



World Vision

ENOUGH

A Syrian child during a malnutrition exam in World Vision's medical centre.
© World Vision Syria Response, Zaher Jaber

SPOTLIGHT ON NUTRITION, FOOD SECURITY & CLIMATE CHANGE IN SYRIA & THE HOST COUNTRIES OF LEBANON, TÜRKIYE, JORDAN & IRAQ

WORLD VISION MIDDLE EAST AND EASTERN EUROPE – BRUSSELS VIII POLICY BRIEF – April 2024

INTRODUCTION

The Syria crisis recently marked its 13th year, it remains the [largest displacement crisis in the world](#), with over 12 million Syrians forcibly displaced in the region. Humanitarian needs [across Syria](#) and [neighbouring host countries](#) remain high, while a political solution to the conflict that would enable the safe return of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees has yet to materialize. In parallel, [funding for the Syria crisis response](#) has continued to dwindle year after year, despite soaring concerns linked to nutrition, food security and the overall impact of climate change on internally displaced, refugee and vulnerable host populations.

In April and May 2024, world leaders and key stakeholders in the Syria crisis response will be meeting at the European Union's [Brussels VIII Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region."](#) The conference will be a key opportunity to discuss the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in Syria and host countries, as well as

the need for more durable solutions that would allow vulnerable Syrians and host communities in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Türkiye to overcome challenges such as malnutrition, food insecurity and climate change in the longer term.

About World Vision's ENOUGH campaign

In September 2023, World Vision [announced](#) that it would commit US\$3.4bn as part of its new global campaign called '[ENOUGH](#)' that aims to end child hunger and malnutrition. This includes investing the funds over three years into work that will reduce hunger and improve the nutritional status of 125 million children in 67 countries where they are suffering most. The ENOUGH campaign is World Vision's latest contribution to sounding the alarm about the hunger global emergency.



SYRIA

Action for Humanity - Little Selma* was on the verge of losing her life hadn't she received vital support for severe malnutrition. © World Vision Syria Response Partner

Thirteen years on, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains extremely dire. In 2024, [16.7 million people](#) are in need of humanitarian assistance across Syria, up from 15.3 million in 2023. Among them, [5.5 million](#) are displaced from their homes. The protracted conflict, economic downturns, health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic and cholera outbreaks, coupled with the [recent earthquake](#), have pushed Syrian families to the brink. Syria hosts the world's [second-largest number of internally displaced people \(IDPs\)](#), and it is estimated that [90% of the Syrian population are now living below the poverty line](#), with many displaced families and children struggling to survive. Furthermore, [70% of the families across Syria](#), notably in the Northeast and Northwest, are unable to cover basic living expenses, including shelter, food, and medicine. This has led many families to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as pulling their children out of school, exposing girls and boys to increasing protection risks such as [child labour and early marriage](#).

More worryingly, Syria ranks among the top ten countries hosting the highest number of people facing hunger, with the World Food Programme (WFP) estimating that over [12.9 million Syrians](#) are struggling with inadequate food supplies, while another [2.6 million](#) are on the brink of food insecurity.

Since Syria heavily relies on food imports, the local currency's devaluation has made imported goods much more costly and domestic food prices soar. In October 2023, the [cost of a food basket](#) sufficient for a family of five reached SYP 928,587, marking a 100% increase since the beginning of the year and a fourfold increase over two years. Despite [the minimum wage doubling to SYP 187,940 in August 2023](#), it now accounts for merely 20% of the total cost of one food basket. This represents a dramatic decline in purchasing power from three years prior, when the minimum wage covered 50% of a family's food basket's cost.

Women and children are bearing the brunt of the food crisis. [Female-headed households](#) that are facing high levels of food insecurity are particularly vulnerable to increased risks of [gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse](#). [Nearly 5.9 million people, 64% of whom are children, require immediate nutritional support](#). The incidence of [Global Acute Malnutrition \(GAM\)](#) has tripled over the past five years, climbing [from 1.7% in 2019 to 4.7% in 2023](#), affecting approximately 650,000 children under five, which is an increase of 150,000 from 2019. Stunting rates have consistently risen, [from 12.6% in 2019 to 16.1% in 2023](#), indicating that at least one in four Syrian children suffers from anaemia, a direct result of diets deficient in essential nutrients.

