



A child carrying a jerry can of fuel during a blizzard in Northwest Syria.
©Takaful Al Sham

DIRE CONSEQUENCES: 12 YEARS OF SUFFERING IN SYRIA

An overview of the most pressing needs shaping the humanitarian response in Syria today

March 2023

OVERVIEW

[Humanitarian needs](#) are currently [at their highest](#) in Syria and [neighbouring host countries](#), as Syrian families, girls and boys continue to bear the brunt of conflict, violence and displacement, 12 years on. Syria is the [world's largest displacement crisis](#) with more than 13 million people having either fled the country or been displaced within its borders since 2011. With [6.9 million IDPs](#), Syria is also the country with the most internally displaced people. The humanitarian situation in neighbouring host countries also remains critical. Türkiye hosts the [largest refugee population](#) in the world, which includes over 3.7 million Syrians. Lebanon and Jordan are also among the countries with the [highest number of refugees per capita globally](#), including millions of vulnerable Syrian women, men and children residing in refugee camps, informal settlements and host communities.

Meanwhile, [funding](#) for the Syria crisis is dwindling further, year after year, while a political solution to the ongoing war remains largely elusive. [World Vision](#) has been operating in [Syria](#) – as well as [Lebanon](#), [Jordan](#), [Iraq](#) and [Türkiye](#) – as part of the Syria crisis response since 2013, with the aim of giving all Syrian children a voice while responding to their most pressing needs. After 12 years of conflict, the cost of the Syrian war has been disastrous. Our [Syria 10](#) report estimated that the cost of the conflict over the 2011-2020 decade amounted to US\$1.2 trillion in lost GDP, and is believed to be much higher today. This [loss of productive capacity](#) severely impacts Syrian children and young people, as less money is invested in the key services they need to thrive, such as education and healthcare.

Among the 6.4 million children living in Syria today, [more than 2 million](#) are currently out of school, 40% of

whom are girls at risk of being exposed to child marriage. Many of them have known nothing but war in their short lives and have had to endure or witness multiple layers of violence and suffering, impacting both their physical and mental health. Recurring attacks on health infrastructures, schools, and [IDP camps](#) – in addition to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and, more recently, [cholera outbreak](#) – have all devastated the prospects for child survival and development in Syria. Even if the conflict were to end today, the economic repercussions would include an additional [\\$US 1.7 trillion](#) by 2035, when factoring in the children whose education and healthcare have been negatively affected, dimming their hopes for happy and fulfilled futures ahead.

On this twelfth year of the Syrian conflict, [another layer of suffering and trauma](#) has been added to the compounded crises faced by Syrian families and children following the devastating [earthquakes](#) that hit Syria and Türkiye on February 6th, 2023. More than 50,000 men, women and children have been confirmed to have died, and [850,000 Turkish and Syrian children](#) were displaced following the destruction of tens of thousands of homes and buildings on both sides of the border.

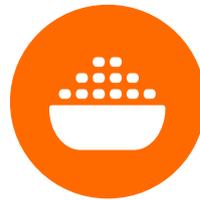
Syrian children in particular are at an increased risk of developing symptoms of [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#) as recurring childhood exposure to adversity stemming from the Syria crisis may result in a variety of behavioural and emotional problems. Meanwhile, [aid has been slow to reach Northwest Syria](#) and has yet to meet the enormous needs following last month's earthquakes, with Syrian children finding themselves [once again at risk of being forgotten](#) by the international community.



HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AT THEIR HIGHEST



Children who sought safety in a displacement camp in Northwest Syria after fleeing violence in their villages. © World Vision



HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

[12 million people](#) in Syria do not know where their next meal will come from, due to hunger soaring to a 12-year high according to the World Food Programme (WFP). The Syrian economy is currently plagued by rampant inflation, a currency that has fallen to a record low, and skyrocketing food prices. In Northwest Syria, an isolated area bordering Türkiye, more than [4.1 million people](#), representing close to 90% of the area's total population, need humanitarian assistance. In addition, [3.3 million](#) of them are considered food insecure. Women and children also represent [more than 80%](#) of Northwest Syria's population, many of them have been displaced time-and-time again by recurring violence, only adding to their vulnerabilities.

