

NORTHWEST SYRIA INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ASSESSMENT

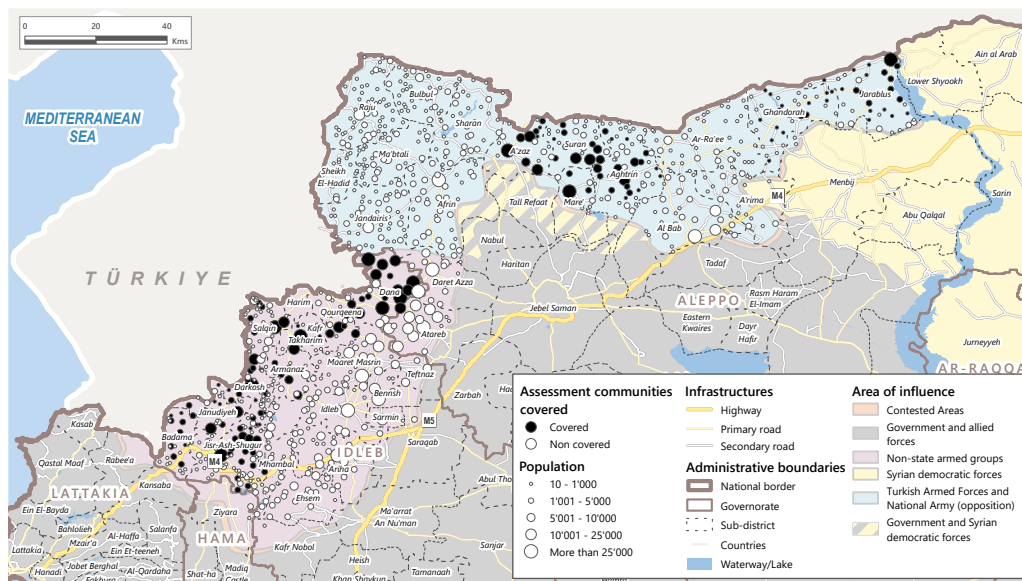
February 2024 | Syria

CONTEXT & RATIONALE

In the past year, the devastating impacts of the February 2023 earthquakes, in combination with several protracted crises, has had widespread impacts on the **Syrian economy**. The Northwest (NWS) faces its own particular challenges, in addition to being the area most affected by the earthquakes, it is also a region particularly sensitive to the economic downturn in Turkey, due to its reliance on the Turkish Lira (TRY) and Turkish markets. These issues in the wider economy translate into increased challenges for households, who face a rising cost of living in the face of stagnating incomes and currency depreciation.

Cash assistance is recognised as an important modality in addressing the humanitarian impacts of these crises.¹ **Despite this, there is a lack of existing data on household income and expenditure.** Building on the first round of this assessment, which was conducted in Afrin, Al Bab, Harim and Idlib in October 2023, this round assesses three new districts in NWS: A'zaz, Jarablus, Jisr-Ash-Shugur to gain a wider understanding of the dynamics of household finances in the region.

Map 1: Coverage map



KEY MESSAGES

- Incomes have remained **relatively stable and have experienced a slight increase in the period November 2023 - January 2024**, nonetheless, households still face **widespread challenges in meeting their basic needs**.
- Expenditure on a wide range of basic needs is perceived to be **insufficient to meet basic needs**, including food, where 41% of households reported that their expenditure was insufficient.
- **Debt is a common coping mechanisms used by households across all districts to enable them to meet their basic needs**, with 81% of households reporting holding debt, whilst **only 2% reported holding savings**.
- Of the three districts assessed in this round, **Jisr-Ash-Shugur consistently fares worse**, having reported the biggest difference between household income and SMEB value and a widespread inability to meet basic needs.

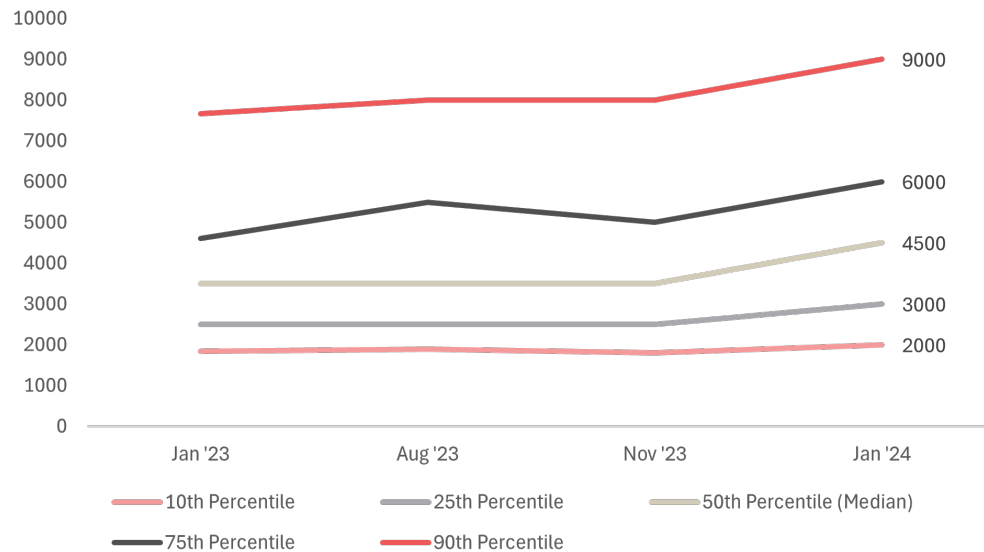
ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

