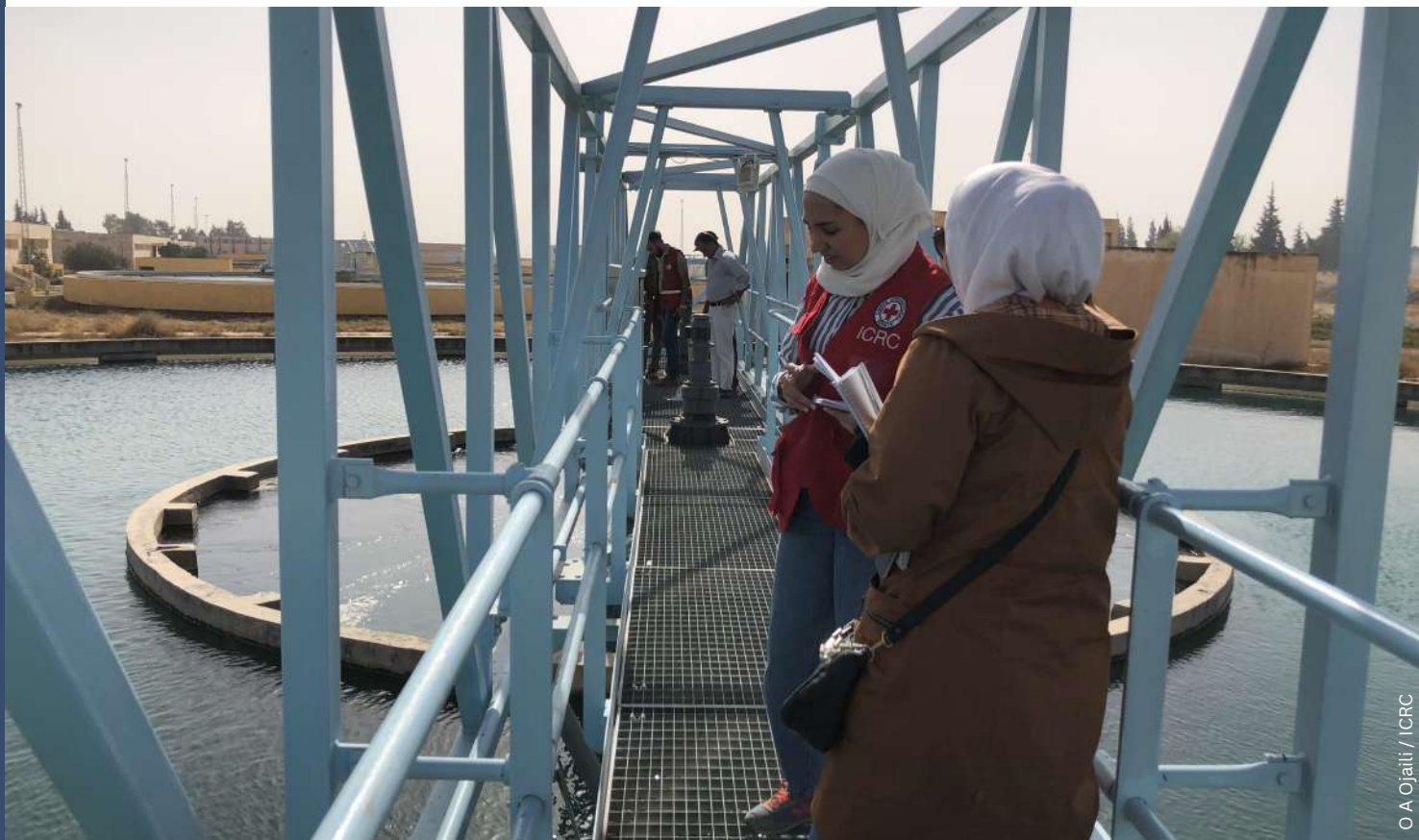


Too Big to Fail: Stabilizing Critical Infrastructure in Syria



ICRC



Aleppo, Syria. Visit to the Khafsa water treatment plant as part of the TbtF Program.

In Syria, after more than 13 years of armed conflict and sanctions, critical water supply infrastructure that enables the delivery of potable water across the country has been severely impacted with millions of people at risk if this critical infrastructure is left to collapse. The seven main drinking water facilities are large, ageing, and the service they provide is rapidly declining. Shortages of staff, consumables and materials, as well as the reduced availability of water, fuel, and electricity, have now drastically reduced the delivery of and access to potable water.

