



Jassar* and his family were able to secure a safe home after years of witnessing war in Syria. © ULUSLARARASI INSANI YARDIMLAŞMA DERNEĞİ, World Vision's partner.

KEEPING OUR PROMISE FOR THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF SYRIA AND THE REGION

World Vision policy brief ahead of the seventh Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region
June 2023

I. BRUSSELS VII: ADDRESSING A 12-YEAR CRISIS THAT IS FAR FROM ENDING

As the Syria crisis marks its 12th year,¹ the European Union (EU) will host the 7th *Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region* in June 2023.² It represents the main international pledging event for the Syrian crisis, and aims at renewing the political, humanitarian, and financial commitments of the international community towards the Syrian people, Syria's neighbours and the communities most affected by the protracted conflict.³ In parallel, the annual gathering serves as a platform for dialogue with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in Syria and neighbouring host countries, as key drivers of change.⁴ The overarching objective of the Brussels Conference is to mobilise support for

a comprehensive political solution to the conflict in line with the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2254, which endorses a road map for peace in Syria.⁵ However, in reality, a solution to the Syria crisis remains elusive today, with a population largely divided across internal and external borders as a result of more than 12 years of recurring violence and displacement.⁶

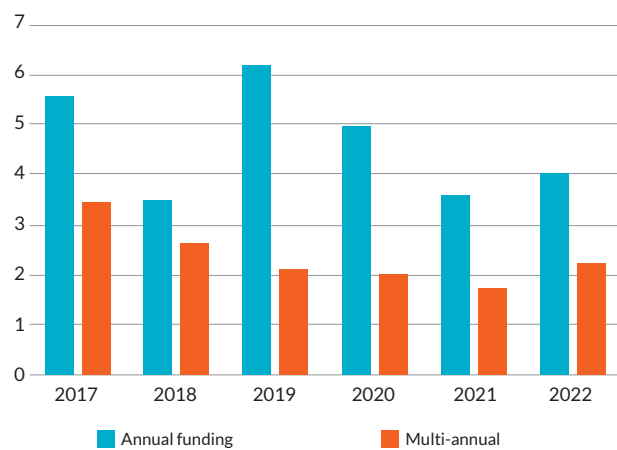
Syria continues to be the world's largest displacement crisis with more 13 million people having either fled the country or been displaced within its borders since 2011.⁷

While durable or long-term solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) have been discussed during several editions of the Brussels Conference,⁸ and highlighted as a priority by

both local and international actors,⁹ they have been slow to materialize over the years.¹⁰ This sentiment has been echoed time and time again in the co-chairs outcome statements, affirming that conditions inside Syria have yet to be conducive for the promotion of safe, voluntary and dignified returns.¹¹ In parallel, CSOs have remarked that possibilities for resettlement and complementary pathways continue to shrink.¹² This year, it remains critical for the international community to follow up with concrete commitments that would ease the suffering of Syrian families and children, while also stepping up support for long-term solutions that would allow them to thrive beyond this protracted crisis.

Brussels Conference funding trends:

Annual & Multi-annual Brussels Conference Pledges (b Euros)



Since 2011, the European Union (EU) and its Member States have been the largest donors supporting Syria and the region, with over €27 billion dedicated to humanitarian and resilience programming within the Syria crisis response.¹³

More recently, following the devastating earthquakes that hit Southern Türkiye and Northern Syria in particular, an international donors’ conference was organized by the European Commission and Sweden – as presidency holder of the EU Council – where more than 7 billion euros were raised in grants and loans for relief and reconstruction efforts.¹⁴ Nevertheless, while the post-earthquake emergency Flash Appeals for Syria¹⁵ and Türkiye¹⁶ were entirely funded, it is not yet the case for the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)¹⁷ and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP),¹⁸ both of which have been chronically underfunded over the past years, resulting in considerable gaps in the humanitarian and resilience response in Syria and host countries.

EU donors must step up their efforts to support Syrian families and children following 12 years of conflict.¹⁹ This means renewing their financial commitments on a multi-annual and flexible basis, while funding continued lifesaving, protection and resilience programming that would safeguard the development of Syrian girls and boys in Syria and neighbouring host countries.²⁰



takeholders gather in Brussels for the 2022 Syria Conference © World Vision



Lara* suffers from a growth disorder but despite the challenges she's adamant about going to school and learning. ©World Vision Syria Response

II. POVERTY & NEGATIVE COPING MECHANISMS IMPACTING IDPs, WOMEN & CHILDREN INSIDE SYRIA

After 12 years of protracted conflict,²¹ Syria is still considered to be one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies of our time.²² The war has triggered the world's largest displacement crisis, with more than 6.8 million internally displaced persons within the country.²³ Women, girls and boys represent more than two thirds of the displaced, with many of them having already been on the move more than once.²⁴

Following years of economic decline, more than **15.3 million people in Syria** are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023.²⁵

In February 2023, over 8.8 million people in Syria were impacted by the 7.7 magnitude earthquakes and their aftershocks, which resulted in 5,791 deaths and 10,041 injuries in the country.²⁶ As long-term solutions to the Syrian crisis continue to be out of reach, the rise in poverty and heightened dependence on humanitarian aid will only drive struggling families towards harmful coping mechanisms – such as domestic violence, child labour and early marriage – adding to the colossal costs of the response in the mid to long-term.²⁷