This report outlines the key findings from a household income and expenditure assessment which interviewed a sample of 454 households across the districts of A'zaz, Jarablus, Jisr-Ash-Shugur and Harim in NWS. Only the findings from the three new districts of A'zaz, Jarablus, and Jisr-Ash-Shugur are presented in this situation overview. Findings presented are representative of households in these districts. The survey asked respondents to provide details on different aspects of their household's income, savings, debt, and expenditure on basic needs. All monetary figures are reported in Turkish Lira (TRY). A full overview of the methodology is provided on page 11.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

INCOME TRENDS

Figure 1: Household income percentiles January 2023 - January 2024 (TRY)



In the period from January 2023 to January 2024, **household incomes across the three districts showed relative stability, with noticeable increases reported between November 2023 and January 2024.** This trend is true across different income brackets, as well as across districts as shown in Figure 1 and 4.

The most commonly reported reasons for this increase were an increase in working hours (40%) and higher wages (38%). This is supported by data from REACH's March 2024 [Humanitarian Situation Overview in Syria](#) (HSOS), which found a modest rise in average daily wage for casual or irregular labour in the period August 2023 - March 2024.

While the rise in household income suggests modest improvement in household finances over the past year, **this does not necessarily translate to households being better able to meet their basic needs**, with 49% of surveyed households that reported an increase in their income during the past year having stated that

it remained slightly or much harder to meet their basic needs. **These increased challenges in meeting needs can largely be attributed to the rising cost of living and the depreciating currency.**²

Similar findings are outlined in recent analysis³, which finds that despite some increases in affordability in areas controlled by the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), the overall cost of living remains highly unaffordable. The relative improvement can partly be attributed to the geographic position of these areas within the Syria-Turkey trade chain, which enables them to engage in trade with other regions of Syria and boosts overall economic activity. **However, this advantage also comes with significant risks, as the reliance on trade with Turkey makes Northwest Syria vulnerable to Turkish economic policies and volatility.** This dependency is particularly concerning given projections of further inflation in the Turkish economy.

With regard to currencies, no respondents across the three districts reported earning any of their income in Syrian Pounds (SYP). Overall 82% of income was earned in Turkish Lira (TRY), with 18% earned in USD. There is however some variation between districts, with 24% of income in Jisr-Ash-Shugur being earned in USD, compared to just 5% in Jarablus. TRY and USD is preferred in NWS, due to its relative stability compared to SYP, although TRY has also experienced inflation.

Figure 2: Ability of households to meet basic needs even with increase in income January 2023 - January 2024 (by % of households who reported income increase)

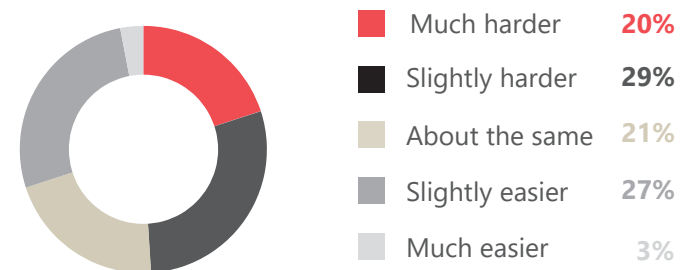
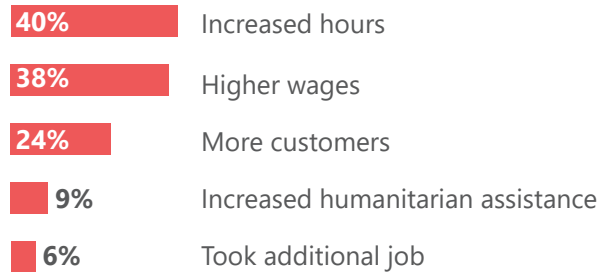


Figure 3: Most commonly reported reasons for income increase January 2023 - January 2024 (by % of households who reported income increase)



When comparing across population groups, the survey data indicates that the incomes reported by IDP and host households are similar, with IDP households having reported a median household income of 5500 TRY, slightly higher than the 5000 TRY reported by host households.

However, there is evidence to suggest differences between other population groups. Participants in REACH's recent round of FGDs highlighted the differentiated challenges of households, mentioning the particular issues faced by households with members with disabilities, who face barriers in generating income.

INCOME ACROSS DISTRICTS

Comparing across districts, it is evident that **average incomes in Jisr-Ash-Shugur are comparatively lower than the other two districts** (Figure 4). While incomes in this district have undergone a recent increase in line with the other two districts, the median income was still 1000 TRY per month lower as of January 2024.

In each district, the median household income for January 2024 does not cover the total SMEB cost for the same month (Figure 5). This is once again particularly evident in Jisr-Ash-Shugur, where the difference between median household income and the total SMEB value for January 2024 is just over 1000 TRY.