In response, we launched one of our biggest multi-year programmes in 2022, the **Too Big to Fail (TBtF) Program**, in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Ministry of Water Resources. In this preventive approach aimed at avoiding the collapse of these critical water facilities, we have been working to **maintain and rehabilitate seven major water stations that supply clean water to nearly 12 million people** across the country. This includes repairing the stations' electrical and mechanical systems to ensure they remain operational for years to come.

The ICRC leverages a prolonged **local presence, strong relations with local actors** (particularly with local service providers), an intimate understanding of these urban water supply systems, and the expertise and capacity of ICRC's teams across Syria to carry out this work. There is no other actor – humanitarian or development – willing or able to provide this type of support at a system level in Syria today.



In light of recent events, this program remains just as relevant today, after the fall of the previous Government of Syria in early December 2024, as it did when we initiated the program. The Syrian transitional government was quick to endorse the TBtF program and actively help ensure the continuity in the implementation of the program with all local stakeholders.

Location

7 major water stations

in Aleppo, Damascus, Deraa, Hama, Hassakeh, Homs, Lattakia, and Tartus

Beneficiaries

12 Million civilians

across Syria are to benefit from clean water supply

Duration

2022-2028 (7 years)

Extended from 2026 to 2028 due to delays in program implementation (for example due to a lack of sustained safe access to some TBtF facilities)

Operational Status

Implementation progress as of December 2024

As part of the TBtF program, the ICRC commissioned an independent technical assessment of six out of seven facilities, conducted by an international consultancy with a local engineering firm. These assessments form the basis for an agreement with the Ministry of Water Resources and local providers on a multi-year plan of urgent, prioritized interventions. The ICRC and SARC are currently overseeing implementation at six sites, while the ICRC continues efforts to secure safe access to the seventh - Allouk water station - to conduct its assessment and restore reliable potable water for people in Hassakeh.

1. **Al Khafsa water treatment plant**
 - The comprehensive technical assessment of the Al Khafsa water treatment plant that supplies Aleppo and surrounding areas with potable water was completed in late 2021.
 - Implementation of urgent measures at the Al Khafsa facility commenced in Q1 2022 and remain ongoing.
2. **Ain Al Tanoor water pumping station**
 - The technical assessment for the Ain Al Tanoor water pumping station that provides water to Homs was completed at the end of Q4 2022
 - The implementation of urgent measures commenced in Q1 2023. 
3. **Al Sen water treatment plant**
 - the technical assessment for the Al Sen water treatment plant that provides water to Tartus and Lattakia was completed in Q2 2023
 - The urgent measures commenced in Q3 2023.
4. **Al Qusair water treatment plant**
 - The technical assessment for the Al Qusair water treatment plant that provides water to Homs and Hama was completed in Q4 2023
 - The urgent measures commenced in Q1 2024.
5. **Al Ashari & Barada Springs water pumping station**
 - The technical assessment for the Al Ashari water pumping station that provides water to Dera`a and the Al-Fijeh & Barada springs water pumping stations that provide water to Damascus and Rural Damascus were completed in Q4 2024
 - The urgent measures commenced in Q1 2025.
6. **Al-Fijeh & Barada water pumping station**
 - An additional study for the associated works of the Al-Fijeh & Barada WPS remains ongoing with an expected completion date of Q3 2025. The technical assessment for the seventh facility
7. **Allouk water pumping station**
 - Assessments in the Allouk Pumping Station were on hold due the need to ensure sustained safe access. In May 2024, a one day visit to Allouk was conducted, followed in Q3 2024 by a plan of deeper assessment and a ten-day crossline mission. In Q4 2024 a proposed way forward on how to re-operate the station was sent to all stakeholders, however due the events in Nov/Dec the process stalled.

Water Supply Projects	Area Served	Program Initiation	Program Implementation						
		2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Al Khafsa WTP	Aleppo	Technical Study	Implementation of urgent measures (Year 1)	Implementation of Urgent Measures					
Ain Al Tannour WPS	Homs		Technical Studies						
Al Sen WTP	Lattakia & Tartous		Technical Studies						
Al Qusair WTP	Homs & Hama		Technical Studies						
Al Ashari WPS	Dara'a		Technical Studies						
Al-Fijeh & Barada Springs WPS	Damascus		Technical Studies Parts 1&2						
Allouk WPS	Hassakeh		PENDING						

Note: WTP – Water Treatment Plant, WPS – Water Pumping Station

We are making good progress with the implementation of TE  and Q1 of 2025 marked a milestone where we have upscaled to be implementing at six of the seven facilities in parallel.