Livelihoods and food security

Recurring displacements, conflict and economic instability continue to impact Syrians' livelihoods

and living conditions. A multi-sectorial needs assessment conducted by World Vision in Northwest Syria prior to the earthquake found that half of respondents (50.8%) were IDPs, with the wide majority (83.3%) having been displaced 1 to 3 times in the past 2 years.²⁸

More than half of IDPs (**59.3%**) had lost their main source of livelihood as a result of displacement in the past year alone.²⁹

The majority of respondents relied on temporary or seasonal daily employment (57.9%), followed by debt and loans (11.8%) to survive.³⁰ Women and female-headed households were particularly affected, with more than 39% of respondents reporting there were “no work opportunities” available for them to adequately support themselves and their families.³¹

This is also the case in Northeast Syria, where in early 2023, World Vision found that close to 43% of male IDP respondents residing in collective shelters relied on daily labour to survive, while the majority of women highlighted the need for professional training and cash for work opportunities in order to be able to secure an income.³² As for Northcentral Syria, close to 40% of respondents reported having no source of stable income when World Vision conducted its assessment there in November 2022.³³

Poor livelihoods have had a severe impact on food security in Syria with the recent earthquakes only adding to the daily challenges faced by displaced families.

Our post-earthquake assessment in Northwest Syria found that 23% of respondents did not have regular access to food, and 44% reported that markets were destroyed in their neighbourhoods.³⁴

More worryingly, 28% reported that pregnant or lactating women were residing in their households.³⁵ The World Food Program (WFP) estimates that more than 12.1 million people (55% of Syria's population) are currently food insecure.³⁶ Without sufficient resources, the agency has warned that it will be forced to prioritise food assistance to only 30% of its beneficiaries from July 2023 onwards.³⁷ This would have a disastrous impact on close to 3.8 million people who would stop receiving food assistance, 24% of whom are located in Northwest Syria, where the majority of the population (80%) is made up of women and children.³⁸

Overview of nutrition needs

Prior to the recent earthquakes, children, pregnant and breastfeeding women were already at risk of malnutrition, particularly in Northwest Syria where maternal wasting is one of the main public health concerns.³⁹ In parallel, stunting rates and anaemia among children under 5 continue to be classified as "serious".⁴⁰ Across the country, Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) cases impacting children under 5 have increased by 48% in 2022 compared to the year before,⁴¹ while not enough resources are being dedicated to safeguard Syrian mothers and children's nutritional needs.

Living conditions

Even prior to the recent earthquakes, the majority of shelters were characterized as being in a "bad or very bad state" by more than half (62%) of World Vision's respondents in Northwest Syria, with many families still residing in damaged houses.⁴² Living conditions only worsened following the February 2023 quakes when more than 10,600 buildings were impacted by the severe tremors and aftershocks.⁴³

World Vision found that 94% of respondents' homes had been damaged by the earthquakes, with 51% saying they had been completely destroyed.⁴⁴

The water infrastructure was further strained by the natural disaster, with 24% of those impacted by the quakes in Northwest Syria reporting not having access to clean water, increasing the population's reliance on water trucking.⁴⁵ Although shelter and WASH assistance was mobilized to support those impacted in the weeks that followed, it is estimated that at least 53,000 families displaced by the earthquakes still need dignified shelters today.⁴⁶

In Northeast Syria, our January 2023 assessment found that close to 24% of IDP respondents from the host community were residing in houses that had been damaged during the war, and another 5% of respondents indicated living in unfinished buildings.⁴⁷ As for those residing in collective shelters, many complained about the lack of: electricity (21%), space (19%), WASH facilities (14%), and privacy (14%).⁴⁸ More worryingly, the majority of respondents from collective shelters (98%) indicated they had not received any shelter services in the past year and more than 86% of respondents in both host community and collective shelters had not received any WASH assistance in the past three months.⁴⁹

Access to health

Prior to the earthquakes, only 59% of hospitals and 57% of primary healthcare centres were deemed to be partially or fully functional across the country.⁵⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic coupled with a cholera outbreak that began spreading in August 2022 added to the pressures felt by already-stretched health facilities and staff.⁵¹ Since August 2022, there have been 111,084 suspected cholera cases and more than 104 associated deaths across Syria.⁵²

Children under 5 in Northwest Syria are particularly vulnerable to the spread of the disease, making up close to half (45%) of confirmed cholera cases.⁵³

Following the recent earthquakes, the risk of waterborne diseases spreading is on the rise again due to the additional destruction of health facilities, overcrowded shelters, damage to water infrastructure, and disruption of health provision services.⁵⁴ This is particularly the case in Northwest Syria, where 44% of our respondents reported being in need of specialized care during our post-earthquake needs assessment.⁵⁵ As for Northeast Syria, respondents highlighted the need for further health professionals, when it comes to responding to the specialized healthcare needs of IDPs in overcrowded collective shelters.⁵⁶

Education and child protection

Syria continues to be one of the most dangerous places to be a child with close to 2,000 grave violations committed against children in 2022, including the killing and injuring of children, as well as recurring attacks on schools.⁵⁷ According to UNICEF, over 7,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed across the country, limiting children's access to accredited educational services, and leaving over two million children out of school, with another 1.6 million children at risk of dropping out.⁵⁸

In February 2023, 42% of those surveyed by World Vision in Northwest Syria reported that education facilities in their community had been partially damaged or completely destroyed by the earthquakes, and 82% reported that their children's access to education had been affected.⁵⁹



Karam* is learning about human anatomy at his school in an IDP camp. ©World Vision Syria Response

Mental health impact of the crisis on children and caregivers

Following the earthquakes of February 2023, more than 87% of respondents World Vision spoke to in Northwest Syria reported feeling unsafe.⁶⁰ Families were particularly concerned about the quakes' impact on their children, with 98% of caregivers saying their boys and girls were exhibiting fear, sleep disturbances and sensitivity to noise.⁶¹ This life altering event is likely to increase the prevalence of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety among impacted boys and girls,⁶² and could heighten the risk of stress related disease and cognitive impairment well into their adult years.⁶³

Many barriers to education still remain, including the cost of school enrolment and supplies, poor infrastructure, the availability of teachers, and costs of transportation.