Jisr-Ash-Shugur faring comparatively worse than the other two districts aligns with findings from the 2023 MSNA, where **83% of households reported their ability to meet basic needs as 'insufficient' or 'not at all,'** compared to 56% in Jarablus and 54% in Azaz.

Across all districts, unemployment and/or loss of job were cited as a prevalent challenge in meeting basic needs in the 2023 MSNA, with this again being more pronounced in Jisr-Ash-Shugur, with 56% of households reported this a challenge, compared to 41% in Jarablus and 39% in A'zaz.

This inability to meet basic needs has significant impacts on the physical and mental wellbeing of affected populations, underlined by findings from the 2023 MSNA data in which 71% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur reported that men in their household had shown high levels of stress, compared to 44% in A'zaz. The findings for women were similar, with 69% of households reporting high levels of stress for female household members in Jisr-Ash-Shugur and 36% in A'zaz.

Figure 4: Median household income, by district, January 2023 - January 2024 (TRY)

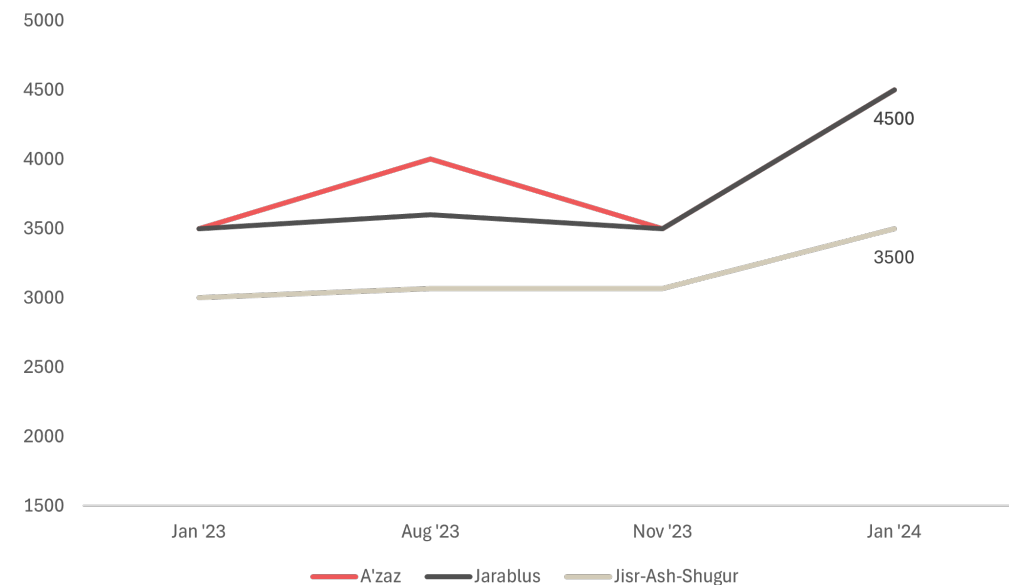
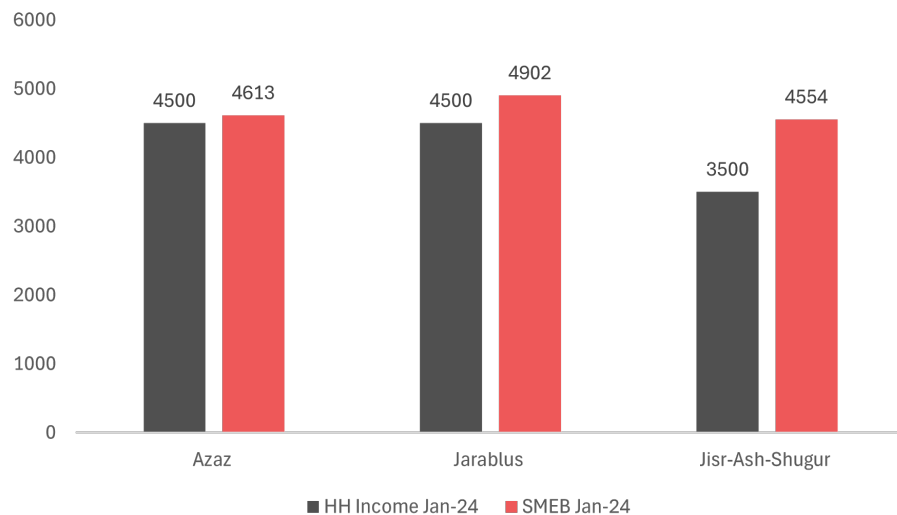


Figure 5: Median household income for January 2024 and total SMEB value for January 2024, by district (TRY)