Children and mothers in Northwest Syria are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition. Between May 2019 and June 2021, chronic malnutrition rates among children aged under five [jumped from 19% to 24.5 %](#). Acute malnutrition also prevails among [pregnant and lactating women](#) with many facing increased health risks during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Children in Northwest Syria also suffer from [high stunting rates](#), which can impact their educational prospects and overall ability to live happy and active lives. According to World Vision's latest [assessment](#) in the area, around 60% of families flagged the distribution of micronutrient supplements or powder as one of the most important nutrition needs due to growing food insecurity.



LIVELIHOODS

World Vision's most recent [assessment](#) in Northwest Syria shows that 34% of families do not have any source of income and 46% have no ways of saving money. [More than half \(52%\)](#) of Syrian families rely on unstable daily employment, while low wages have been flagged as a main challenge for earning income by the majority (68%) of respondents. According to the most recent [Humanitarian Needs Overview \(HNO\)](#), Syrians' daily earnings would need to [rise](#) by 43% to cover basic living expenses.



WATER CRISIS

Syria's ongoing [water crisis](#) has also made it more difficult to tackle disease outbreaks such as the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), particularly in internally displaced people (IDP) camps. Climate change, drought and hot temperatures have made water shortages worse in recent years, while [water infrastructure](#) remains very poor as a result of the protracted crisis. These challenges have also contributed to a spike in waterborne diseases – [such as cholera](#) – as well as the deterioration of the [malnutrition status](#) of children and pregnant and lactating women in particular.



SHELTER

Displacement continues to be an issue for Syrian people today, many of whom have been displaced up to three or four times since the conflict began. In the first eight months of 2022, over [130,724 new displacements](#) were recorded mainly around frontline areas in Northwest Syria. Around [23,600 IDP](#) movements were recorded in November 2022 alone, which is almost 43% higher than the previous month. Living conditions also remain [extremely dire](#), particularly in IDP camps, where most families still reside in makeshift tents or caravans 12 years into the conflict. Shelter assistance remains [a top unmet need](#) for displaced people, with warm, secure and safe housing still out of reach for many vulnerable families across Syria.



WINTERISATION

The winter season is particularly harsh on displaced families, with [6 million people requiring winter assistance](#) across Syria – 2.5 million of whom reside in the Northwest – as they are living in hazardous circumstances with little to no access to heating, medical care, or clean water. Our recent report, '[Out In The Cold](#)' showed that fuel, gas, wood, medicines, insulation material for tents, solar panels, batteries, and other core winterisation relief items are consistently mentioned as the most needed items during the cold season.

Female-headed households are [particularly vulnerable](#) in winter as they do not receive regular winterisation assistance to meet their needs. [Previous research](#) by World Vision has also shown that single, divorced and widowed women are particularly at risk of stigma and exposure to various forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Northwest Syria's IDP camps.



A child drinking a glass of clean water in a displacement camp in Northwest Syria.
© Hand in Hand



EDUCATION

Children's access to education continues to be at risk. After 12 years of conflict, more than [7,000 schools](#) have been damaged or destroyed largely limiting Syrian children's access to accredited education. More than [2 million](#) children are left out of school across Syria and another 1.6 million are at risk of dropping out in 2023. Schools in Syria continue to be [impacted by](#) chronic teacher shortages, overcrowding, dilapidated buildings and classrooms, poor school furniture and supplies, insufficient lighting and heating, and inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities.