SAMAH'S STORY

Samah* is a widowed mother of five who is like millions of other mothers affected by the conflict and recent earthquake in Syria. After cheating death and managing to free her family from what seemed like doomsday, she was faced with another conundrum, securing food for her five children. This is easier said than done in the middle of a war-torn country that is lacking jobs and facing soaring food prices. She was heartbroken as food became a luxury in her household and her children were going hungrier each day. But despite all these challenges, Samah did not lose hope. World Vision Syria Response and its local implementing partner Takaful al Sham helped Samah and her family get through the aftermath of the earthquake, so that she could continue providing nutritious meals for her children. Samah and more than 4,000 other families received financial support enabling them to cover their basic necessities with support from World Vision UK.



Takaful Al Sham - Samah* in a shop buying necessary food items for her five children. © World Vision Syria Response Partner

After years of conflict, the [February 2023 earthquake](#) inflicted additional damage on infrastructure, including that related to agriculture, and prompted considerable displacement towards rural areas. This displacement has strained the resources and savings of affected households and their host communities. According to the WFP's Remote Monitoring report from March 2023, approximately [63% of households](#) in earthquake-stricken areas were experiencing inadequate food consumption, severely impacting food security.

Additionally, [environmental challenges](#) in Syria are intensifying the crisis. The risk of another severe drought, coupled with the possibility of flash floods, threatens to severely impact agricultural output and worsen water shortages. This not only threatens food supply, but also complicates efforts towards maintaining hygiene and sanitation, elevating the risk of additional public health emergencies. A 2023 multi-sectorial needs assessment (MSNA) conducted by World Vision in Northern Syria confirmed that residents' most pressing needs include access to food, livelihood support, electricity, and health services.

The need for humanitarian assistance in Syria reached an all-time high, with [16.7 million people](#) expected to require support in 2024, marking the largest figure since the crisis began in 2011. Despite soaring needs, funding continued to dwindle. [In 2023, the Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria was only one-third funded](#), leading to drastic reductions in essential services such as food assistance and healthcare, severely affecting millions of Syrians. Last year, the [WFP announced](#) it would be significantly scaling down its food assistance programs in Syria in 2024 due to lack of funding, leaving more than 3 million Syrians without vital food assistance. The protracted Syrian crisis and dwindling financial support have cast a shadow over humanitarian operations, threatening their sustainability. As a result, vital infrastructure maintenance projects for electricity, water supply, as well as primary healthcare and nutrition facilities might be indefinitely deferred. This will only add to the suffering of Syrian women, children and men who continue to struggle to make ends meet following 13 years of conflict.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Donors must **urgently meet the financial needs** outlined in the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to ensure that the critical humanitarian requirements are fully addressed. This includes the **immediate restoration and increase of funding for food assistance**, vital for supporting the 12.9 million Syrians who are food insecure and constitute over half of the population. Recognizing that **access to food assistance is a fundamental human right** is essential in combating the escalating issues of food insecurity, malnutrition, and child mortality in Syria.

World Vision's Nutrition Response in Syria

- In 2023, [World Vision Syria Response \(WVSR\)](#) reached close to 535,500 individuals in Northern Syria through its nutrition programs, including more than 329,000 children. In 2024, WVSR will continue addressing nutrition needs by supporting the nutrition cluster's surveillance teams and community-based surveillance systems that are efficiently tracking malnutrition rates.
- Our teams will also continue to suggest social behaviour, preventive and root problems intervention while continuously assessing the nutrition situation in northern Syria.
- WVSR will also continue implementing nutrition activities targeting women, infants, young children by conducting regular MUAC screenings, for pregnant and lactating women, as well as children under 5, and providing timely and effective treatment for malnutrition cases.