INCOME SOURCES

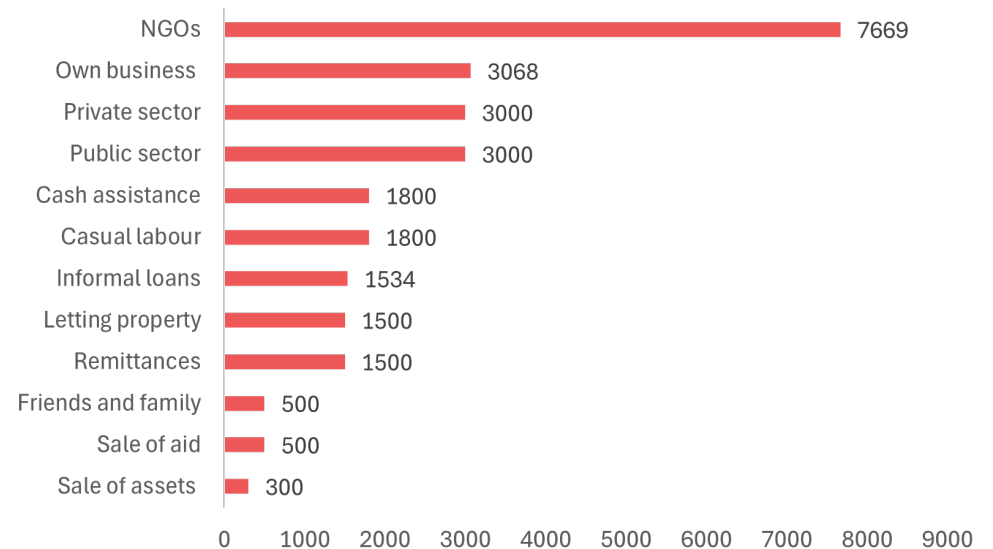
Households across all districts most commonly reported the private sector (42%), casual labour (32%), and informal loans (31%) as sources of income. This is in accordance with [2023 MSNA data](#) which found that over 40% of households in Northwest Syria only had access to daily, casual, or temporary work.

A [recent REACH report into economic deprivation in NWS](#) found **casual labour lacks employment security and income security, possibly contributing to higher levels of stress, worse health outcomes, and lower incomes**. This is reflected in the findings from this survey, where 46% of households reported that their income is 'somewhat' or 'very' unstable from month to month, with the most commonly given reason for this instability being the unpredictable availability of work (41%).

While working for NGOs was an income source for only 14% of households, it is by far the source with the highest median monthly income value at 7669 TRY, more than double the next highest source, own business, at 3068 TRY (Figure 6). This indicates that while NGOs may not be as accessible an income source for all households, **those who are able to secure NGO work receive a substantially higher income compared to other sources**.

Shifting contextual factors can also be an important factor in shaping income levels from different sources. In an FGD REACH conducted in Idleb, participants reported that the impacts of the earthquake had created more demand for construction workers, but that conversely the closure of schools had a negative impact on the incomes of education workers.

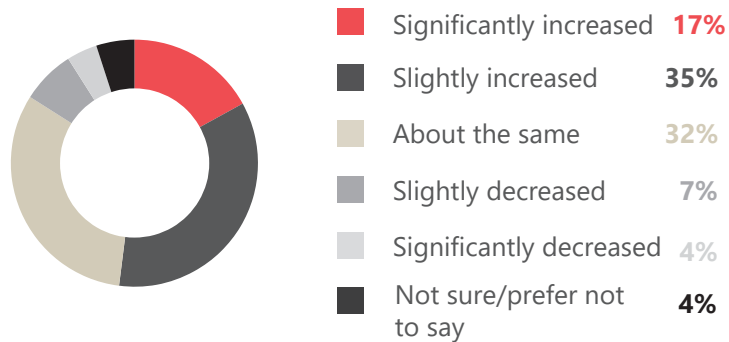
Figure 6: Median monthly household income January 2024 from income source (TRY) *



*Median values were calculated from the responses of households that identified a particular category as a source of income. It is possible for households to report multiple income sources.

HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS AND DEBT

Figure 7: Household debt change January 2023 - January 2024



Debt is a common way in which households in all assessed districts **bridge the gap between their income and the expenditure they need to meet their needs**, with 81% of households having reported that they currently hold debt.

Underlining the extent to which debt is critical in enabling households to meet their basic needs is the finding that the median value of debt incurred in the past 30 days is 2000 TRY, **which is equivalent to the monthly median food expenditure reported in Jarablus and Jisr-Ash-Shugur**.

Debt levels have either slightly or significantly increased in the past year for 52% of households across assessed districts. Rising debt levels can increase strain on already fragile household finances by creating a vicious cycle of increased borrowing and repayment difficulties.

Comparing across districts, debt is another indicator in which **Jisr-Ash-Shugur fares comparatively worse than the other districts**, with the median household debt amount being more than double than that of A'zaz (Figure 8). This aligns with findings from the 2023 MSNA, in which Jisr-Ash-Shugur shows higher levels of other negative coping strategies, such as selling off household assets to meet basic needs, with 36% of households having reported this, compared to 17% of households in both A'zaz and Jarablus.