Ongoing instability has also had a dire impact on schooling with at least [13 verified attacks on schools](#) in Northwest Syria in 2021 alone. [Only 196 schools](#) were found to be functioning among 1,017 IDP camps in the area, which is a very small number of learning spaces considering the high number of children residing in overcrowded camp sites. Many schools continue to be [severely damaged](#) or contaminated by unexploded ordnances (UXOs) and other remnants of war; a crucial challenge faced by our education partners on the ground. As a result, many of the 1.7 million school-aged children in Northwest Syria, are not attending school because of [severe overcrowding](#) in classrooms. Conditions are even worse for [children with disabilities](#) who find it very hard to access classrooms and learning tailored to their needs.



Children participating in an art class at a World Vision supported school in Syria. © World Vision



CHILD PROTECTION AND MENTAL HEALTH

As a result of continuous violence, displacement and lack of access to schools, children are exposed to serious protection risks such as early child marriage, child labour, as well as other forms of

exploitation and abuse. Previous findings from our '[Stolen Futures](#)' report confirmed that child marriage has increased alarmingly in Northwest Syria. Child marriage has become much more common since the onset of the conflict according to most adolescent girls and boys we [surveyed](#). They also [identified](#) conflict and insecurity as the top driver of child marriage, while female respondents believed that the fear of sexual exploitation, abuse, and kidnapping also affected their exposure to early child marriage. More recent studies also show that [rates of early marriage](#) have increased in Syria from 47% in 2020 to 62% in 2021.



“Childhood exposure to adversity may result in a variety of behavioural and emotional problems—for example, increased risk taking, suicide, aggressive behaviour, and difficulties in relationships with others. Of great concern is the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), particularly following events such as conflict, displacement or the recent earthquakes. Children in Syria are being continuously exposed to prolonged activation of the stress response systems that can disrupt the development of brain architecture and other organ systems. This can increase the risk for stress related disease and cognitive impairment, well into the adult years,” says Phiona Koyiet, Senior Technical Advisor on Mental Health at World Vision.

Child marriage is associated with [significant physical and psychological harm, increased domestic violence, and early withdrawal from education](#). Early marriage further interrupts girls’ education, many of them drop out of school which also affects their ability to gain financial autonomy, adding to their feelings of [powerlessness and isolation](#). In fact, World Vision’s recent ‘[Reaching The Final Straw](#)’ report found that women and girls were most affected by suicidal ideation on Northwest Syria, making up the majority of suicide and attempted suicide cases between early 2021 and mid-2022. The vast majority (70%) of survey respondents who cited “lack of safety” as a daily challenge in their community were also female.

Children and young people’s [mental health](#) in Northwest Syria is also impacted by the daily hardships they have been facing for more than a decade. The majority of [survey respondents](#) (76%) flagged poverty and lack of basic needs (76%) as a primary factor behind suicidal ideation among young people. More worryingly, [66% of respondents](#) believed children were “very likely” to act on suicidal thoughts due to the overall stressful environment in which they were being raised and the uncertain future ahead.



Rania* lays out rice grains on a tray in preparation to feed her children in a displacement camp. © World Vision

In 2022, World Vision reached 1,918,831 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 psycho-social 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.

EMERGENCY NEEDS FOLLOWING THE FEBRUARY EARTHQUAKES

Against the backdrop of this complex crisis, Syria and Türkiye were hit by [devastating earthquakes](#) on February 6th, 2023, which only added to already compounded humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities, particularly in Northwest Syria. The earthquakes caused immense destruction and suffering in both countries, creating needs greater than any other natural disaster [World Vision has responded to in over a decade](#).

More than 50,000 men, women and children have been killed, and more than [850,000 Turkish and Syrian children](#) were displaced following the destruction of tens of thousands of buildings and homes on both sides of the border. In Northwest Syria, [4,500 deaths and 8,700 injuries](#) have been reported so far, however the number of casualties is still expected to rise as many people remain unaccounted for. More than [10,000 buildings](#) have been partially or completely destroyed, and tens of thousands of people are seeking refuge in collective shelters or already overcrowded IDP camps, where some tents are now housing up to [15-17 people up from families of 5-7](#).

