



# Stuck in Time

Syria: 10 Years of a Population Suspended in Crisis



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## Where are we 10 years on?

The dire and frankly unsurprising reality of the ongoing Syrian crisis is that after ten years, much devastation, loss of life and immeasurable amounts of suffering has worn the lives of Syrians both within the country and abroad, and yet no real improvement is foreseeable in the near future.

The catastrophic combination of an ongoing conflict, a health crisis accelerating at an alarming rate, and the near total collapse of the Syrian economy, situates the current state of the crisis in one of its worst stretches since it began ten years ago. The failure of the international community to seek a resolution to the conflict on behalf of the Syrian population forces an abandonment of current status quo practices and a rethink of how the preservation of the rights of Syrians can be achieved, despite a deterioration of circumstances.

It has become abundantly clear that Aid actors operating in Syria cannot wait on the improvement of political conditions in order to access those most vulnerable to shocks. A proactive stance is needed in order to roll back access restrictions placed on local responders and INGOs by the Syrian government and approved for certain regions of the country by the UN Security Council. Wading into such political waters requires a firm commitment to the humanitarian principles that steer the actions of aid organizations.



# Let's move forward together: key messages from WeWorld interventions

The tenth anniversary is an opportunity to take stock of the realities of the crisis in both Syria and Lebanon, where WeWorld is currently intervening with various projects targeting protection, WASH, Shelter, education and livelihood needs.

In Syria, for international organizations to continue assisting those most affected by the multi-layered crisis, **access must be guaranteed**, particularly to the 2.8 million people in the North West and inhabitants of the al-Hol camp in the North East of the country – 80% of which are women and children – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance<sup>1</sup>.

Access will allow the scaling up of operations to address the upsurge in COVID-19 cases, as well as the impact of the near total collapse of the Syrian economy on the livelihoods of Syrians, among other pressing concerns. The UN Security Council will vote this year whether to allow access for UN-led assistance into North West Syria, a restriction they approved during a vote last year<sup>2</sup>. There is still no access allowed for humanitarian assistance to the North East. Without a coordinated, international humanitarian presence in the North, the situation will rapidly deteriorate with calamitous consequences.

**A renewed political approach must be adopted:** one that is proactive in exerting pressure to uphold existing political commitments to ensuring the safety and dignity of the Syrian people. While WeWorld continues to reaffirm its support for a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict, based on the Geneva Communiqué (2012) and the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), standing access restriction issues or alternative avenues that go beyond ongoing diplomatic stalemates still require effective political actions. Failure to do so will only abandon the Syrian populace at such a critical juncture.

That after ten years, there is still an acute need for humanitarian assistance across the country demonstrates little to no progress in improving the conditions for Syrians to rebuild their lives and for Syrian refugees abroad to be able to return safely. Humanitarian interventions now must better address the multiple crises in Syria and

<sup>1</sup> Whole of Syria Humanitarian Situation Report End of Year 2020 (2020). UNICEF

<https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-whole-syria-humanitarian-situation-report-end-year-2020>

<sup>2</sup> NGOs warn: Humanitarian Aid Shortage amid Harsh Temperatures and rising cases of COVID-19 (2020). CARE

<https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/press-releases/ngos-warn-reduced-humanitarian-access-impedes-response-to-rising-cases-of-covid-19/>

neighbouring countries, accompanied by a refocus towards long-term and durable solutions. **Actions must be coordinated in a manner that identifies the structural vulnerabilities and risks populations face that perpetuate continued cycles of violence and socio-economic deprivation.** Basic and critical infrastructure must be repaired and maintained to supply Syrians with water and electricity, schools rebuilt and reopened, and adequate housing to become available again. This need has been demonstrated in recent flooding in the north, displacing tens of thousands residing in temporary settlements<sup>3</sup>. While flooding is periodic during the winter, it is certain that climate-induced disasters will become more frequent and continue to worsen in the coming years.

The toll the civil war has had on education has been absolutely devastating, with nearly 5.8 million children from preschool to secondary school requiring educational assistance<sup>4</sup> and approximately 3 million Syrian children lack access to education altogether<sup>5</sup>. In most hosting countries, refugee parents do not have the ability to meet children's needs, with negative coping mechanisms such as child labour and early marriage on the rise. **An enormous effort should be made to ensure safe learning environments, where children can feel physically, emotionally, and socially comfortable and their needs taken care of by thoughtful teachers and members of their community.**

Building resilience to such shocks must be integrated programmatically with humanitarian interventions to ensure that Syria can eventually recover to a level that Syrians abroad may choose to return in a safe and dignified manner.