TÜRKIYE

International Blue Crescent Relief -- Ahmad*, a Syrian refugee who is living with a disability in Türkiye, receives a support package following the earthquake of February 2023. © World Vision Syria Response Partner

Türkiye is home to one of the largest refugee populations in the world which includes over [3.2 million Syrian refugees](#) under temporary protection. Nearly half of them are children and 48% are women and girls, with the majority (95%) residing in [host communities](#). Although significant progress has been made to integrate refugees in the past years, economic challenges such as high inflation and currency fluctuations have further burdened both refugees and host communities. By September 2023, inflation had soared to [61.5%](#), hitting low-income families the hardest, particularly in terms of transportation, food, and housing costs. [In 2023](#), 85% of Syrian families reported a decline in their financial situation over the past year, while only 18% of Turkish citizens reported being able to

fully cover their expenses, highlighting significant financial challenges among both communities. This competition for limited jobs and resources has often led to a deterioration of social cohesion between both communities.

In Türkiye, while [hunger is not a widespread issue](#), the prevalent consumption of unhealthy foods coupled with the limited access to nutritious options, are contributing to rising rates of poor nutrition and obesity among specific population groups. Refugees, in particular, encounter difficulties in securing formal employment, which places them at risk of engaging in informal labour, making them heavily reliant on assistance for their basic needs and survival. In 2023, [92% of Syrian households](#) reported not being able to

cover their basic monthly household needs, and 35% reported facing financial constraints impacting the school enrolment of their children.

In February 2023, the catastrophic earthquake struck Southern Türkiye and Northwest Syria left millions displaced, homeless, disrupted the education of countless children, and worsened the already critical situation, affecting approximately [9 million people](#), including [1.7 million Syrian refugees](#) in Southeast Türkiye, and rendering about [3.6 million people](#) homeless across both countries. [More than half \(57%\) of Syrians](#) in the affected regions reported very severe damage to their homes as a result of the earthquake, while [18% experienced severe damage](#). Additionally, [65% of Syrians](#) indicated that the earthquake had significantly impacted their mental health. The restoration of public institutions that are vital for providing essential services such as healthcare, education, waste management, and employment, has become a crucial priority for both refugees and host communities.

The earthquake has also escalated child protection concerns, with a notable number of children out of school including [450,000 in Türkiye alone](#). Additionally, the participation of refugees in secondary and tertiary education in Türkiye [remains low](#), underscoring the extensive impact of the disaster on educational opportunities for displaced youth. Being out of school also exposes children and young people to various forms of hazardous child labour that can be detrimental to their health and wellbeing in the long term.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Donors must **enhance their support for economic recovery** and livelihood opportunities in earthquake-affected areas of Türkiye. This approach should prioritize **creating employment opportunities for both refugees and members of the host community** to mitigate anti-refugee sentiments. **Targeted assistance for vulnerable families facing financial constraints** in schooling their children and covering basic household needs is also **urgently needed to mitigate child protection risks** such as child labour or early marriage, while also preventing food insecurity and poor nutrition for vulnerable children in the long term.

World Vision's Response to the Syria and Türkiye Earthquakes

World Vision has effectively reached close to 2,450,000 people through its [Syria and Türkiye Earthquake Response](#), more than half of whom are children. Our projects are focused on the provision of health services, comprehensive WASH services, Multi-purpose cash assistance, rehabilitation of schools, supporting running costs of schools and school personnel, conducting back-to-learn campaigns, identification of individuals in need of specialized protection services and referrals, structured and non-structured psychosocial support, shelter rehabilitation, Cash for Work and various distributions of Non-Food Items (NFI).



Syrian people trying to salvage their belongings after the destructive earthquake wiped out thousands of homes.
©World Vision Syria Response, External Consultant



LEBANON

Three Syrian refugee children at an ITS in the Bekaa Valley. © World Vision Lebanon

Lebanon continues to face a multifaceted crisis with devastating effects on [education and food security](#) specifically. The country has the [highest number of refugees per capita](#), including 1.4 million Syrian refugees and more than [489,000 Palestinian refugees](#). According to UN ESCWA, the [multidimensional poverty rate](#) in Lebanon doubled from 42% in 2019 to 82% of the total population in 2021. The refugee crisis, inflation, COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut blast of August 2020, have placed tremendous stress on the country's infrastructure and economy. Inflation in Lebanon reached [154.8% in 2021](#), causing a severe devaluation of the local currency and a reduction in purchasing power. Both refugees and host communities are struggling to meet their basic needs due to the rapid increase in prices as well as the unemployment rates that were fuelled further by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) of the World Food Programme estimates that 1.4 million Lebanese and non-Lebanese individuals are facing high levels of acute food insecurity, with the food price index rising [by 304% between May 2022 and May 2023](#). Rising inflation is a major factor driving food insecurity, with food inflation [reaching 274%](#) year-on-year in August 2023, which can be classified among the highest rates globally. According to a recent study by World

