

# Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion

May 2023

The crisis in Syria has severely impacted the livelihoods of most of the population, particularly internally displaced people (IDPs) who had to flee their homes to seek safety leaving everything behind, including jobs.

According to the [2023 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview](#), livelihood support represents the third highest unmet need (46 per cent) of the population in Syria after food (60 per cent) and electricity (52 per cent). IDPs in camps are even more affected by the lack of livelihood opportunities.

UNHCR provides livelihoods support to the most vulnerable IDPs, returnees, refugees and host communities to increase their self-reliance, reduce their dependency on assistance and mitigate the risks of engaging in harmful coping strategies.

**15.3 million**  
people in need in Syria\*

**85%**  
of households in Syria unable to meet the basic needs of all family members\*\*

**90%**  
inflation rate in Syria in 2022\*\*\*

## Background

The 13 year-long crisis has deteriorated access to livelihoods, ability to meet basic needs and the availability and affordability of services. These have resulted in high unemployment rates, low productivity of inputs, and risks related to resilience and social cohesion of communities.

For instance, agriculture, a key part of the economy in Syria, has been severely affected by the deteriorated situation. Many irrigation canals were damaged across the country during the crisis. In north-east Syria, over 660 irrigation canals previously supplying water to more than 50,000 farmers have become non-functional.



Ahmad opened a car repair workshop in Homs Governorate with support from UNHCR. ©UNHCR/S.Sawas

The earthquakes that struck Syria in February 2023 further exacerbated an already complicated situation with many people having lost their jobs and businesses.

\* Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic 2023

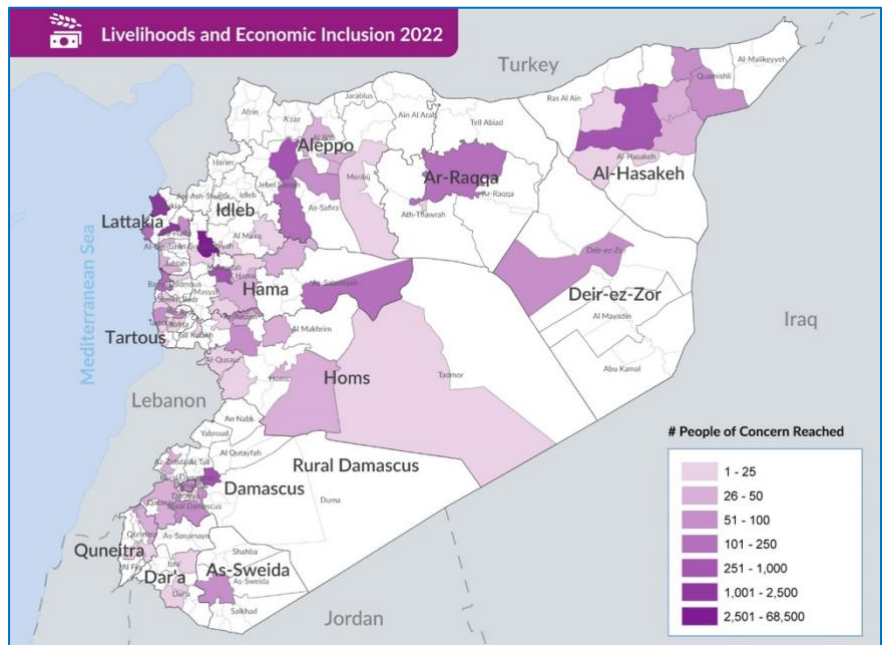
\*\* Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic 2023

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## UNHCR livelihoods assistance

UNHCR is providing support to people to start-up small businesses and re-establish agricultural activities in rural areas, as well as contributing to restoring basic services that are critical to boost local economic activities.

To foster more comprehensive and sustainable livelihood opportunities for affected people in Syria, UNHCR is enhancing partnerships with other UN agencies and the private sector. In 2022, UNHCR collaborated with UNDP, FAO, and WFP in Aleppo, Rural Damascus, and Ar-Raqqa Governorates and established partnerships with the private sector including microfinance institutions.



## Key Objectives of UNHCR's livelihood strategy (2023-2025)

1. Foster reintegration of vulnerable displaced people into their communities through enhanced livelihoods opportunities and support.
2. Reduce engagement of vulnerable people in harmful coping mechanisms.
3. Create synergies with other expert partners to build livelihoods and resilience programmes
4. Facilitate economic inclusion in partnership with other stakeholders, such as financial service providers.

