

2023-2024 WINTER HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Emergency Cash
Assistance to Vulnerable
Families

UNICEF Syria - September 2023

UNICEF Syria

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Authors: UNICEF Syria Social Policy Team
Design by [Sahel Masharqa](#)

For any enquires please contact:

Social Policy Section, UNICEF Syria Country Office
East Mazzeh, Al Shafiee St., Bldg. 2
P.O. Box 9413
Damascus, Syria
Tel: (+963) 11 619 1300

HIGHLIGHTS

- UNICEF Syria plans to provide emergency winter cash assistance to support **over 250,000 people** to meet their basic needs in seven governorates across the country during the 2023-2024 winter season.
- The 2023-2024 winter response builds on the [lessons learned](#) and positive [results](#) achieved in delivering previous winter responses.
- The [results](#) show the high level of vulnerabilities among the beneficiary families, and the extent to which those families used the cash received to meet their necessities, i.e., food, energy for heating and health expenses. Moreover, the families spent the cash very fast, implying the huge needs of these families to cash. This means that **these families would have much suffered if they had not received the cash assistance.**
- The response focuses on four groups of highly vulnerable families: (1) families caring for children with disabilities; (ii) families caring for orphan children; (iii) families caring for people/children with chronic illnesses; (iv) and female-headed families.
- Between November 2023 and March 2024, each family will receive three rounds of regular cash assistance.

I - Issues

Humanitarian Needs

Families and children across Syria are sliding deeper into poverty and finding it overwhelmingly difficult to make ends meet. Over 12 years of conflict have plagued Syria into deeper poverty, stemming from multiple crises: armed conflict; the loss of human capital; the economic and financial downturn; the severe water crisis; continued food insecurity; the consequences of the Ukraine- Russian war; health emergencies such as Covid-19 and cholera; and the [devastating February earthquake](#).

The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, with an estimate 15.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023. The country has lost 42 places on the Human Development Index, its economy is back at the level where it was in the mid-1990s, and some child development indicators have fallen back to the level they were over three decades ago. Basic services and other critical infrastructure are on the brink of collapse.

Poverty and humanitarian needs are widespread, resulting in a shrinking ability of families to meet basic needs and growing negative coping mechanisms. The majority of sub-districts (203 out of 270) are classified under severe, extreme, or catastrophic conditions (2023 HNO). It is estimated that over 90 per cent of the population live in poverty. People's ability to meet their basic needs has worsened further with 85 per cent of households reporting being sufficiently or completely unable to meet their basic needs, an increase from 76 per cent in the year before (HNO 2023).

Female-headed families and families caring for children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. They have been affected disproportionately by the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Their ability to meet basic needs is worse than male-headed households, with nine out of ten female-headed households reporting being completely unable or insufficiently able to meet their household's basic needs. The income expenditure gap is also greater among female-headed households and in households where the head is living with disability (HNO 2023). UNICEF PDM surveys have also consistently pointed out that female-headed families and families face much greater vulnerability. For example, in [Aleppo](#), 33 per cent of female-headed families had no earning members compared to only 4 per cent of male-headed families. Lack of affordability and children needing to work to support the household are the most frequently stated reasons for households not to send their children to school.

High level of food and non-food inflation. The hikes in food prices have put further pressure on families'

budgets and their capacity to meet their basic needs. Often, this leaves them confronted with impossible choices, such as choosing between food or fuel for heating. Annual inflation reached 74 per cent and food inflation 23.1 per cent in 2022. The high level of inflation has continued in 2023. The national average price of WFP's standard reference food basket¹ in May 2023 was SYP 529,946 (US\$ 81.13 at the official exchange rate of SYP 6,532²), 68 per cent higher than May 2022. Food remains a critical need for most Syrians. For example, UNICEF PDM surveys have consistently shown that families used at minimum one-fifth of the cash assistance to purchase food.

Continued depreciation of the Syrian pound. In 2022, the Syrian pound weakened by 31.5 per cent against the US dollar, following a previous fall of 77 per cent in 2021. In the first 8 months of the year 2023, the Syrian pound further weakened, with a growing gap between the formal and the parallel market exchange rates. By end August 2023, the differential between the formal and informal exchange rate was 65 per cent (SYP 14,000 versus SYP 8,542).