Vision Lebanon [entitled "Impact of prolonged food insecurity and interrupted education in Lebanon on economic growth."](#) food insecurity and malnutrition during emergencies have significant economic consequences on the long term. They increase healthcare costs, cause lost productivity, reduce educational attainment, and heighten social costs. The study [revealed](#) that the Average Protein Supply per capita is a significant predictor of national GDP per capita, emphasizing that good nutrition is integral to the nation's economic well-being. The study also [showed](#) that in Lebanon, higher Progression to Secondary School rates correlate with a more robust economy, and higher progression rates to secondary schools, are associated with better overall economic performance.

In a 2021, UNICEF conducted a [SMART survey at the national level in Lebanon](#) where the prevalence of stunting was found to be remarkably high among Syrian children living in Informal Tented Settlements (ITS), almost reaching 26% and representing a 17% increase since 2013. Stunting rates were also elevated among children [in Beirut, standing at 11%, and in Palestinian camps, where it stands at 10.5%](#). The study also found that although [malnutrition rates remained low](#) among children under 5 in 2021, over 94% of children aged 6-23 months still did not receive the minimum acceptable diet necessary for their health and development, with this situation

worsening further in 2022 and 2023 as the economic crisis intensified. According to UNICEF's 2023 [Child Food Poverty Report](#), 277,000 children under the age of 5 are currently experiencing food poverty in Lebanon, with 85,000 living in severe food poverty. Across all governorates, over [60% of children](#) are affected by food poverty. In specific regions such as the Bekaa, North Lebanon, and Beirut, [43%](#), [39%](#), and [30%](#) of children also live in severe food poverty respectively.

RAHAF AND REEMAS' STORY

In Baalbeck, a father faces the distressing reality of not being able to afford food for his two young daughters, [Rahaf, aged 9, and Reemas, only 6 years old](#). "At school, I struggle to concentrate. I keep asking my teacher to explain things again, but she gets frustrated and snaps at me," shares Rahaf. Her father, a physiotherapist, travels door-to-door, working tirelessly to earn a living and provide for his family.

"Rahaf appears smaller than most kids her age, leading to episodes of fainting at school and persistent knee pain that keeps her awake all night. On the other hand, Reemas faces a different challenge; she lost her baby teeth, and it has been a year without any sign of her adult ones emerging. I cannot afford to give them milk or the essential nutrients they need. We used to provide them with iron supplements and milk, but now, even the cost of the iron supplement is beyond our means. We just can't manage it anymore" says Fares, the father.



Rahaf and Reemas' father can no longer afford to provide them with much needed iron supplements
© World Vision Lebanon

Despite years of residing in Lebanon, Syrian refugees in the country remain highly vulnerable, having depleted their limited resources and resorted to survival coping mechanisms, while durable solutions to the crisis remain largely elusive. Humanitarian food assistance plays a crucial role in bridging food gaps and diversifying their dietary intake. However, [recent cuts to this assistance](#) have emerged as significant contributors driving the results of the latest IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification in Lebanon. As of December 2023, Syrian refugee households benefiting from WFP/UNHCR assistance received a reduced transfer value of \$15 for food, capped at five household members (down from \$20) and a decrease in the assistance coverage from 90% to 60% of Syrian refugees. According to [the IPC's findings for the period of October 2024 – March 2024](#), 27% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity. Moreover, coverage for humanitarian food assistance is anticipated to [drop further](#) in the coming months, placing thousands of children at increased risk of malnutrition and stunting. As a result, social cohesion in the fragile country is deteriorating further due to the shrinking humanitarian space and growing competition between refugee and vulnerable host community members around increasingly limited livelihood opportunities.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a **need to address the funding gap in Lebanon and enhance investment** in programming focused on food security, in addition to access to clean and potable water to ensure that Syrian refugee and vulnerable Lebanese children are exposed to fewer risks and are food secure. This can be done by **funding the newly established [Lebanon Response Plan \(LRP\)](#)**, which will present a unified response framework for partners to meet the needs of all crisis-affected populations in the country.