In Northcentral Syria, the majority of parents told World Vision that the cost of education was a primary challenge when sending their children to school (67%), followed by lack of support to education services (33%), and purchasing schools supplies (32%).⁶⁴

Children who drop out of school are particularly vulnerable to protections risks that can cause both physical and mental harm, and severely impact their development.⁶⁵ Even prior to the quakes, close to 14% of respondents in Northwest Syria reported that child labour was impacting boys in their households, and 71% reported that child marriage was impacting girls, with economic hardship, social and cultural acceptance being mentioned as key reasons.⁶⁶ In Northeast Syria, we also found that 50% of parents in Ar-Raqqa were concerned about their children's mental health, particularly as many were unable to regularly attend school due to poor infrastructure, or limited availability of teachers.⁶⁷ Some parents (16%) were also concerned about the risk of out-of-school boys being recruited into armed groups.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to impact women and girls, particularly in Northwest Syria where many of them have had to move to collective shelters following the quakes.⁶⁹ Close to 38% of female respondents also reported facing movement restrictions imposed by male partners or guardians.⁷⁰ This not only limits their learning and work opportunities, but also hinders

their access to humanitarian assistance programs.⁷¹ In Northcentral Syria in particular, IDPs reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had increased the levels of stress felt among household members due to movement restrictions, lack of protection services, and difficult economic conditions, resulting in a rise of GBV within the home, which persisted beyond the pandemic.⁷²

WORLD VISION'S IMPACT IN SYRIA

World Vision has been present in Syria since 2013. In 2022, we reached more than 1,900,000 unique beneficiaries in Syria – 45% of whom are children and 30% are women – with humanitarian assistance in the areas of health, WASH, protection/mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), education, nutrition and livelihoods. We also supported the operation of essential disease monitoring services, which indirectly benefitted 4.7 million people in areas impacted by disease outbreaks. Since the earthquakes of February 6th, 2023, we have also reached close to 350,000 unique beneficiaries in Syria by providing WASH, education, health and nutrition assistance, shelter and survival items, cash and voucher assistance, livelihoods, child protection and psycho-social support.



Nader* attended a Cholera awareness session organized by World Vision in a Syrian IDP camp. © Hand in Hand for Aid, World Vision's partner.



Ahmad and his children reside in a remote village in Wana, Iraq. He dreams of being able to provide for them. © World Vision

III. HOST & REFUGEE POPULATIONS IMPACTED BY SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Syria's refugee crisis remains one of the world's largest, with more than 6.8 million Syrian refugees residing in Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, which represent the five countries covered by the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP).⁷³ Socio-economic conditions in host countries were impacted by multiple compounding crises in the past years, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and deteriorating social cohesion in already fragile host communities.⁷⁴ Protracted displacement, limited education and work opportunities, coupled with the absence of viable durable solutions to the ongoing crisis, have only added to both refugee and host communities' vulnerabilities over the years.⁷⁵

Additional challenges linked to climate change and rising temperatures – particularly in Iraq and Jordan -- have resulted in increased drought and water scarcity.⁷⁶ Overstretched resources in host countries, coupled with dwindling funding dedicated to humanitarian and resilience programming, has resulted in refugee families, women and children resorting to harmful coping strategies, such as increased uptake of debt, rationing food, domestic violence, child labour and child marriage.⁷⁷

Syrian refugee girls and boys in host countries are at constant risk of dropping out from school, with more than **41%** of children in 3RP countries not having been enrolled in any form of education in 2022, up from 36% in 2019.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, refugee women and girls are increasingly impacted by gender-based violence (GBV), with adolescent girls, divorced and widowed women⁷⁹ particularly at risk of facing movement restrictions, exploitation, abuse and stigma.⁸⁰

While most Syrian refugees do hope to return home one day, the lack of a political solution to the conflict – coupled with the absence of adequate protection reassurances for returnees – has meant that the majority are unable to go back any time soon.⁸¹ Donors must invest in longer-term solutions that would ensure Syrian children can continue accessing education, protection, healthcare and livelihoods opportunities that will allow them to thrive as they reach adulthood.⁸²



World Vision Iraq with funding from Japan platform implements the unlock literacy and catch up program approach for children who have missed years of education © World Vision

IRAQ

Iraq hosts close to 270,000 registered Syrian refugees⁸³ and is home to 416,000 vulnerable host community members.⁸⁴ Iraq also hosts over 1 million IDPs and close to 5 million returnees⁸⁵ as a result of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) crisis. Many of them are in need of aid due to chronic displacement and limited access to humanitarian assistance for the internally displaced.⁸⁶

Unemployment rates remain high, and the national labour participation rate is one of the lowest in the world (39.5%) due to the largely informal nature of the economy, with women and youth being particularly affected.⁸⁷ In parallel, climate change, rising temperatures and drought are limiting the availability of water and other natural resources.⁸⁸ As a result, host, refugee, IDP and returnee populations' vulnerabilities are expected to increase throughout 2023 and beyond, stressing on the need to shift towards more long term solutions that would continue to address their needs in the longer term.⁸⁹

Despite the complex and enduring challenges that have pushed so many Iraqi children and families into poverty and vulnerability, some donors have begun to see northern Iraq as a development context rather than a humanitarian situation, further curtailing the amount of funding available. Funds targeted at both recovery and resilience can have the greatest long-term impact for the host

country, but resources have not been forthcoming, particularly in recent years.