Achievements in 2024

The TBtF urgent measures carried out at the seven largest critical water facilities in Syria during 2024 helped to ensure uninterrupted supply of clean and safe water to **9'482'014 people during the year**. This figure will gradually increase in subsequent years once the implementation commences on additional facilities and associated delivery infrastructure.

9'482'014 people

gained uninterrupted supply of clean and safe water in 2024 due to the TBtF urgent measures

Thus far the TBtF program has:

- Improved water production and supply.
- Maintained safe water quality in line with national water quality standards.
- Reinforced capacity for local water service providers to carry out Operation & Maintenance (O&M)
- Strengthened the resilience of water supply systems to potential destabilising events (e.g. postearthquake response).
- Ensured water delivery across the front lines of the armed conflict.
- Made a contribution to reducing the likelihood of an outbreak and spread of disease (e.g. cholera) originating from the contamination of domestic water supply in these systems.

In Q1 2024 urgent and most urgent measures to ensure the continuity of the service were ongoing at five water stations, Khafsa WTP, Ain Al Tannour WPS, Al Sen WTP, Al Qusair WTP, Fijeh-Barada WPS Stage 1 (Water Sources) for which the feasibility, design and capacity building studies had been concluded.

In the last quarter of 2024 the technical assessment for the Al Ashari water pumping station that provides water to Dera`a and the Al-Fijeh & Barada springs water pumping stations that provide water to Damascus and Rural Damascus were completed.

December 2024, Aleppo.

A joint team from the ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, in coordination with all parties on the ground, visited the Babiri water pumping station, which supplies the al-Khafsa water station with water. The visit aimed primarily to assess and detect the damage caused to the station as a result of the intensification of fighting in the area and provide some necessary materials in order to work on repairing this damage and as a result to restore the station to operation.



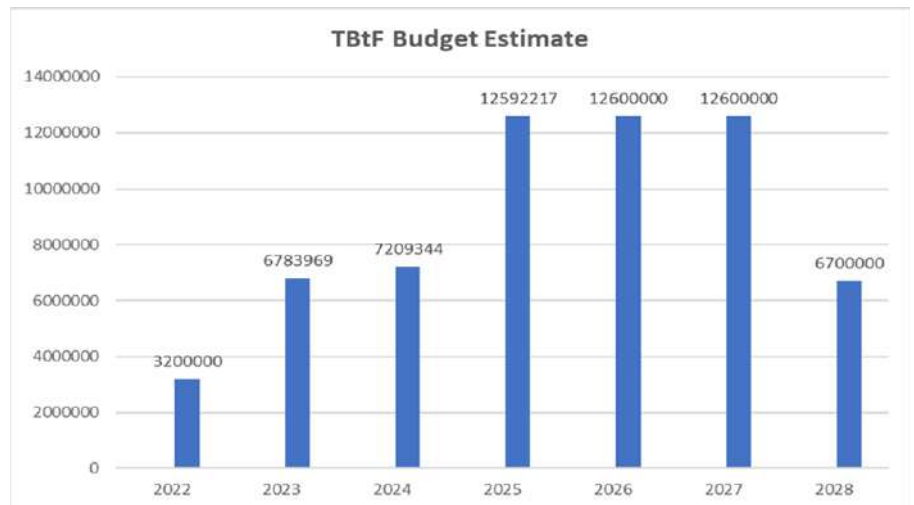
January 2025, Aleppo.

*ICRC team - including Yasmine Praz Dessimoz, director of operations - visit al-Khafsah water treatment plant, part of a network that ensures water supply to some **three million people** in the surrounding area. This station, and others like it in the vicinity are currently on the front lines between opposing forces, with ongoing hostilities putting millions at risk of losing access to essential services.*

Budget update

TbTF is a multi-year program that makes up an integral part of ICRC's humanitarian response in Syria. It follows the standard ICRC financial architecture in that it is a General Objective within the Syria Annual Appeal and all the funding earmarked to TbTF will be used solely for that activity.

The estimated budget for TbTF is 61.7 million CHF (equivalent to approximately 70 million USD) over seven years (2022-2028). This is only an estimate, and it is subject to change pending the completion of all seven technical assessments (i.e. pending Allouk water station) and will need to factor in inflation.



S. Ryan / ICRC

THANK YOU

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