81%

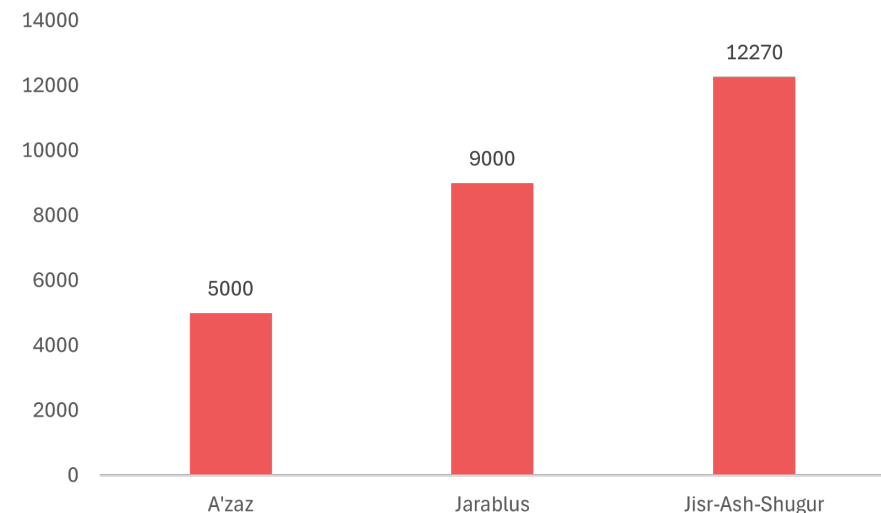
of households report that they currently have debt, while only 2% report that they have savings.

Friends and family are overwhelmingly the most common source of borrowing for households, with 70% of all households having reported this as a source. As highlighted in a FGD in Idleb, informal debt is an unsustainable way of households meeting their basic needs, particularly in a context where borrowers are increasingly unable to repay and lenders are increasingly unable to lend to begin with.

Conversely, savings are rare across all households, with only 2% of respondents having reported that they currently hold any savings. This is unsurprising given the extent to which households have reported in an inability to meet their basic needs. Of those households which did report savings, 13 out of 14 reported that they hold their savings in USD, which is preferred for its stability over the long term.

While debt serves an important function in enabling households to meet immediate needs, it is generally **not a sustainable coping mechanism in the long term and has the potential to perpetuate poverty cycles**. Likewise, the low prevalence of savings increases households financial vulnerability to future shocks.

Figure 8: Median total household debt January 2024, by district (TRY)



HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURE

Figure 9: Median monthly household expenditure in January 2024 on basic needs (TRY) and % of households that reported expenditure was sufficient to meet needs

Food	2301		41%
Cooking fuel	400		71%
Transport	400		67%
Energy	300		77%
Hygiene	300		70%
Water	200		83%
Communications	150		87%

REGULAR EXPENDITURE

Across all districts, spending on basic goods is reported to be inadequate to meet basic needs. From the categories under regular expenditure, **food has the highest median value across all assessed households** (2301 TRY per month) but also has the **lowest percentage of respondents having reported that their expenditure is sufficient to meet their needs** (41%).

Figure 11 shows that **actual spending on food is reported at lower than the SMEB food cost in each district for January 2024**. This indicates that there is a widespread inability to meet basic food needs, and that this is particularly stark in Jisr-Ash-Shugur, where just 14% of households report that their food expenditure is sufficient, compared to 58% in Azaz. This is in line with findings from the 2023 MSNA data, which found that 68% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur highlighted food as one of their top three unmet needs, compared to 48% in A'zaz and 36% in Jarablus.

In addition to this, **the amount of money respondents felt would be required to meet their basic food needs is higher in each district than the cost given in the SMEB**. This indicates that **the SMEB may not accurately quantify the cost of meeting basic food needs in these districts**. This is supported by recent research conducted by REACH in support of the SMEB Revision Taskforce, in which it conducted a series of FGDs with communities in NWS and found widespread agreement that the composition of the basket does not reflect the needs of a household of 6 people for one month.

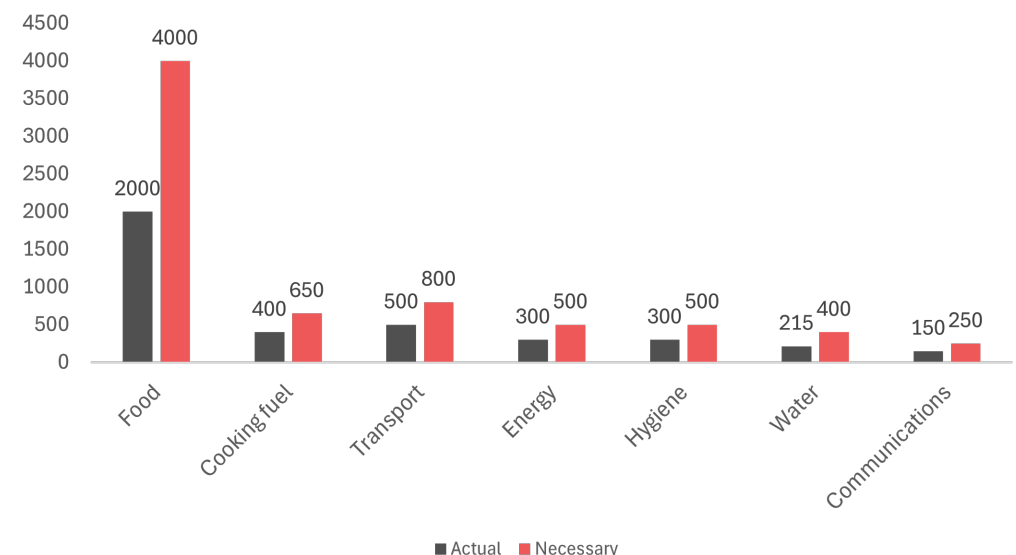
41%

of all households report that their monthly expenditure on food is not sufficient for them to meet their basic food needs.