Livelihoods and access to basic needs

In a 2022 assessment, the majority of Syrian refugee households (93%) reported a reduction in income in the period following the COVID-19 pandemic, and many others (88%) reported having access to fewer labour opportunities.⁹⁰

Syrian refugee households were also more likely to rely on debt for income (83%) compared to host community members (58%).⁹¹

More than half of Syrian refugees (64%) reside in the host community and have to cover their own costs while contributing to the local economy.⁹² This is particularly challenging as Syrian refugees cannot work in the public sector – which consists of the bulk (60%) of the local economy – and have to resort to informal work or daily labour instead.⁹³

Increasingly harsh living conditions in the host community led to many Syrian families requesting to move back into the refugee camps where some of these services are provided for free, even though other basic needs remain lacking.⁹⁴ As for IDPs, a

decrease in humanitarian assistance coupled with additional socio-economic challenges meant that many could no longer meet their basic needs or access essential services such as education and health.⁹⁵

Climate change and food security

Climate change is having a devastating impact on the agricultural sector in Iraq, with many farmers making the difficult decision to abandon their lands and find work opportunities elsewhere.⁹⁶ This is significantly reducing agricultural outputs and threatening food security for host, IDP and refugee populations.⁹⁷

The majority (86%) of Syrian refugees living in camps were considered food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity in 2022.⁹⁸

In fact, food was reported as the primary reason that Syrian refugee households were taking on additional debt (76%) particularly for families residing in camps.⁹⁹ Many households also reported switching to cheaper and less quality food items or even consuming less food during the day.¹⁰⁰

According to UNICEF, more than 100,000 Syrian refugee girls' and boys' development is at risk in Iraq due to shortage or rationing of food.¹⁰¹

Vulnerable groups such as female-headed households, children and the elderly are particularly reliant on increasingly under-funded food and livelihoods support programs across the country.¹⁰² Climate change and water scarcity are also increasing the prevalence of waterborne diseases, particularly in overcrowded refugee or IDP camp settings, where children are most vulnerable to malnutrition.¹⁰³

Education and child protection

The 2022-2023 school year saw the implementation of the Refugee Education Integration Policy (REIP) in the Kurdistan region of Northern Iraq, which aims at integrating Syrian refugee students and teachers from grades 1 to 4 into the national system, as opposed to maintaining a parallel education system.¹⁰⁴ Although it represents a landmark decision promoting further integration of Syrian refugee students in the classrooms, some challenges remain such as the language barriers faced by Syrian students, parents and teachers who are transitioning to classes held in the Kurdish language as opposed to Arabic.¹⁰⁵

In addition, over 680,000 IDP and returnee children continue to face obstacles accessing education and other basic rights due to absence of civil documentation.¹⁰⁶ If these children remain stateless, they risk missing out on key education, protection and mental health services that are essential to their development.¹⁰⁷ According to UNICEF, 7% of children and adolescents aged 5–17 years are engaged in child labour in Iraq, many of whom have dropped out from school.¹⁰⁸

Mental health impact of negative coping mechanisms on women and children

Women and girls in Iraq are also increasingly impacted by Gender-based Violence (GBV) which intensified during the pandemic as well as the post-COVID-19 period.¹⁰⁹ Worryingly, the majority of GBV survivors (67%) do not know where to seek support.¹¹⁰ Psychological and emotional abuse represented the most common type of GBV reported in 2022, a 7% increase from 2021.¹¹¹ As for children, many of them (80%) were exposed to violent discipline by caregivers, which can have a negative impact on their physical and psychological development.¹¹²

WORLD VISION'S IMPACT IN IRAQ

World Vision has been responding in Iraq since 2014 and works with Syrian refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), host communities and returnees reaching more than 400,000 people in FY 2022. Today, we continue to geographically expand and grow our presence to respond to the evolving needs of vulnerable girls, boys, families and communities. Most of our programmes focus on medium to long-term recovery and development, while we also continue to provide short-term emergency relief to the most vulnerable populations.



In one of the Jordanian schools* to "at a Jordanian school supported by World Vision. © World Vision Syria Response -

JORDAN

Jordan currently hosts 1.3 million refugees making it the second largest per capita refugee hosting country in the world.¹¹³ Among them, there are 660,600 registered Syrian refugees, the majority of whom reside in the host community.¹¹⁴ The two Syrian refugee camps of Zaatari and Azraq in Jordan currently host more than 135,000 Syrian refugees.¹¹⁵

More than half (56%) of Syrian refugees residing in the country are boys and girls under the age of 17.¹¹⁶

Jordan is also home to more than 500,000 vulnerable members of the host community.¹¹⁷

Jordan has provided a favourable protection environment for Syrian refugees over the past 12 years, allowing for their inclusion in key public sectors such as education, healthcare, and more recently, the national COVID-19 vaccination programme.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, a decrease in funding in recent years has resulted in a gradual downscaling of humanitarian and resilience programmes to the detriment of the most vulnerable population groups – including Syrian and Palestinian refugees, but also migrants and vulnerable Jordanians – while long-term solutions to the crisis remain few.¹¹⁹

Return intentions and need for long-term solutions

When asked if they thought it will be possible for them to return home to Syria in a couple of years, the majority (82%) of survey respondents in World Vision's 2022 assessment responded "No".¹²⁰ More than half (65%) said that resettlement to a third country would be their preferred option, followed by integration in the Jordanian community (28%).¹²¹ These intentions highlight the need for further integration opportunities where possible, in addition to more resettlement and complimentary pathways that would allow Syrian refugee families to live in dignity.

