different types of services? So we helped them build a data flow pipeline right from needs assessment to archiving data.

Berhudan and the team are seeing organisations moving from simply collecting data to actually using it for analysis and decision making. Alice Almond, Director of Humanitarian Operations at hub member Map Action, agrees:

“Syrian civil society organisations collect a lot of data but lack the tools, skills, and access to integrate it into decision-making, both locally and nationally. Many organisations are



stuck at the “excel ceiling”, without real-time updates or meaningful visualisation. These organisations need support to transition to using dashboards, pipelines and data automation and to feed the data they hold into higher level coordination systems, recognising the value that they can bring to humanitarian decision making.”

Supporting Smarter Humanitarian Collaboration

The Syria Information Management Resource Hub is funded through the H2H network, which brings together organisations that provide specialist services essential for more effective and accountable humanitarian aid. These “humanitarian to humanitarian” (H2H) expert services help frontline agencies deliver quality aid and ensure affected communities, as well as local

and national leaders, are at the centre of humanitarian responses.

The H2H Fund is a unique mechanism that delivers rapid, targeted funding in humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises, where funding for foundational services is often limited and hard to access. By supporting technical expertise and critical services early in humanitarian responses, humanitarian actors can deliver assistance quickly, collaboratively, and effectively.

Hub partners credit the convening power of the H2H network with shaping the consortium approach. Albert Abou Hamra, Syria Lead for iMMAP, explains:

“I see the H2H network as an enabler for different specialised organizations to come together

under one coordinated framework to complement, not compete with each other. This ensures each partner contributes where they add the most value and it increases efficiency and impact because H2H are effectively supporting a networked approach rather than isolated interventions. Funding a model like the helpdesk, the H2H network reinforces its added value and offers a scalable model for delivering such support in complex humanitarian contexts.”

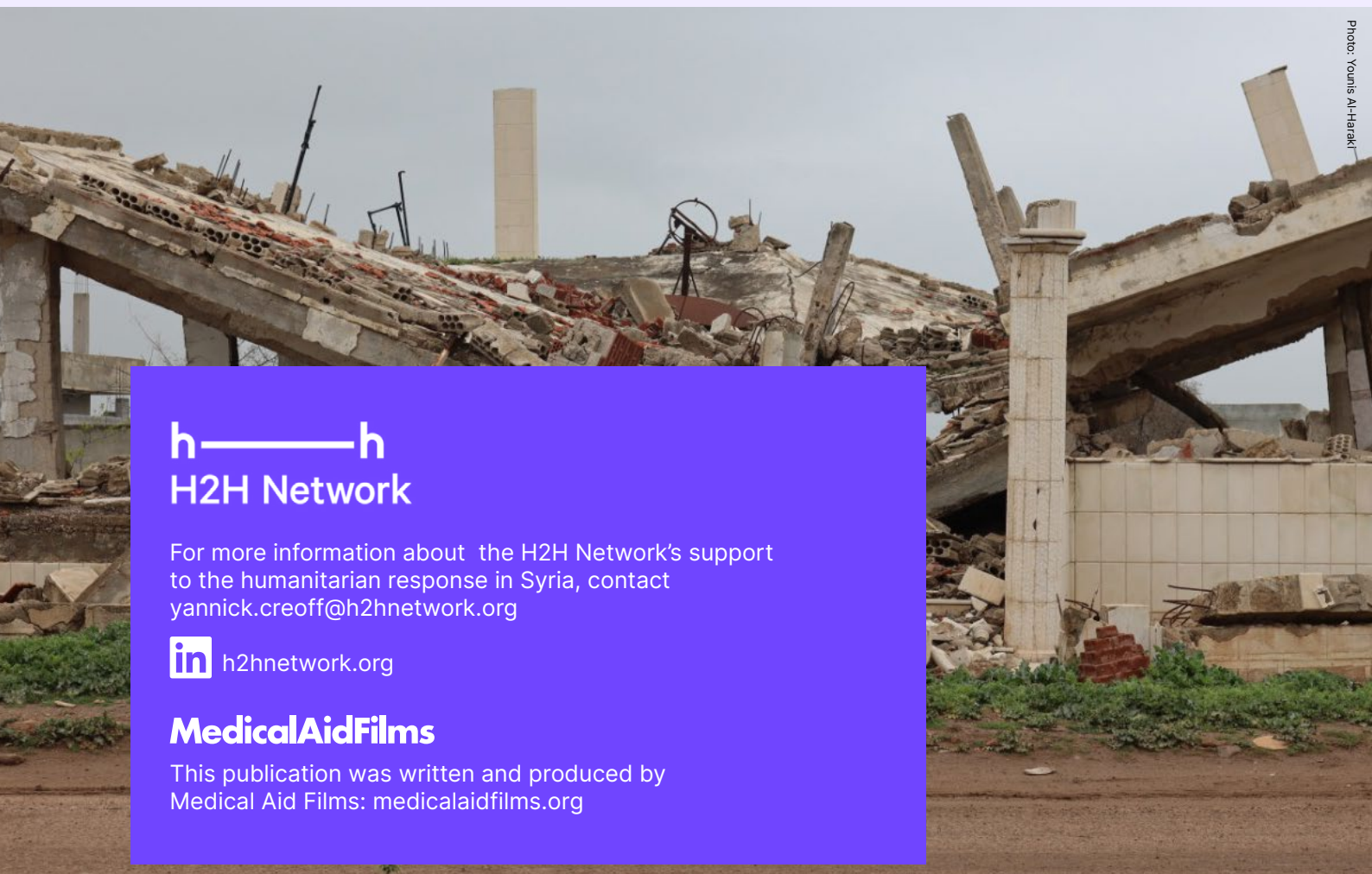
There’s a saying in Syria “*In God we trust; everyone else must bring data*”. Syria civil society understands how essential strong information management is to their operations, decision-making and ultimately delivering effective support to the 16 million Syrians in need of humanitarian aid.



In these times of constrained resources, this project is having a big impact for a small-scale budget and is certainly meeting tremendous need. It's clear much more could be done if

there was longer-term funding invested in this approach to essential infrastructure support.

H2H Network members



h—h H2H Network

For more information about the H2H Network's support to the humanitarian response in Syria, contact yannick.creoff@h2hnetwork.org

 [h2hnetwork.org](https://www.linkedin.com/company/h2hnetwork.org)

MedicalAidFilms

This publication was written and produced by Medical Aid Films: [medicalaidfilms.org](https://www.medicalaidfilms.org)