The financial barriers that households face in meeting their food needs has worsened nutritional outcomes in the region. This is underlined by findings from the 2023 MSNA data, where price increases of food and other key goods were cited as one of the main challenges faced in the last 30 days by 95% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur and 88% in A'zaz and Jarablus. In addition, [a recent REACH report into economic deprivation in NWS](#) found that food insecurity has increased in recent years and that as of 2023, a total of 280,000 people in NWS were estimated to be severely food insecure.

Households also face challenges in meeting hygiene needs, highlighted by the fact that just under a third of all assessed households reported their expenditure in this category as insufficient. This was again reflected in the 2023 MSNA data, where only 40% of households in A'zaz reported that they had a sufficient amount of water for each of the past 30 days.

Figure 10: Median actual and necessary monthly expenditure for January 2024 on basic needs from households which reported actual expenditure insufficient (TRY)



■ Actual ■ Necessary

Figure 11: Median food expenditure, SMEB food price, and median necessary food expenditure, January 2024

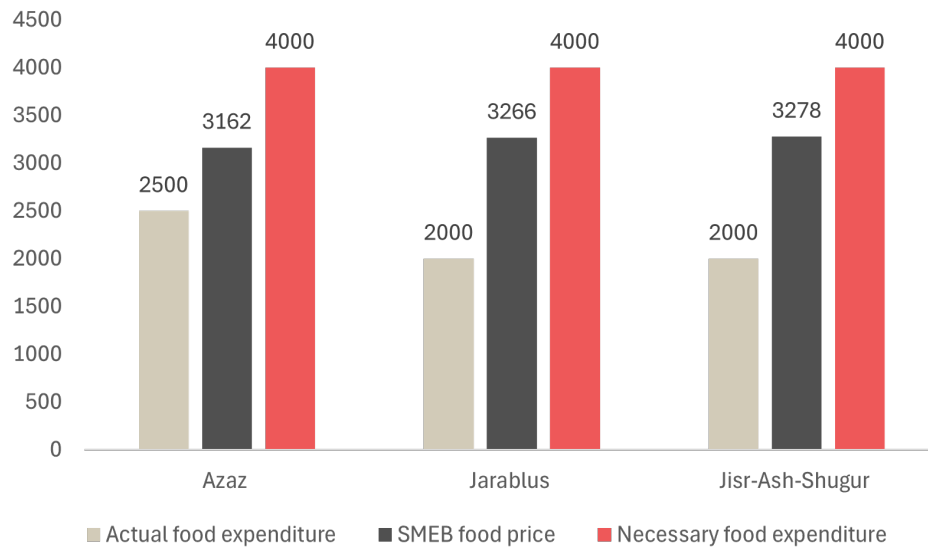
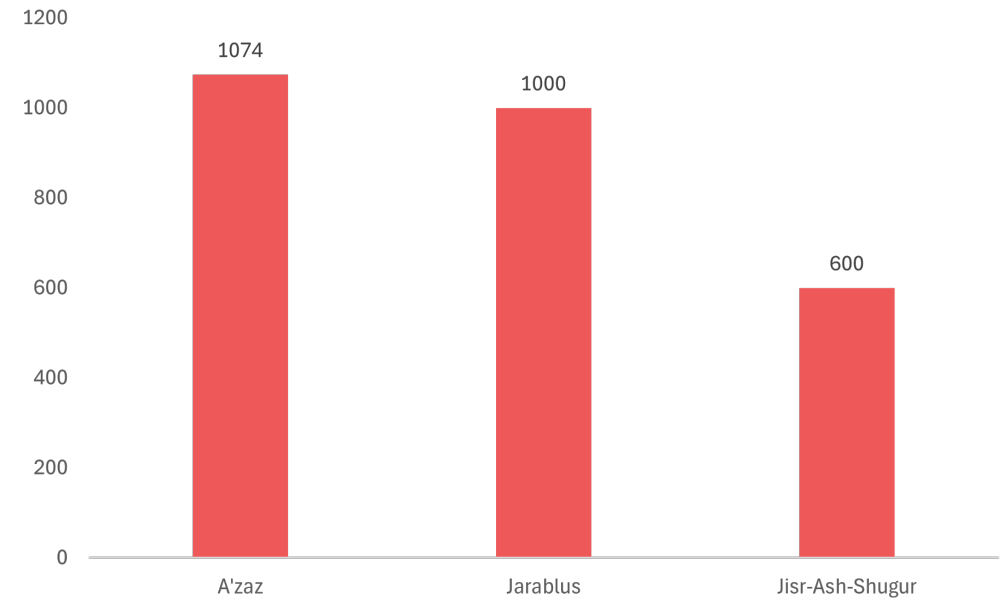