Livelihoods and lack of job opportunities for women

Unemployment in Jordan is the highest among the 3RP countries, with women, young people and refugees being most affected by limited work opportunities.¹²² A 2022 multi-sectorial needs assessment conducted by World Vision found that Syrians in urban areas particularly stressed on the need for more 'livelihoods' and 'income generating' interventions to support them and their families.¹²³

More than one third of Syrian and vulnerable Jordanian survey respondents (36.5%) were impacted by unemployment, and more than half (56%) were concerned about losing their current employment.¹²⁴

Although the Jordanian government has taken positive steps to provide work permits for Syrian refugees over the past years, employment opportunities are limited to certain sectors such as seasonal work in the agricultural or construction fields, in addition to certain permits allowed for sales jobs and home-based businesses.¹²⁵ With only 6% of these work permits being issued for women, coupled with very few opportunities for youth employment, many Syrian refugees are still struggling to secure a stable income.¹²⁶ World Vision also found that Syrian refugee women continue to face many barriers to employment, including: difficulty getting a work permit (87.5%), needing to take care of children or the elderly in the household (52%), lacking the relevant work experience skills (49%), and not enough work opportunities being made available for them (44%).¹²⁷

Living conditions, shelter and WASH needs

In the host community, 50% of refugee households are thought to reside in sub-standard or inadequate shelters with leaking roofs or inadequate ventilation, while many continue to face eviction threats due to limited income opportunities.¹²⁸ In fact, refugee households have reported using debt primarily to cover their rent (32%).¹²⁹ Jordan is also one of the most water scarce countries in the world, adding to the socio-economic stressors faced by both host and refugee communities.¹³⁰ In a 2022 assessment, World Vision found that close to 53% of respondents in the host community were not getting enough water to cover their daily needs.¹³¹

Food security and negative coping strategies

In 2022, it was estimated that 77% of refugees living in Jordan's host communities were food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity.¹³² The situation of female-headed households is of particular concern with 9 out of 10 women struggling to meet their household's basic needs.¹³³

A 2022 assessment by world vision found that more than half of Syrian families (54%) requested additional financial assistance to meet their food needs, while more than a third (36%) needed support to access healthier and more affordable food items.¹³⁴

The lack of access to healthy foods has resulted, among other factors, in the spread of chronic diseases among many refugee households. Our 2022 assessment found that 44.5% of respondents had at least one member in their household who was suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.¹³⁵ In Azraq and Zaatari camps, many have resorted to negative coping strategies to make ends meet, with the wide majority buying food on credit, spending their savings, or even reducing non-food expenses.¹³⁶ Female-headed households and smaller families were found to face more barriers when it came to food consumption, as opposed to larger families.¹³⁷

Education in host community and camps

Even though Jordan has taken positive steps to enable Syrian refugee children access to education, 40% of school-aged children are growing up in families that are considered highly vulnerable, increasing the risk of dropouts.¹³⁸ In the host community, 17% of school-aged refugee children had never been enrolled in school, particularly if they resided in informal settlements.¹³⁹

In a 2022 survey conducted by World Vision, close to **50%** of respondents with out-of-school children said that lack of financial resources was the main reason resulting in their children dropping out from school, followed by the need for children to work to support the family, the belief of that education was not necessary, especially in the case of female children.¹⁴⁰

Dropping out from school exposes children to various protection risks. In the camp setting, child labour was found to be particularly prevalent among boys in Azraq camp, while girls in Zaatari camp were more exposed to early child marriage.¹⁴¹ Vulnerable Jordanian and Syrian refugee children living with disabilities in both host community and camp settings also continue to face financial, physical and social stigma barriers when trying to access inclusive education that meets their learning needs.¹⁴²

WORLD VISION'S IMPACT IN JORDAN

World Vision has been present in Jordan since 2013 as part of its Syria Response. In 2022, World Vision Syria Response reached more than 590,000 beneficiaries, including more than 180,000 women and 300,000 children, many of whom are impacted by conflict, displacement and climate change. The majority of the children (90%) that World Vision supports in Jordan are characterized as “most vulnerable” and facing extreme deprivation, discrimination, abuse and exploitation.



Sarah and Aya* conducting solid waste management door-to-door visits in Azraq Camp, Jordan. They aim to raise awareness regarding green waste separation and healthy waste disposal. © World Vision Syria Response.