The need for energy will add a further financial burden on families during winter. [UNICEF's assessment](#) indicates that money families spent on fuel for heating during winter is a massive burden on their budget. Since available quantities made available through Government subsidized schemes are not nearly enough, families purchase petrol on the informal market. While they need on average 400 L of Mazot to warm their houses, Syrian families are receiving just 50 L at a subsidized price of 2000 SYP/L, while having to buy the remainder from the free market at a price of 8000-9000 SYP/L. The same applies to car fuel which is no longer subsidized and is still rationed at 75 liters per month with an official price of 8000 SYP/L while the price in the free market is almost 18000 SYP/L

Consequently, **investing in this incoming winter response of 2023/2024 is critical to mitigate the worsening living conditions felt by the most vulnerable families.** Coupling these facts of the growing burden to buy food and energy products with the results coming from the previous year response that show the criticality of the cash received to buy food and energy imply the large opportunity cost that comes from non-investment in this programme.

1 The standard food basket is a group of essential food commodities. In Syria, the food basket is set at a group of dry goods providing 2,060 kcal a day for a family of five during a month. The basket includes 37 kg bread, 19 kg rice, 19 kg lentils, 5 kg of sugar, and 7 litres of vegetable oil.

2 [WFP Syria Market Price Watch Bulletin, May 2023](#).



A house kept warm with a mother's love

UNICEF's Cash for Winter programme helps Amal make ends meet and care for her family.

Before receiving the cash assistance:

"Those days were harsh. We didn't have enough money to eat every day. The children would go to sleep with empty stomachs sometimes," said Amal, 35, from Beit Sawa village in East Ghouta of Rural Damascus, Syria.

After receiving cash:

"When I go to work now, I feel reassured that in case I don't make enough money during the week I'll be able to feed my children," Amal said. "This is the first winter in a long time that I feel happy," she added.

II- Why invest in UNICEF winter response

Comparative Advantages

Proven and evidence-based intervention: In 2021, UNICEF fully shifted its winter response from the provision of in-kind assistance (winter clothes) to the provision of cash, in line with UNICEF commitments to the Grand Bargain. Rigorous monitoring surveys have confirmed the relevance of this shift and the positive impact of cash assistance to help families meet their multiple and essential needs during the harsh winter months.

With the shift to cash assistance, UNICEF successfully addressed the numerous challenges encountered with the in-kind response, especially in terms of timeliness, quality and satisfaction of beneficiaries. A [Survey](#) of the 2020-2021 in-kind winter response indicated that most beneficiaries found the distribution of winter clothes untimely and that they were not satisfied with the size of the winter clothes. Beneficiaries had suggested that the best time for receiving winter clothes should be in October, before the start of winter. With the shift to cash assistance, as illustrated in the 2022-2023 winter response, all beneficiaries received their first round of cash assistance before or at the onset of winter.

Readily available delivery platforms: UNICEF has Long-Standing Agreements with three Banks and Financial Service Providers, which provides a network

of over 500 payment points across the country. UNICEF also has ongoing partnership agreements with national NGOs, with a network of over 300 social workers, to implement the winter response across the country.

Strong quality assurance, financial control, and monitoring systems: UNICEF has in place a solid monitoring system to mitigate the risk of fraud and ensure transparency and effectiveness. The Financial Service Providers (FSP) have been identified following a thorough contracting and sanctions-compliance verification process, including assurance that they follow international standards in terms of financial management and practices including the frequent disclosure, reporting, and the managing and monitoring of solvency risks. In addition, regular and rigorous [Post-Distribution Surveys](#) allow UNICEF to (i) make sure that cash assistance reaches intended beneficiaries; (ii) understand how the cash is used; and (iii) provide accountability to donors and affected populations.

Accountability to beneficiaries: UNICEF has an effective Grievance and Redress Mechanism in place, which allows beneficiaries to provide feedback and to respond to their concerns. In the first half of 2023, over 2,500 calls were received and responded to. Ninety-five per cent of calls were closed within the same day, and 5 per cent closed within five working days.

Shock-responsive readiness: The quick [cash response to the February 2023 earthquake](#), when cash assistance reached families within 96 hours of the earthquake, illustrated the readiness of UNICEF social protection programmes to respond to shocks in a timely and effectively manner.

III – Winter response Actions

Overall target

The proposed response builds on the [lessons learned](#) and positive [results](#) achieved in delivering previous winter responses. Interventions will focus on the **most socio-economically vulnerable families**, including female-headed families, families caring for children with disabilities, chronic diseases and families with orphan children.