Humanitarian aid and search and rescue efforts were [slow to reach Northwest Syria](#) in the first weeks following the earthquakes, due to access challenges and funding not materializing quickly enough. As a result, local search and rescue teams [could only comb 5%](#) of affected areas on time to pull out any survivors stuck under the rubble due to limited equipment and capacity.

ACCESS

The access picture in Northwest Syria remains complex. Humanitarian aid continues to be delivered mostly through [cross-border channels](#), with UN operations authorised by [UNSC resolution 2672](#) for one crossing (Bab Al-Hawa) and the Government of Syria for [two additional crossings](#) (Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai), while NGOs also utilise commercial crossings. UN authorisations remain



Syrian families searching for their belongings that were lost under the earthquake rubble.
© World Vision.

precarious, with the UNSC resolution set to expire on July 10th, 2023, and the Government of Syria permissions agreed for the other two border crossings only being valid for a period of three months. Meanwhile [cross-line convoys continue to face significant challenges](#) linked to access, acceptance and permissions on the ground, and are unable to cover the enormous needs in Northwest Syria.

FUNDING

A key challenge for scaling humanitarian response and recovery efforts has also been adequate resourcing. One month on, the [Flash Appeal](#) for Syria is only 53% funded, while the [Appeal for Türkiye](#) is just 10% funded. Funding has been slow to reach operational partners, with only [one-third](#) of pledges to the Syria Flash Appeal converted into

the actual commitments necessary for NGOs to implement response and recovery activities. This has impacted pooled funding mechanisms that partner Syrian NGOs rely on in particular and has contributed to reprogramming of existing lifesaving assistance and basic service delivery, ultimately [creating challenges](#) both for scaling earthquake response and meeting the existing humanitarian needs of Syrian children and their families.



“We have not seen suffering and devastation of this scale in over a decade. The impact is so enormous that it could take a generation for survivors to recover, and maybe longer in Northern Syria where millions were already living on humanitarian aid with few prospects of their lives improving. We urge all governments to provide adequate funding in order to meet the chronic needs of the people in Syria and Türkiye and to be more flexible than ever when it comes to granting access. This isn’t a time for bureaucracy, it’s a time for humanity.” says Johan Mooij, World Vision’s Syria Response Director.

RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A [rapid needs assessment conducted by World Vision on February 8-9th](#) found that 94% of surveyed families’ homes had been damaged by the earthquakes and aftershocks that followed, while 51% of families had completely lost their homes. The most pressing needs according to survey respondents were listed as mattresses & blankets (85%), clothing (81%), food (75%), and infant formula (68%). The families that [World Vision spoke with](#) also expressed their concerns about unaccompanied children and separated minors who have no one to care for them; heightened protection risks for children impacted by the earthquakes who have become more [vulnerable to exploitation and abuse](#); increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) for women and girls, particularly in over-crowded collective shelters and camps.

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

UNICEF estimates that [2.5 million Syrian children](#) have been impacted by the earthquakes. The already stretched child protection system in Northwest Syria is now faced with [high numbers of unaccompanied children](#), many of whom have lost one or both parents. According to our staff’s initial assessments, their ages range from a few days old to 8 years. Most of them are missing identification documents which only adds to the challenges of reuniting them with loved ones. Syrian children impacted by the earthquakes are also at increased risk of developing [symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#) to their exposure to recurring shocks and complex trauma following 12 years of conflict in addition to the recent earthquakes.



People waiting for the civil defense to pull out survivors from the rubble of the earthquake. © World Vision



RISK OF WATERBORNE DISEASES

Health facilities also continue to face the unimaginable task of responding to the enormous needs with very limited resources. [Doctors have warned](#) that stranded or displaced children are at risk of developing hypothermia and being exposed to waterborne diseases such as cholera or hepatitis A due to the decimated conditions

of shelters and WASH facilities. There have been more than [50,000 suspected cholera cases](#) in Syria since the outbreak began in September 2022, and at least [two related deaths](#) since the earthquakes occurred. The WHO [has warned](#) that the effects of any additional spread of waterborne disease can have a disastrous impact on Syrian children following the destruction caused by the earthquake, and its impact on the already decimated water infrastructure in the country.