Donors should also be **addressing the economic risks and wider protection risks** in Lebanon that are currently impacting Syrian refugees – as well as host communities and other vulnerable population groups – who are increasingly vulnerable to food insecurity due to the ongoing crisis. Lastly, there is a **need to invest in direct school-based food provision**, such as school feeding programmes and school kitchens, to secure healthy meals and protein accessibility for vulnerable children, preventing malnutrition and stunting in the long term.

World Vision's response in Lebanon

World Vision Lebanon is currently responding to hunger through cash and food-in-kind support to vulnerable families, providing support to farmers through producer groups, cash for work projects through community interventions and livelihood interventions that contribute to employment and creating economic opportunities. During the 2023 fiscal year, World Vision Lebanon reached more than 274,000 individuals under its global hunger response, more than half of whom are children.



One of the volunteers constructing latrines in Azraq Camp, Jordan.
© World Vision Syria Response Communications Assistant Joanna Zreineh

Jordan ranks as the [second highest per capita refugee-hosting country](#) in the world. Despite not ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention, Jordan has a long-standing tradition of providing refuge and protection, integrating refugees into its national policies and ensuring their access to fundamental human rights. This includes education, healthcare, and notably, comprehensive inclusion in the national COVID-19 health response and vaccination efforts. Presently, [Jordan is home to 1.3 million refugees](#), including 653,295 Syrian refugees that re-registered with UNHCR. The majority (81.4%) are living in urban areas while others still reside in camps.

More than a decade into the Syrian crisis, Jordan has transitioned from a state of humanitarian emergency [to focusing on the sustained needs of Syrian refugees](#). These needs include support for livelihoods, housing, food security, safety, and

promoting their integration within Jordanian society. However, the growing refugee population has strained the country's institutions and services, particularly in the health, education, and employment sectors, compounded by prolonged economic stagnation, regional instability, trade disruptions, and the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local economy.

Jordan also happens to be one of the [most water-scarce countries in the world](#) making it particularly vulnerable to [climate change](#). The country is [expected to experience more heatwaves](#) as temperatures are predicted to rise by 4.5°C within the next 50 years, while water availability will likely decline by 75%. This intensified water stress, coupled with irregular precipitations, have had a direct impact on [agricultural production](#), which is expected to worsen in coming years, increasing the risk of food

shortages among both refugee and host population alike. Climate change is also having a [dire impact on children and young people in Jordan](#), hampering their access to food and water while also negatively affecting their education and mental health.

MOHSEN'S STORY

In the challenging environment of Azraq Camp in Jordan, Syrian refugee Mohsen* showcased his passion for green living. Mohsen secured a volunteering opportunity with the GIZ-funded SWM project where he learned about waste management and ways to protect the environment. Mohsen even took his dedication to saving the environment one step further, creating an electrical bicycle that works on solar panels that would allow him to move around the camp and run errands more efficiently. He's a true hero to his environment and community!



Mohsen riding his solar powered bicycle in Azraq Camp, Jordan. © World Vision Syria Response Communications Officer, Rand Is-haqa

A vast majority of [Syrian households \(93%\)](#) in Jordan find themselves in debt as they struggle to meet basic needs. Food security is a pressing issue, with [18% of Syrian households facing severe food insecurity](#), and [27% reporting challenges in affording food over the last three months](#). The rate of unemployment has witnessed a sharp increase, almost [doubling from 11.9% in 2014 to 22.3% in 2023](#), according to the Jordan Department for Statistics (DOS), with the rate for [refugees aged 15 and above standing at 28%](#). The current socio-economic climate poses significant obstacles for both refugees and Jordanian citizens in achieving self-reliance through employment. Furthermore,

[79% of Syrian households](#) are compelled to adopt stress coping strategies, such as spent savings, taking loans for non-food essentials, purchasing food on credit, or selling household goods and assets. These economic challenges also push Syrian families to adopt negative coping mechanisms such as [withdrawing their children from school](#) to manage daily expenses or exposing young girls to [early marriage](#). Recent data from both [host communities and refugee camps](#) in Jordan highlight an increase in child protection concerns for Syrian refugee children due to continuing financial hardships, with a doubling of school withdrawals, a five-fold increase in child labour and a tripling of early marriages impacting young girls in particular.