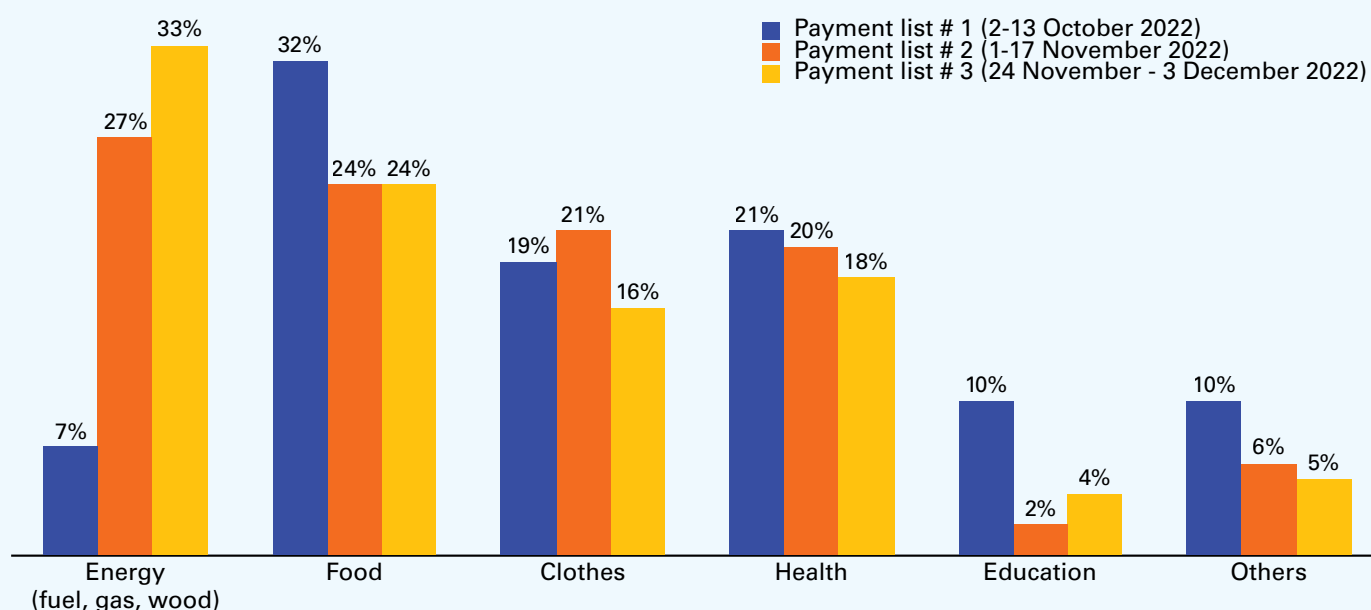
Between 1 November 2023 to 15 March 2024, UNICEF will provide 47,000 families (over 250,000 people) with three rounds of unconditional cash assistance to help them meet their basic needs, particularly in terms of warm clothes for children, fuel for heating, food, and health.

Cash modality: unconditional and unrestricted cash assistance

[Evidence](#) show that families prioritize different areas, based on their specific vulnerabilities and needs at specific moments in time. If conditionalities and/or restrictions are imposed on the use of the cash or if families are given vouchers or in-kind support, their most important needs would go unmet.

For example, in Rural Damarcus, key differences were observed in the use of cash by families depending on the times of payment. While use of cash for food, clothes and health were consistent and significant expenditures in each payment round, use of cash for energy significantly varied according to the period of the transfer (i.e. families who received cash early in the winter season spent less on fuel/energy products than families who received cash later in the season). Evidence also indicate that the use of cash was closely related to the type of vulnerability affecting families: families with a member with chronic illness or disability spent five times more on health than other families.

Use of the cash assistance by families in Rural Damarcus during the 2022-2023 winter season: Comparison between payment lists



Zahira's perseverance helps her family look forward to better days

UNICEF's Cash for Winter programme helps vulnerable families to prepare

Before receiving the cash assistance:

"Living amid rubble is tough, but it's worse during the winter," Zahira said. "My husband and I spent most of our time trying to stop rainwater from leaking in," she added.

Zahira's daughters were diagnosed with malabsorption, a difficulty in the digestion or absorption of nutrients from food. "There were days when we had nothing to eat but bread. The girls' inadequate diet was probably what led to this," said Zahira.



After receiving cash:

"I was excited I would be able to buy cornbread for the girls and store some suitable food for Reem," explained Zahira.