"I love to come here so I can learn to read, write and see my friends", says Imane when asked about why she loves school. © World Vision

LEBANON

Lebanon hosts close to 1,500,000 Syrian refugees, and an almost equal number of vulnerable host community members.¹⁴³ The country has experienced compounding political and economic crises since 2019, resulting in the local currency losing more than 95% of its value in a matter of a few years.¹⁴⁴ This has significantly reduced both refugees and the host community's purchasing power as they continue to struggle to meet their basic needs.¹⁴⁵ As a result, poverty, food insecurity and negative coping mechanisms are on the rise, while social cohesion continues to be threatened in the already fragile country.¹⁴⁶

Livelihoods and food security

As a result of the economic crisis, most Syrian refugees in Lebanon still depend on humanitarian aid to survive, while the host community is also struggling to get by. Although the monthly income of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon has improved in 2022 compared to 2021, it only covers 21% of the cost of their food and non-food essential needs due to rising prices.¹⁴⁷ Syrian refugee women are particularly impacted by unemployment compared to men, with only 18% of females participating in the labour force compared to 73% of males.¹⁴⁸

According to the most recent Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon, the wide majority of Syrian refugee households (94%) are borrowing money to cover essential needs, with food needs being reported as the main reason to take on debt (93%), followed by rent (46%) and medication costs (35%).¹⁴⁹

A livelihoods needs assessment conducted by World Vision towards the end of 2022 among vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian families in South Lebanon found that many were adopting negative coping strategies as a result of rising food insecurity.¹⁵⁰

The majority of respondents (95%) said they relied on less expensive food, many others (88%) had reduced their meal portions, or reduced the number of meals consumed per day (82.5%).¹⁵¹

This was particularly the case for adults (53%) and female-headed households (24%) who reduced their food consumption to allow for their children to eat.¹⁵²

Food insecurity is on the rise with 67% of Syrian refugee households being categorized as moderately or severely impacted, an 18% increase since 2021.¹⁵³ Female-headed households were found to be particularly at risk of food insecurity with 7 out of 10 of them being unable to cover their food and non-food essential needs.¹⁵⁴ This has impacted more than 80% of children and young people between the ages of 6 and 23 who are unable to access the minimally diverse diets crucial to their development, with girls being most at risk of being exposed to poor diets due to gender barriers.¹⁵⁵

Living conditions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

The cost of rent has almost tripled compared to last year and many Syrian refugees have reported being behind on rent in 2022, particularly in the capital Beirut where rents are increasingly high.¹⁵⁶ Poor shelter conditions are still affecting many Syrian refugee households, with 31% residing in non-permanent shelters or non-residential structures.¹⁵⁷ More than half (58%) also describe their shelters as being overcrowded or in sub-standard conditions.¹⁵⁸

WASH needs on the rise

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) needs have also peaked in 2022, with 28% of Syrian households reporting that safe drinking water was not available for them when needed, and 56% reporting insufficient water for washing and domestic purposes, representing a 23% increase from last year.¹⁵⁹ This is particularly the case for refugee households in residential shelters as opposed to informal tented settlements (ITS) which are usually supported by humanitarian actors with regular water trucking.¹⁶⁰ In fact, World vision found that more than one third (38.5%) of ITS residents in the Bekaa and Baalbek-Hermel governorates relied on water trucking for their drinking needs, followed by bottled water (35%), as public water sources were deemed unsafe to drink.¹⁶¹

WASH needs of those residing in ITS also worsened with more than a third of Syrian refugee households reporting having to share toilets with others, partly due to economic hardship which resulted in the sale of toilet materials to cover other basic needs.¹⁶² The sharing of WASH facilities can increase the risk of waterborne diseases as well as protection and GBV risks impacting women and girls in particular.¹⁶³ World Vision found that the wide majority (97.5%) of ITS residents relied on latrines.¹⁶⁴

Only 3.4% of respondents in ITS reported having gender-segregated external latrines, and close to 20% reported not feeling safe when using the latrines, the majority of which (62%) were females.¹⁶⁵



Ghida, a Social worker with LebRelief conducts awareness sessions on heating preservation techniques and alternative heating methods for beneficiaries in the North of Lebanon. © World Vision

Health needs of Syrian refugee children and families

Health needs remain high among Syrian refugee households with more than 48% of them having at least one member with a health issue.¹⁶⁶ The recent COVID-19 pandemic and cholera outbreak have overstretched the Lebanese public health sector almost to its breaking point.¹⁶⁷ Access to secondary healthcare services also remains challenging for many due to costs of consultation fees, medication transportation.¹⁶⁸ This is particularly worrying for vulnerable population groups such as children, pregnant women or the elderly. In fact, children under 2 years of age remain particularly vulnerable to the spread of diseases, with 24% regularly falling ill in 2022.¹⁶⁹

Education and child protection

In addition to food and health expenditures, close to one third (30%) of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon said they had also reduced their expenditure on education, with 1 in 10 refugee households reporting having to withdraw their children from school.¹⁷⁰

This is also apparent in the number of out of school children who currently represent close to half (47%) of girls and boys aged between 3 and 17.¹⁷¹ Children between the ages of 6 to 14 were found to be most at risk of dropping out of school, with boys being particularly impacted as they turned to various forms of child labour to support their families.¹⁷²

Worryingly, more than one third (35%) of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 have never attended school, which will inevitably have a devastating impact on their future prospects as young adults.¹⁷³

In parallel, the public school system has also suffered due to poor wages and deteriorating infrastructure, which have resulted in lengthy strikes and closures of schools.¹⁷⁴