World Vision is rapidly responding to the February 6th earthquakes' impact in Syria and Türkiye. So far, it has dispersed funding to 15 local partners in both countries. In Northwest Syria, our teams were [mobilised within hours](#) of the first earthquake, allowing for a rapid response to immediate needs and support to search and rescue efforts. This prompt response from World Vision and our partners has meant that over 50,000 people who needed life-saving assistance in the first few weeks of the earthquakes' aftermath were able to get it.

Through a combination of private donations and public grants, [World Vision will continue to respond](#) to the evolving needs of the most vulnerable women, men and children impacted by the earthquakes mainly through the organization's partners – with 70% of our funding going to local NGOs – to provide WASH support, education, health and nutrition assistance, shelter and survival items, cash and voucher assistance, livelihoods, child protection and psycho-social support.



Two children walking in a displacement camp in Syria. © Hand in Hand

CONCLUSION

As we commemorate 12 years since the conflict in Syria started, the children – many of whom have known nothing beyond living in a warzone – need global support for their growing needs. Even prior to the devastating earthquakes of last month, the humanitarian situation in Syria was extremely dire, however the conditions for Syrian families are now catastrophic. World Vision remains committed to ensuring that young generations can access key protection, education and health services that will enable them to thrive, despite an uncertain future. The next generation of Syrians need our support now more than ever before.

It is crucial that more **funding, access and humanitarian aid** is dedicated to the Syria crisis response. This scale up can support both emergency and longer-term needs while ensuring that Syrian girls and boys can have some semblance of a normal childhood and fulfilling life. Both of which are in critical jeopardy of being lost after 12 interminable years of war and trauma.

KEY ASKS:

Following 12 years of conflict and the February earthquakes, World Vision is calling for:



An urgent scaling up of the humanitarian response:

The international community must **urgently mobilise** to equitably support the response in earthquake-affected areas of Türkiye and Syria, recognising respective scales of damage, but also differing pre-earthquake humanitarian needs, constraints on principled response, and domestic capacities. What is needed is more assistance, more access, and more funding.

More funding: The Flash Appeals for [Syria](#) and [Türkiye](#) must be fully and swiftly funded and fully committed. Separately, but in complement, the [Syria Humanitarian Response Plan \(HRP\)](#) must also be fully funded for 2023. Existing programme funding should not be diverted to respond to the earthquakes unless the entire project can no longer be implemented. Redirecting or ending funding from one area to another limits the ability to meet the existing humanitarian needs of vulnerable Syrians and can create tension at community level, while also risking the undoing hard-won gains. Funding must be prioritised for partners with the most access to affected populations and capacity to respond; this means ensuring resources can reach Syrian NGOs as well as partner INGOs.

More assistance: Every effort must be made by the international community to support rapid procurement and logistics to ensure safe, timely and unhindered delivery of relief items and life-saving assistance. This must include continuing to remove barriers to the import and procurement of items for humanitarian response programming and operations, and providing clear guidance to stakeholders on how new policies can be operationalised to limit over-compliance.

More access: All access modalities must be operationalised and maximised, in accordance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. Delivery of humanitarian aid to the most affected populations must not be obstructed, delayed, or diverted. Every effort must be made to remove or expedite bureaucratic and administrative

impediments. [UN Security Council Resolution 2672](#) must also be renewed in July 2023 to allow for UN cross-border aid to continue to transparently reach Northwest Syria.

Member States must also ensure full and swift implementation of [UN Security Council Resolution 2664](#), while reviewing domestic sanctions and counterterrorism measures to reduce complexities, delays and blockages that may impact timely procurement and delivery of life-saving equipment and supplies.