"I hope when winter sets in, my mom will draw a new higher line to show my height," said Reem, pointing at the lines Zahira drew on the kitchen closet to monitor the girls' growth during their treatment from malabsorption. "Winter was tough before, but now I feel we can welcome it," Reem added.

Transfer value: each family will receive a one-month full Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB), the latest available estimate for which was US\$ 170 as at July 2023.

Targeting criteria: families are targeted through a mixed method of geographical and categorical targeting criteria.

- ➔ **Geographical targeting:** the response focuses on urban and peri-urban slums where there is high level of housing infrastructure damage and/or high level of displacement. Locations are also identified using the severity of needs as per the 2023 HNO.
- ➔ **Categorical targeting:** all families with children who meet one of the following criteria: (i) family is female headed; (ii) family cares for a child with severe mental or physical disabilities, based on 12 medically verified disability types³; (iii) family cares for an orphan child; and (iv) family cares for an adult or a child with chronic illness and disability (regardless of the severity of the disability).

Targeting method: eligible families are enrolled following a thorough and tested identification, registration and verification process, conducted by UNICEF and its implementing partners across the country. Eligible children and families are identified through outreach activities, in particular lengthy door-to-door registration campaigns in targeted urban and peri-urban slums.

Children with severe disabilities are identified through a vast network of national NGOs, community infrastructure such as health centers and schools, and outreach activities/field assessments. To be enrolled in the programme, each child must have a disability card or medical certificate attesting to her/his disability.

Payment modalities: families will receive the transfer value in Syrian equivalent in three regular installments at regular intervals of 6 to 8 weeks. Each payment will correspond to one third of the total value identified (i.e. one month MEB).

Sector Coordination: To ensure better coordination and avoid duplication, UNICEF field officers oversee the selection of targeted locations at communities' level (Admin 4+) in direct coordination with DoSALs and through the rest of coordination platforms, mainly the sub-NFI sectors and the sub-CWGs. A full information around targeting criteria and targeted locations will be shared and reported in the planning phase to avoid 1) any potential gaps in targeting and 2) geographical

overlapping. Also, UNICEF will maintain active participation in the Building-Blocks (BB) Tool through the national CWG to ensure smooth deployment of the BB.

Key actions:

1. **Provide three rounds of cash assistance to 17,000 families caring for children with severe mental/physical disabilities.** Cash-top up will be provided to families enrolled in the Integrated Social Protection Programme for Children with Disabilities.
2. **Provide three rounds of cash assistance to 30,000 highly vulnerable families in urban and peri-urban slums:** female-headed families, families caring for children with disabilities, chronic diseases, and families with orphan children.
3. **Provide referral services for vulnerable children:** all vulnerable children identified in families (i.e. children without legal documents, children out of school, displaced children, and children with disabilities) will receive dedicated case management and referral services to help her/him access essential services tailored to her/his specific needs.
4. **Monitoring of cash usage and beneficiary satisfaction:** post-Distribution Monitoring surveys will continue to be conducted in real time to monitor cash use and satisfaction among beneficiaries.

3 The Integrated Social Protection Programme for Children with Disabilities focuses on 12 severe medical forms of mental and physical disabilities, as defined in the Syria National Classification of Disabilities. 1. Severe intellectual disabilities 2. Profound intellectual disabilities 3. Autism 4. Down's syndrome 5. Monoplegia 6. Quadriplegia 7. Cerebral Palsy 8. Spinal Cord Diseases 9. Lower limbs loss at both sides 10. Upper limb loss at both sides 11. Severe hearing impairment 12. Severe visual impairment.

IV - Budget requirements

Activities	Budget (US\$)
Emergency winter cash assistance	8,484,120
Referral mechanism for vulnerable children	848,412
Financial service providers fees	63,631
Monitoring and evaluation	50,000
Programme and operational support cost	2,664,304
HR cost (10%)	1,211,047
Operations costs (12%)	1,453,257
Programmable amount	12,110,467
UNICEF recovery cost (8%)	968,837
Total	13,079,305

Note: (i) UN Coordination Levy (1%) is not applied to this proposal: (ii) Budget can also be found in the 2023 HRP, under project HSYR23-NFI-196625 *Cash for Winter for vulnerable families in Al-Hassakeh, Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Homs, Hama, Lattakia, Tartous, Deir-ez -Zor, and As- Sweida.*

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