Figure 13: Median monthly rent value for January 2024 by district (TRY)



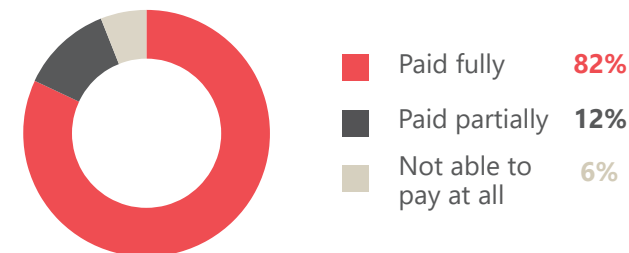
RENT

Across all households 46% reported that they pay rent for their accommodation. Of those households which did report paying rent, 82% reported they were able to pay this amount fully, though once again households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur were less likely to report this, with 72% of households having do so, compared to 80% in Jarablus and 86% in A'zaz.

The most common time period over which households pay rent is one month, with 98% of households having reported this. **The median one month rent value across all districts was 920 TRY**, though there is variation between the different districts, with households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur reporting a median value of 600 TRY per month, compared to 1074 TRY in A'zaz and 1000 TRY in Jarablus (Figure 13).

The 2023 MSNA data reveals that financial barriers are an important factor in the adequate quality of shelters across the region, with 93% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur having reported that they are unable to afford heating fuel for their accommodation and 50% reporting leakage from the roof or ceiling.

Figure 12: Capacity of households to pay rent (% of households which reported they pay rent)



IRREGULAR EXPENDITURE

Figure 14: Median 3 month household expenditure on basic needs November 2023 - January 2024 (TRY) and % of respondents who reported expenditure as sufficient to meet needs*

Productive assets	1500	86%
Household items	750	67%
Construction/maintenance	500	83%
Healthcare	400	84%
Medicine	400	68%
Governmental services	200	96%

*Medians are calculated using values from households which indicated any expenditure in each category. Education is not included in this comparison as reported costs are for the entirety of a school year.

Around a third of households reported that their expenditure on medicine was insufficient to meet their basic needs (Figure 14). This is also reflected in the 2023 MSNA data, where 46% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur cited medicine as one of the top three unmet needs of their household, as well as 30% in A'zaz and 28% in Jarablus. In addition to this, households also face the issue of finding available healthcare, with 35% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur having reported that a specific medicine, treatment or service that they needed was unavailable in the past 3 months.

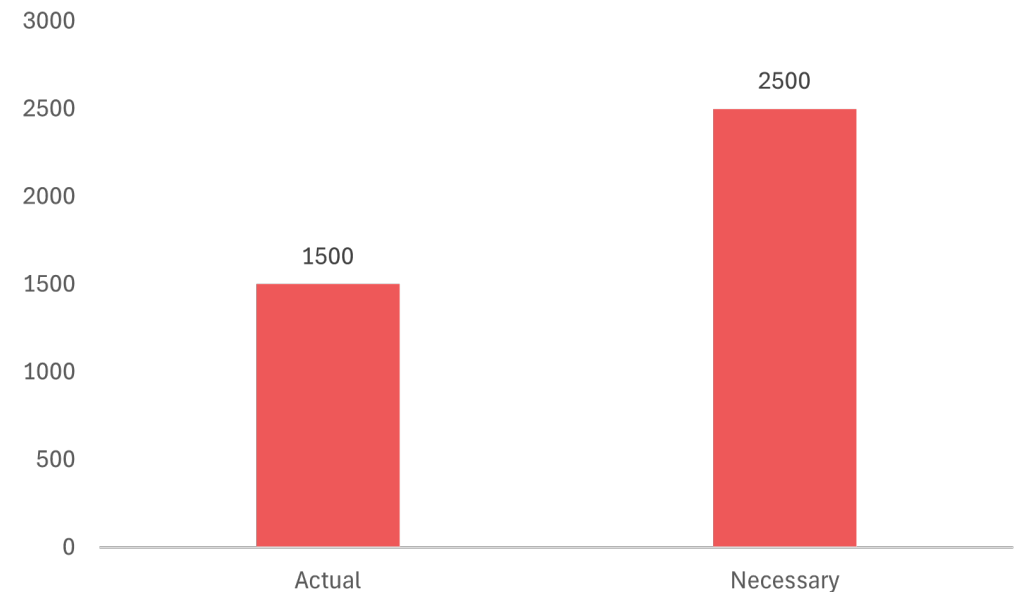
Education costs, which are typically incurred over a school year, were another category of irregular expenditure in which households widely reported an inability to meet their needs, with only 56% of households reporting that their education expenditure was sufficient. **The monetary gap between actual and necessary expenditure for a school year was also large**, with a median actual value of 1500 TRY compared to 2500 TRY for necessary expenditure (Figure 15). There was also variation in education expenditure between districts, with households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur reporting a median expenditure over a school year of 2000 TRY, compared to 500 TRY in Jarablus and 750 TRY in A'zaz.

44%

of all households report that their expenditure on education is insufficient to meet their needs.