Legal status remains a key issue for Syrian refugees in Lebanon with only 17% holding a legal residency.¹⁷⁵ Women, children and young people remain particularly impacted by the lack of legal residency papers or birth certificates, often limiting their access to work opportunities, as well as humanitarian aid and services.¹⁷⁶ This also increases the risks of resorting to negative coping mechanisms or being exposed to protection risk and various forms of abuse and exploitation.¹⁷⁷ Among adolescent boys and girls surveyed in 2022, at least 17% reported having worked for at least one hour in return for pay, with boys being three times more affected than girls.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, girls were more exposed to child marriage, as 22% of those aged between 15 and 19 had already been married, with the majority of them being located in the capital Beirut.¹⁷⁹ Most of them (68%) had stopped attending school as a result.¹⁸⁰

WORLD VISION'S IMPACT IN LEBANON

World Vision has been working with the poorest communities in Lebanon for nearly 45 years, establishing strong relations with communities and local stakeholders. Since 2012, World Vision has also been assisting Syrian refugees and vulnerable members of local host communities through humanitarian relief programmes across all sectors. Currently, we continue to respond to the worsening socio-economic situation in Lebanon while taking into account the increasing risks of climate change and environmental degradation. During FY22, which ran from October 2021 to September 2022, World Vision reached more than 845,000 beneficiaries including more than 449,000 children in Lebanon.



World Vision and its implementing partner in Türkiye supporting people affected by the earthquake with clean water. © World Vision Syria Response

TÜRKIYE

Türkiye still hosts the largest population of persons under temporary and international protection.¹⁸¹ They include a Syrian population of more than 3,388,000 registered Syrians, 45% of whom are under the age of 17.¹⁸² The wide majority of them (98%) reside in urban or rural areas across the country.¹⁸³ Although the Turkish government has covered the bulk of the Syrian refugee response's financial costs over the years, it is increasingly stressing on the need for international support for more durable solutions to the protracted crisis, particularly as resilience-related needs continue to increase.¹⁸⁴

The recent earthquakes of February 2023 have only exacerbated both host community and Syrian refugees' needs, particularly in the Southeast of the country, which was the hardest hit.¹⁸⁵ OCHA has estimated that more than 9 million people have been impacted by the quakes, including 4 million children.¹⁸⁶

Livelihoods and food security

Thanks to regulations introduced back in 2016, more than 286,000 Syrians currently benefit from work permits in Türkiye.¹⁸⁷ However, the majority of Syrians (62%) continue to work informally which exposes them to irregular employment, harsh working conditions and economic insecurity.¹⁸⁸ In fact, the labour participation of Syrians only stands at 44%, with women being particularly impacted by

unemployment due to language barriers and duties within the household such as taking care of children and the elderly.¹⁸⁹ The primary costs and expenditures that refugee families struggle to cover are rent (73%) – with female-headed household particularly affect due to lack of income opportunities, followed by food (59%), and utilities (39%).¹⁹⁰

Even prior to the earthquakes, it was estimated that close to 90% of Syrian refugee households could not fully cover their monthly expenses, forcing them to adopt negative coping mechanisms such as the reduction in essential food expenditure (57%) and consumption (52%).¹⁹¹ Refugee families living in rural areas, with limited access to job opportunities and services, particularly struggle to cover food expenses.¹⁹² These needs only intensified following the earthquakes of February 2023, particularly as access to food became less regular. In the few weeks following the quakes, close to half (48%) of respondents in Southeast Türkiye told World Vision they had not received food aid since the earthquakes hit, and many others (42%) could not access any functioning markets.¹⁹³

The majority (70%) confirmed that food prices had increased with many families worrying about children and the elderly's food needs in particular.¹⁹⁴

In terms of nutrition, close to 67% of respondents said there were cases of malnutrition or undernutrition in their surroundings, while 50% said there were not enough energy and nutrient dense foods for children under two years.¹⁹⁵

Access to health for Syrian refugees and vulnerable host community

Transportation costs and language barriers represent the primary challenges for Syrians trying to access healthcare services, with those residing in rural areas, women, children and the elderly being most impacted.¹⁹⁶ World Vision's post-earthquake assessment in Southeast Türkiye also found that 58% of health facilities had become partially functional in addition to 8% being out of order.¹⁹⁷ In addition, 20% of Syrian and Turkish survey respondents stated that access to health services had become more difficult, with access to medications (45%) being a priority for many who stressed that they had become too expensive.¹⁹⁸

Living conditions following the earthquake

In March 2023, World Vision surveyed 269 Turkish and Syrian caregivers affected by the quakes in Southeast Türkiye, in addition to 528 children and 59 female-headed households.¹⁹⁹

The wide majority (94%) said their homes had been damaged or destroyed as a result of the quakes, and 66% were still residing in tents.²⁰⁰

Moreover, 22% of respondents did not feel safe in their current shelter, with female-headed households being most affected.²⁰¹ More than half of respondents (51%) were relying on water trucking for their drinking and domestic water use needs, and half of female respondents (50%) lacked access to essential hygiene products.²⁰² The wide majority of respondents (85.5%) were using communal latrines for their WASH needs, while also frequently visiting relatives' homes that were not destroyed by the quakes in order to bathe with their families.²⁰³

Education, child protection and mental health

The host country continues to promote the inclusion of Syrians under temporary protection in the primary, secondary and even higher education systems in Türkiye, nevertheless, barriers to access are still faced by many.²⁰⁴ Prior to the earthquake, the top three barriers in accessing education for children were listed as financial constraints (35%), peer bullying by other students (21%) and long travel distance to the nearest school (15%).²⁰⁵ In fact, increased peer bullying remains the main concern for refugee parents (58%), followed by tensions with the host community (53%).²⁰⁶ This has also increased the likelihood of out-of-school children being exposed to protection risks. One third of refugee households (34%) reported being concerned about an increase in child marriage, and 17% listed child labour as the primary reason for their children being out of school.²⁰⁷

World Vision's post-earthquake survey found that the education and child protection situation had worsened in Southeast Türkiye.