A prioritisation of the protection needs of Syrian children and their families:

Protection must be **at the centre** of the earthquake response, particularly in northwest Syria where girls and boys are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. This means ensuring the streamlining of protection and child protection services into all emergency response activities, in addition to the prevention of all forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

Child Protection & MHPSS: It is crucial protection risks for children are mitigated, while specifically ensuring family tracing and reunification services are available for unaccompanied children. Child Protection actors must be resourced to provide comprehensive services as 'providers of last resort' including child-friendly and [mental health and psycho-social support \(MHPSS\) services](#), with a particular focus on [unaccompanied or affected children](#).

GBV Risks for Women & Girls: Previous [World Vision research](#) has found that displaced girls, women and [female headed households](#) are particularly vulnerable to stigma and being exposed to various forms of GBV in northwest Syria. The risk of GBV [continues to rise](#) due to the destruction of safe and dignified spaces, over-crowding in collective shelters, and renewed displacement triggered by the earthquake. Re-establishment and scale-up of multi-sectoral GBV response services,

mobile teams, and Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) must be urgently prioritised.

Safe and Dignified Shelter: International assistance must rapidly identify structures safe to return to, expand collective shelters and alternative housing options, improve the safety, dignity and scale of IDP camps, and rebuild with a focus on [durable housing solutions](#) for both earthquake and conflict-displaced Syrians.

Looking forward to longer term response and recovery, World Vision is calling for:



The international community to listen to the children of Syria:

[Previous research](#) conducted by World Vision showed that Syrian children want safe places to live in, reflecting on the difficult living conditions in tented settlements or precarious overcrowded urban housing. Children also urged the international community to support with quality inclusive education as well as livelihoods for their parents, care givers and wider community so that they can continue supporting their families and avoid resorting to negative coping mechanisms such as [early child marriage](#) or child labour.



A brother and sister preparing to go to sleep in a displacement camp in Syria.
©World Vision

Young people [have also called for access to continued education, job opportunities](#) and adequate [mental health and psychosocial support](#) considering the challenging humanitarian situation. This is particularly the case in Northwest Syria where [suicidal ideation](#) is on the rise among young people due to the uncertain future ahead. Now is [not the time to break the promises made](#) to the children of Syria.



Donors to fund sustainable solutions for Syrian children and their families:

Donors must [step up their efforts](#) to support Syrian children and their families following 12 years of conflict. This means renewing their financial commitments on a multi-annual and flexible basis, and funding continued lifesaving, protection and resilience support to achieve durable solutions for children in Syria and host countries. Donors must also increase longer-term investments aimed at ending gender-based violence, early child marriage, child labour and other forms of violence against children, as well as women and girls.

Syria's [Humanitarian Response plan \(HRP\)](#) and the [Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan \(3RP\)](#) targeting neighbouring host countries have been chronically underfunded over the past years, and Syrian children risk being forgotten. In addition to funding these plans, donors must invest in longer-term solutions that would ensure Syrian children can continue accessing education, healthcare and livelihoods opportunities in order to be able to thrive.



All parties to the conflict to protect Syrian children's rights:

All parties to the conflict must safeguard Syrian children's rights and be held accountable by the international community for any rights violations they have committed over the past 12 years. Reconciliation and peace will remain elusive if accountability is not sought after by all relevant parties. The international community must continue to support the UN-led [Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for Syria](#) which systematically monitors and reports grave violations of children's rights. Syrian children have suffered enough, they deserve a chance to thrive after 12 years of war.



A Syrian family gathering under their tent at a displacement camp after fleeing violence. © World Vision



For more information, please visit
wvi.org/syria-response

CONTACT INFORMATION

Hamzah Barhameyeh
World Vision Syria Response
Communications & Advocacy Manager
hamzah_barhameyeh@wvi.org

Evita Mouawad Jourdi
World Vision Middle East and Eastern Europe Region
Communications & Advocacy Specialist
evita_jourdi@wvi.org