In the 2023 MSNA data, households in each of the three districts reported that **cash assistance to help with school related expenses or to offset income children earn from work would be one of the top three ways of improving access to education in their community** (28% A'zaz, 27% Jarablus, 18% Jisr-Ash-Shugur). However, even for those who are able to afford education costs, **the quality of education is often undermined by poorly resourced schools**, with 54% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur having reported that one of the three most effective ways education for 5-17 year olds in their community can be improved is to provide textbooks and/or school supplies.

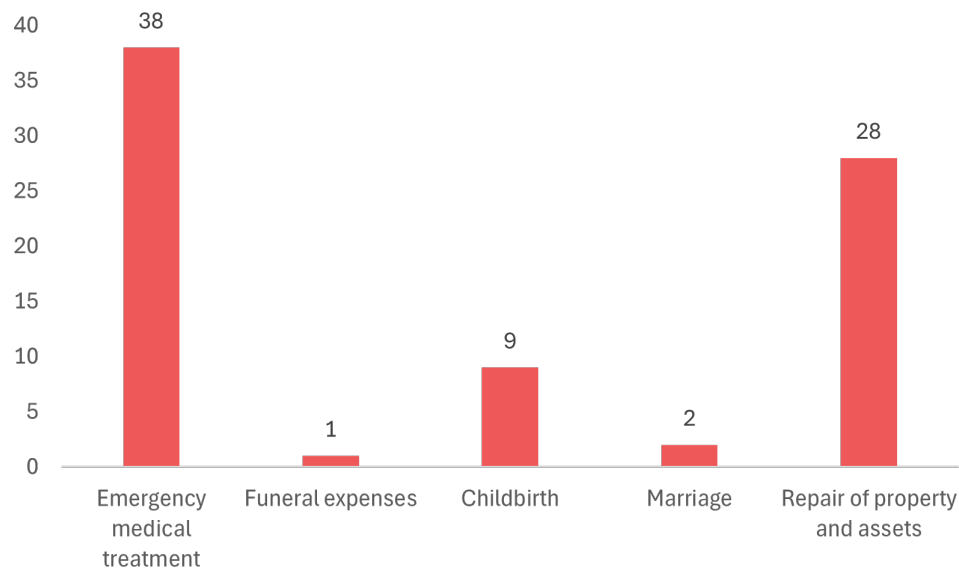
Figure 15: Median actual and necessary spend of households on education over the course of a school year (TRY)*



*Medians are calculated using values from households who indicated that their expenditure on education was insufficient (44% of HH).

EXTRAORDINARY EXPENDITURES

Figure 16: % of households which reported an extraordinary expenditure November 2023 - January 2024, by category



Extraordinary expenditures are defined as ones which occur outside the more regular and predictable aspects of household spending. Since they are often unplanned and can have a high one-off cost, **they can have substantial negative impacts on household finances**, forcing them to resort to coping mechanisms such as taking on debt.

By far the category with the highest median expenditure was marriage at 20,000 TRY, though only 2% of respondents reported this. Conversely, emergency medical treatment was reported by 38% of respondents with the median amount incurred being 460 TRY.

Despite its relatively lower cost, **financial barriers can still inhibit household access to healthcare needs**, in the 2023 MSNA data 62% of households in A'zaz reported not being able to afford the cost of treatments as a barrier which prevented them accessing the health care they needed, as well as 47% of households in Jisr-Ash-Shugur and 49% in Jarablus.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

This assessment utilised a quantitative survey of 454 households in 3 districts of Northwest Syria: A'zaz, Jarablus, and Jisr-Ash-Shugur. These districts were chosen to provide greater coverage of NWS in addition to the 4 districts included in the first round: Afrin, Al Bab, Harim and Idlib. 150 households were targeted in each district, stratified into 75 IDP and 75 resident/returnee households, for a 90% confidence interval and 10% margin of error.

The sampling frame used was the most recent OCHA population data, with a small number of communities excluded due to access constraints. The communities which were excluded were drawn from the list of inaccessible communities for the 2023 REACH Syria Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment.

Data collection was primarily conducted in-person between 20-26 February 2024. Enumerators travelled to the communities outlined in the sampling plan and randomly sampled the relevant population for that community.

For the analysis and reporting all monetary values were converted into TRY, the exchange rates used were based on REACH's October JMMI rate of TRY to SYP = 512.5 and USD to TRY = 30.68

The complete dataset for this assessment can be accessed [here](#).

LIMITATIONS

A key limitation is the ability of respondents to accurately recall precise figures for different aspects of their income and expenditure. Respondents were asked to recall their expenditures over the past month for regular expenditures and past 3 months for irregular and extraordinary expenditures. The difficulty in recalling exact figures across different categories across these time periods means that all numerical values should be treated as estimates.

ENDNOTES

1. Knowledge for Development. (2018). [Cost Effectiveness in Humanitarian Work: Cash-based programming.](#)
2. Crisis Analysis - Syria. (2023). [Contiguous Crisis: Turkish Lira depreciation and markets in Northwest Syria.](#)
3. Crisis Analysis - Syria. (2024). [2023 Syria in Review.](#)

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).