75% of respondents said the quakes had greatly impacted their children's access to education and more than 84% added that their children had to drop out of school as a result.²⁰⁸

More than half (54%) of parents and caregivers said they would not send their children to school anymore this year, while 23% were still unsure if they would be able to.²⁰⁹

Worryingly, more than 73% of respondents reported knowing of children who had become alone and unaccompanied as a result of the quakes, adding that many of them were suffering from poor health and were no longer attending school.²¹⁰

Children and caregivers' mental health following the earthquakes

Children and caregivers' mental health was greatly impacted by the quakes and continues to suffer today. The majority of our respondents in March 2023 (90%) said their children were still afraid.²¹¹ Among the 528 Syrian and Turkish children we spoke with, 55% said they regularly felt upset when remembering the events of February 6th, 2023, and 56.5% still experienced unwanted images and thoughts about the quakes.²¹² Caregivers were also deeply impacted, with close to half reporting regular nightmares while 33% still felt anger, guilt, and shame for not being able to protect their loved ones from this life-altering event.²¹³

WORLD VISION'S IMPACT IN TÜRKIYE

World Vision has been present in Türkiye since 2016. Following the earthquakes of February 2023, our staff and partners mobilized quickly to reach more than 100,000 beneficiaries in Southeast Türkiye – the majority of whom are women and children – by supporting them with protection, WASH, winterization, nutrition, and cash assistance. Our teams continue to be present on the ground today, aiming to alleviate the suffering and answer to the needs of those most impacted by the quakes.



World Vision and its implementing partner in Türkiye supporting people affected by the earthquake with relief items. © World Vision Syria Response

IV. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Rising socio-economic challenges, food insecurity, the spread of disease, and climate change, continue to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of host, refugee and internally displaced populations impacted by the Syria crisis. As a result, Syrian women, girls and boys are increasingly vulnerable to protection risks that regularly expose them to various forms of exploitation and abuse, negatively impacting their physical and mental health wellbeing. Meanwhile, they continue to miss out on essential job and learning opportunities that are key to their development and financial independence. This only perpetuates the cycle of violence, and heightens their dependence on humanitarian aid, adding to the overall cost of the humanitarian response.

It is crucial that European Union (EU) donors – and the wider international community – renew their commitment to those most impacted by the crisis in Syria and host countries. This also means answering to the livelihoods, education, protection and mental health needs of vulnerable host, displaced and refugee families and children, in order to prevent further suffering. In parallel, investing in early recovery, as well as longer-term development approaches, is key to reaching more sustainable outcomes for Syria and the region. This would decrease aid dependence in the mid to long term while allowing displaced and refugee families to gradually become self-reliant. Lastly, it is imperative to continue stressing on the need for a resolution to the ongoing crisis in line with UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2254. The Syrian girls and boys whose childhoods have been tarnished by 12 years of war are yearning to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, while being able to access the education and livelihoods opportunities essential to their development as they become young adults.

With this in mind, European Union donors and the wider international community must:



Fully fund Syria's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP) so that the livelihoods, education, protection and mental health needs of the vulnerable host, refugee and internally displaced families, women and children most impacted by the crisis can urgently be addressed;



Invest in early recovery and sustainable development solutions, through multi-year and flexible funding, that would answer to vulnerable host, refugee and displaced families' and children's needs in the mid to longer-term, while also enhancing their capacity to thrive beyond the crisis, and eventually reduce their overall dependence on aid;



Work hand-in-hand with local actors and communities, including CSOs, NGOs but also the women, children and youth most impacted by this crisis. Involve them in all stages of the humanitarian and resilience responses – including design, planning, implementation and evaluation -- with the aim of jointly developing programmes and solutions tailored to their livelihoods, education, protection and mental health needs.



This is particularly crucial for the mitigation of increasing protection risks, including boys' and girls' exposure to child labour and early marriage, as well as women and girls' exposure to various forms of Gender-based Violence (GBV) as a result of recurring displacement and conflict;



Work together with host countries in the region to develop long-term development solutions that would serve vulnerable host communities and refugee populations, both of whom have had to bear the brunt of increasing socio-economic hardship, particularly during the post-pandemic period.



In parallel, invest further in innovative initiatives aimed at fostering social-cohesion in host countries. This would allow for host and refugee populations to thrive while becoming more self-reliant in the mid to long-term;



Push for further integration opportunities where possible, in addition to more resettlement and complimentary pathways that would enable Syrian families, girls and boys to live in dignity while exercising their full rights;



Regarding Syria in particular, EU Member States must take the necessary steps towards supporting the improvement of safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access, including through the extension of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2672 on Cross-border assistance; and lastly



EU Member States and the wider international community must continue to work towards a resolution to the protracted crisis -- in line with UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2254 that endorses a road map for peace in Syria -- while safeguarding the rights of the families, women, girls and boys who have endured its effects for 12 long years.



"I learned how to draw a flower and I love the colour pink", says Jana, five, proudly when asked about what she is learning. © World Vision

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