Funding for the Syrian refugee response in Jordan [has continued to fluctuate year after year](#) reaching an [all-time low in 2023](#) due to other emerging crises in the region and beyond. Facing an unprecedented funding shortfall, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been compelled to drastically reduce its monthly food assistance [to the 465,000 refugees it supports in Jordan](#). Since August 2023, WFP has had prioritized aid for the poorest families, leading to [the exclusion of about 50,000 individuals from receiving assistance](#). According to WFP's assessments towards the end of 2023, this reduction in assistance has [drastically impacted refugee families](#), with the proportion of food insecure households surging from 3 to 18 % in both camps and host communities. As a result, [social cohesion](#) between refugees and host communities is at risk, while informal migration to third countries is also on the rise.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the complex needs of refugees and vulnerable Jordanians, **increased donor funding and support for comprehensive protection measures** in Jordan are crucial. This comprehensive approach should prioritize:

Enhanced access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities. Such investments will not only **mitigate the current socio-economic challenges** faced by both refugees and host communities, but also **empower them to build resilience against long-term threats** like climate change that could jeopardize food and water security.

World Vision's Response in Jordan

World Vision has been present in Jordan since 2013 as part of its Syria Response, where it continues to address the protection, education and livelihood needs of Syrian refugee children and their families – as well as vulnerable Jordanians – who are increasingly impacted by climate change, drought and food insecurity. We reached more than 100,000 people in 2022 and 2023, including more than 4,000 children.



IRAQ

Hazim and his little grandchildren are showing us the products that have been fruited in their farm in Hamdaniyah. © World Vision Iraq's Communications Officer Shayan Nuradeen

Reasonably stable oil prices and relatively low levels of violent conflict have reduced the immediate threat of hunger and malnutrition to the most vulnerable people in Iraq, including refugees and IDPs. Nevertheless, fundamental structural challenges persist, especially related to access to water and markets for locally produced food. There are approximately [288,706 Syrian refugees](#) currently living in Iraq, the majority of whom (94%) have [no expectation of returning home](#) in the next year. The majority are from northeast Syria and [90% are Kurds](#), enabling some measure of integration with the population of northern Iraq, especially in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

[Refugees from Syria](#) remain among the country's most vulnerable residents, as the majority rely on informal work opportunities to get by, while also reporting taking on higher debt compared to host communities. [In 2023](#), over half of Syrian refugee households faced barriers accessing healthcare in the host country, and the enrolment of more than 75,000 Syrian refugee children in school remains a concern as many parents continue to face financial constraints.

The Government of Iraq recently [pledged](#) to ensure that refugees will be able to access public services such as health and education, while the Kurdish Regional Government has pledged to enhance refugees' access to education. It has also promoted Kurdish (Sorani) language learning among Syrian refugees who are Arabic native speakers. Work is ongoing to update the national asylum law, while vulnerable Syrian refugees continue to receive cash assistance from UNHCR. One of the more challenging protection risk factors Syrians face in Iraq is the lack of [necessary documentation](#) that enables access to social and public services.

In April 2024, the KRG General Directorate of Citizenship announced that Syrian nationals (exempting those with US, Canada or Europe passports) would have their visas suspended and must leave KRI by the end of July. World Vision is urgently seeking clarification on the status of Syrians in camps and is urging the authorities in KRI to ensure that the most at-risk Syrians are protected.