In Lebanon, a quarter of those who lost their lives in the Beirut explosions last August were Syrian, and many more have seen their living standards deteriorate rapidly since, with 89% of refugee families living below the poverty line<sup>6</sup>. Half of the Syrian population in Lebanon is food insecure, worsened by hyperinflation driving the price of food up by 174%<sup>7</sup>. The national health system is overburdened and struggling to cope with increasing COVID-19 cases, all the while Syrian access to required primary health and hospital care has fallen<sup>8</sup>.

Their situation cannot be defined as temporary, as many refugees have been present in the country for the better part of the previous decade and they are embedded into the multi-layered crisis along with increasingly desperate host communities. The

3 Flash Update on the Response to Floods in North-West Syria #2 (2021). UNHCR.

4 <https://www.odi.org/publications/16636-strengthening-coordinated-education-planning-and-response-crises-syria-case-study>

5 <https://www.unicef.org/mena/education-emergencies-and-crisis>

6 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) (2020). WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF.

<https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2020/12/VASyR-2020-Dashboard.pdf>

7 Ibid.

8 Lebanon COVID-19 Response – Overview 2020. UNHCR.

<https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Lebanon%20COVID-19%20update%20January%202021.pdf>





Photo: Francesca Volpi

shrinking of livelihood opportunities and rising debts, combined with legal vulnerabilities, the decrease of aid and increasing social tensions are becoming unsurmountable push factors, painting a bleak future given the lack of conditions for a safe and secure return in Syria.

**Humanitarian assistance must continue, and yet without addressing the structural vulnerabilities and risks that refugees face, such assistance will have limited impact on improving the lives of both hosting and refugee populations in Lebanon.**

The financial pledges made by donors during the Brussels IV Conference have in general exceeded their original conference pledge for 2020<sup>9</sup>. However, the UN regional multi-donor mechanisms for funding, the Syrian Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2020 and the Regional Refugee Resilience Plan (3RP), as well as other mechanisms remained underfunded<sup>10</sup>. With the state of the crisis projected to be far worse for 2021, **the pledges must be met with concrete disbursements to guarantee, once for all, a coordinated programmatic approach addressing dire humanitarian needs with a focus towards long-term and durable solutions.**

<sup>9</sup> Supporting Syria and the region: Post-Brussels conference financial tracking - Report Ten (2020). European Commission.

<sup>10</sup> Syria Humanitarian Response Plan Appeal Summary (2021). Financial Tracking Service, UNOCHA.

<https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/924/summary>

# WeWorld demands a change in political and aid actions

WeWorld considers that the reality of the ongoing Syrian crisis after ten years must be fiercely met with a change in pace of current political and aid actions. For this reason, WeWorld **welcomes the announcement of the Brussels-V Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region on the 29th and 30th of March 2021**, yet considers that relentless efforts are needed for:

## DRIVE PROGRAM SOLUTIONS

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1. **Secure humanitarian assistance in the North East of Syria**, with particular attention to the protection needs of children and women who make up the majority of the population in al-Hol camp.
2. Re-orientate priorities of ongoing programmes in Northern Syria to **address the alarming rise in COVID-19 infections since the end of last year**.
3. Prioritize actions aiming to **secure and rebuild basic infrastructure** for the provision of electricity, clean water, health services and education across Syria.
4. **Address early the increasing food insecurity** due to shortages and a collapsing economy in Syria, and hyperinflation in Lebanon, to avoid its exacerbation and breaking point, which will have further catastrophic effects.
5. Ensure the **return to schooling for children by providing safe environments** where pupils can recover the progression of their education. Foster the means of professional development for teachers to accommodate to new teaching realities; remote learning, larger classrooms, increased need for mental health & psychosocial support of children, all a result of the ongoing, multi-layered crisis.
6. **Prioritize programmatic actions geared towards long-term and durable solutions** that will eventually lead to conditions for a safe and dignified return of Syrians.

### ORIENT POLICY

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7. Put in place a **strong engagement process to ensure meaningful participation of civil society and specifically of the Syrian right-holders** in the Brussels-V Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region and maximize its impact
8. **Increase the efforts to guarantee safe humanitarian access** to the North of Syria to deliver essential aid in respect to the Humanitarian Principles
9. **Revise all international sanctions that clearly exacerbate the dire conditions of Syrian citizens, prevent the rebuilding of the country and the ability of a safe and dignified return for Syrian refugees.**
10. Secure the disbursement of aid, matching donor pledges, **to respond to increasing needs** of Syrian people at home and abroad **within medium to long-term strategies.**
11. NGOs and UN agencies to **strengthen collaboration with relevant ministries of the Government of Lebanon (GoL) to ensure the inclusion of Syrian refugees in all COVID-19 vaccination** programs.
12. Revise all current **efforts to return Syrians** in light of **established criteria, compliant with the Humanitarian Principles, ensuring the appropriate conditions of safety and dignity for the Syrian population to have informed and safe choice.**



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