## Small business start-up projects

UNHCR supports displaced people, returnees, refugees and host community members to start up or resume small businesses by providing business/entrepreneurship training and grants.

The candidates are identified through the **community centers** supported by UNHCR, and more specifically outreach volunteers and protection caseworkers. UNHCR selects trainees taking into account socio-economic factors, such as family size, income level, displacement and gender roles as well as their skills.



*Mariam is a single mother. She opened her own grocery store in Rural Damascus after completing a business training and receiving a grant from UNHCR. ©UNHCR/O.Kabalan*

Through the training, trainees learn basic skills such as accounting and customer service and develop their own detailed business plans including technical feasibility, financial viability and market study. Upon successful completion of the training, the trainees become eligible to receive support to implement the business plans and run their own small businesses.

Small businesses supported by UNHCR have included production-related enterprises (e.g. small-scale manufacturing, building and construction), service industry (e.g. shoe repair, auto repairs, computer/mobile maintenance, food catering, tailoring) and retail (e.g. grocery store and clothes shop).

**IN 2022** around 2,000 people received entrepreneurship/business training with 1,200 receiving grants to start or operate a small business.

## Agriculture and livestock

UNHCR supports displaced people and returnees, wishing to re-establish agriculture and livestock farming.

Beneficiaries are selected based on their skills and experience in farming, fishing or raising livestock. In addition, their vulnerability, access to land or resources, and the potential to sustain and grow their activities are taken into consideration.

UNHCR selects projects in consultation with relevant stakeholders based on needs in the area and in line with the community plans. The support can include provision of seeds, fertilizers, farming tools, irrigation systems, small livestock, training on farming techniques, and access to market opportunities.



*A farmer received tools to grow green barley seeds for fodder*  
©UNHCR

UNHCR and its partners conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of the supported projects to make necessary adjustments to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of the provided support.

**IN 2022** around 5,800 families, mainly returnee farmers, received agriculture support across 14 governorates.

## Small-scale repairs of livelihoods-related basic services

UNHCR and partners support the repair of livelihoods-related basic services affected by the crisis, such as vocational training centres, and collective agriculture irrigation systems/canals as well as public bakeries producing bread in large quantities to cover the needs of people in the area.

UNHCR provides support to facilities/services which have a positive social and economic impact on communities, job creation, capacity-building and employability while addressing protection issues and benefitting the wider economy.



*The repair of a bakery in Tal Hedia village, Aleppo Governorate, created job opportunities for many returnees.* ©UNHCR/H.Maarouf

## IN 2022

- Four vocational training schools were repaired by UNHCR providing courses to over 2,800 individuals in Aleppo, Rural Damascus, and Latakia Governorates.
- 670 people in Tartous Governorate found employment in six handmade carpet workshops repaired by UNHCR.
- Two bakeries were repaired in Aleppo (in collaboration with WFP) and Homs Governorates serving over 47,000 people and providing employment for 50 individuals.
- 30,300 farmers in Ar-Raqqa (in collaboration with FAO), Aleppo, and Deir-ez-Zor benefitted from restoring access to irrigation canals.
- 1,200 farmers benefitted from repair of water reservoirs in Al-Zahraa and Al-Zaetuneh, Lattakia Governorate.
- The refrigerators and animal vaccines provided by UNHCR to the Agricultural Guidance Unit (public entity providing free-of-charge guidance and services to farmers) benefitted over 5,000 farmers in Latakia.

### Support to temporary employment

UNHCR also implements cash-for-work activities. These activities focus on assisting people with very limited or no alternative livelihood opportunities, mainly refugees and displaced persons living in collective shelters and camps, through creating temporary jobs such as tent repairing.

## IN 2022

- 55 refugees and IDPs were employed in Al-Hasakeh Governorate to repair tents.
- 32 refugees and IDPs received self-employment support to run businesses in Al-Hasakeh Governorate (e.g. shops in the newly constructed market in the camp setting).

### Challenges

The operational environment in Syria poses various challenges to UNHCR's livelihoods support:

- The depreciation of the Syrian currency has raised prices of commodities which affected the number of items including agricultural inputs to be provided.
- Refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria still lack formal access to work and self-employment in the country.
- New emergencies such as the earthquakes negatively affected the implementation of livelihoods projects.
- Limited funding to humanitarian early recovery and livelihoods interventions.

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#### CONTACTS

Email: [SYRDAREPORTING@unhcr.org](mailto:SYRDAREPORTING@unhcr.org)

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