Iraq has also experienced significant internal displacement due to the violent conflicts of recent decades, however, local authorities (GOI and KRG) have implemented a process of regularising the status of the roughly [one million internally displaced people \(IDPs\)](#), facilitating work and access to services. Some of the most vulnerable returnees originate

from the Al Hol camp in Northeast Syria, where tens of thousands of formerly IS-affiliated women and children languished for years, experiencing restricted movement and access to services, before being able to finally return home. While rates of hunger and malnutrition appear to be low in Iraq, with childhood stunting [more than halved between 2012 and 2022](#), climate change – specifically related to water scarcity – is now the biggest driver of displacement in Iraq. [Climate change](#) is also the biggest threat to Iraq's long-term food security, due to its soaring temperatures, diminishing rainfall, droughts and water scarcity, in addition to its frequent sand and dust storms. A [2021 study](#) led by World Vision, Save the Children and Oxfam in Iraq found that farmers were cultivating less land due to the compounding challenges associated with climate change and water scarcity. Climate change is also having a dire impact on children and youth in Iraq who are increasingly worried and anxious about the future.

A [2023 research led by World Vision revealed that](#) the educational pursuits of children are often hindered by climate change, as floods and droughts disrupt school attendance. In addition, [food security](#) has been compromised and dietary impacts include reduced nutritional diversity which in turn impacts children and young people's physical growth and overall wellbeing.

SAMAR'S STORY

26-year-old Samar* was born and raised in Rummanah, in Anbar, Iraq. She was a bright and ambitious girl, but when she married at 16, she was forced to leave school and take on the responsibility of raising a family. Not only was Samar a child bride, but her husband has now been in prison for four years during which time she has been the main breadwinner for her four children. For some time she languished in Al-Hol camp in northern Syria. Returning to Iraq from Syria can be especially challenging, and returnees often receive an ambiguous response from their new neighbours. Meanwhile, Samar and her children were living in a small barely habitable house. Samar felt hopeless and despairing, unsure how she would provide for her children. Then Samar had the opportunity to join a sewing and design workshop provided through the SERVE II project, an initiative that is implemented by UNDP Iraq in partnership with World Vision Iraq, and thanks to funding from the Government of Germany. Through this project, Samar not only began learning different designs and gaining valuable experiences, but she also made friends with other women in the workshop, overcoming suspicion and feeling at home once more.



Samar* while sewing in her modest home in Anbar.
© World Vision Iraq, Wisam Arkan Hajl

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The international community must continue **investing in structural resilience to macroeconomic shocks and climate change** in Iraq, in addition to enhancing social cohesion among the country's diverse communities. The international community must also **ensure that levers are available for the Government of Iraq and Kurdish Regional Government to enable small-scale food producers** to get their produce to market for a fair price, and invest in the climate resilience of agricultural supply chains in Iraq. This could pave the way for further economic stability in the mid to long term, while also mitigating the risks of food insecurity.

World Vision's Response in Iraq

World Vision Iraq is currently implementing a new project to aid the return and integration of families and children from the Al-Hol camp in Syria, many of whom are extremely vulnerable and need tailored support to reintegrate in society. Currently, World Vision Iraq's work focuses increasingly on durable solutions to poverty and injustice, including livelihoods and economic empowerment, social cohesion, and climate resilience programmes. It is this recovery and resilience work that is urgently needed and perilously under-resourced in Iraq.



Hand In Hand for Aid - A mother cooking for her children in a Syrian displacement camp. © World Vision Syria Response Partner

CONCLUSION

Syrian children, families and the vulnerable host communities that have welcomed them for the past thirteen years must not be forgotten. Compounding crises grappling the Middle East region – including economic downfall, inflation, climate change, as well as ongoing conflict and displacement – have only exacerbated the vulnerabilities of women, children and men impacted by the Syria crisis. Many families are now facing food insecurity and heightened risks to their nutrition status, not knowing where their next meal will come from. **Now is the time for world leaders to take stock of growing humanitarian needs in Syria and the region, putting forward investments that would pave the way for more durable solutions for refugee, internally displaced and vulnerable host populations, while also keeping early recovery in mind for the ongoing crisis.**

KEY RECOMMENDATION:

Ahead of Brussels VIII, the international community and donors must focus on longer-term food security interventions, beyond emergency or short-term food assistance, in Syria and host countries, that would pave the way for more sustainable solutions to the current food security and nutrition crisis in the region.

In parallel, it is crucial to emphasize the need for economic recovery and livelihood support initiatives alongside food assistance efforts to foster resilience and stability in Syria and the region.

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