

Local aid workers in Syria are the 'backbone of response efforts', says top UN official, urging better protection as fighting rages on

Delivering life-saving assistance to millions of women, children and men in Syria, local aid workers need to be safer and better protected, said the top United Nations humanitarian official in the country on Monday.

"Syrian aid workers [risk their lives](#) on a daily basis and work tirelessly to provide life-saving assistance to fellow Syrians in need in accordance with humanitarian principles," said Panos Moumtzis, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the [Syria Crisis](#).

"All parties to the conflict in Syria are obliged under international humanitarian and human rights law to respect and protect humanitarian workers and other civilians," he added.

As lines of control shift between pro-Government troops and an array of opposition forces, aid workers, who are focused on helping civilians in need, face a greater risk of arrest and detention.

According to reports, most humanitarian staff in the country's south-west, where a Government-led offensive has been going on for weeks now, have stopped working with Syrian aid organizations, significantly impacting the response capacity at a time when they are needed most and "leaving a vacuum in their wake".

"Syrian aid workers, including members of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, have paid the ultimate price, losing their lives in their efforts to help those in need," continued Mr. Moumtzis, pointing out that their highly technical skills and operational knowledge make them "the backbone of the response effort".

It's critical all steps are taken to increase the protection of aid workers – Panos Moumtzis, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator

"It's critical all steps are taken to increase the protection of aid workers and ensure the continuation of services in support of an effective sustainable humanitarian response to the people in need," he stressed.

Syria is one of the most challenging and dangerous environments for humanitarians to operate in. Since the start of the crisis in Syria in March 2011, hundreds of humanitarian workers and service providers, including health workers, have been killed.

In line with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and the imperative to save lives across Syria, humanitarian actors, are doing everything they can to reach some 13 million people in both government- and non-government-controlled areas – including approximately 6.5 million internally displaced.

The Syrian conflict continues to exact a terrible toll on the country's civilians, having forced more than half of the population from their homes, and having displaced numerous people multiple times.