



# OUT IN THE COLD

Winter-related challenges for displaced female-headed households from or within Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan –  
A comparative analysis of three large displacement crises



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The authors would also like to acknowledge the valuable contributions to the report of Kate Kobaidze, Leah Donoghue, Maher Alshdaifat, Joy Cheung, Evita Jourdi, Ghenadie Astrahan, Paul Kiggwe, Qudsia Khairy, Biruk Kebede Beyene, Nino Tchitanava, Ketevan Nebieridze, Armenuhi Sahakyan, Julian Srodecki, Claudia Bade, Venita Popovic, Katherine Shaw and Joanne Legin.

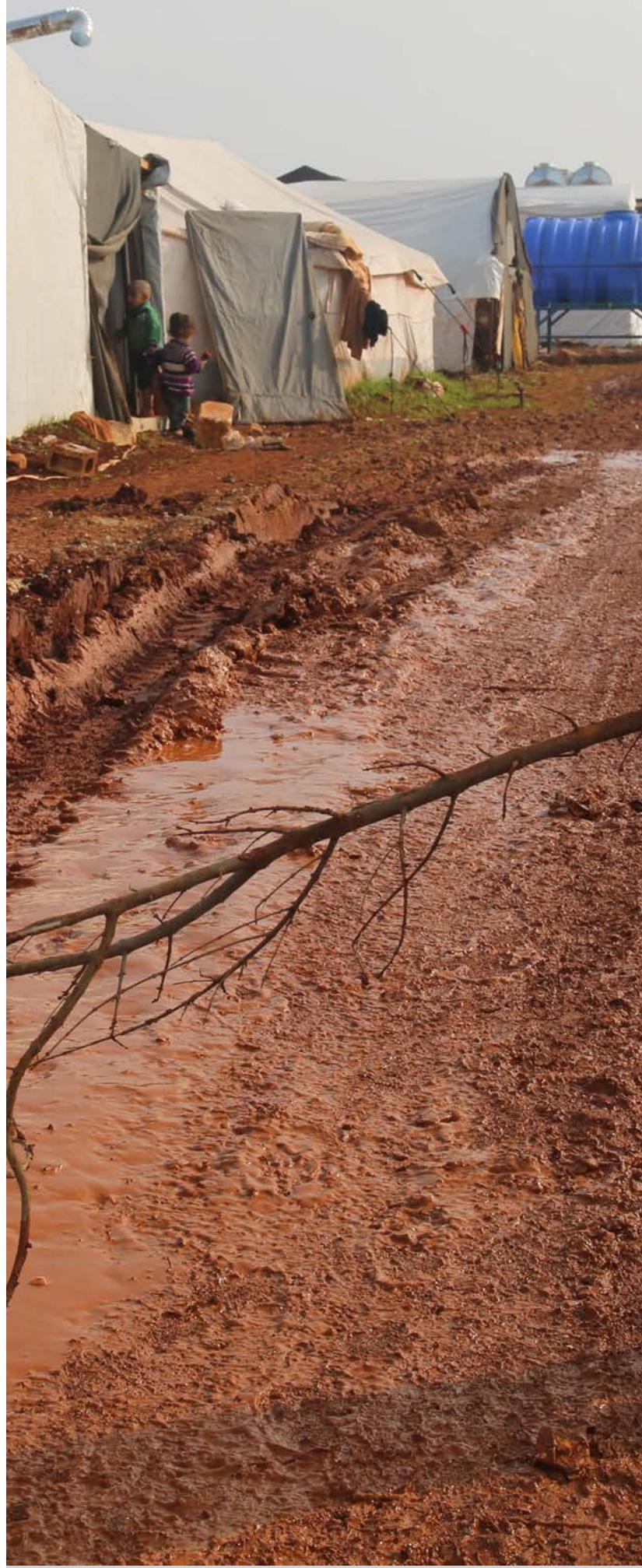
Report designed by: Diana De León and edited by Ellen Kupp.

Cover photo: Paykal is one of Afghanistan's poor and homeless elderly women living with hardships in Badghis Region, which is one of the thirty-four provinces of Afghanistan.

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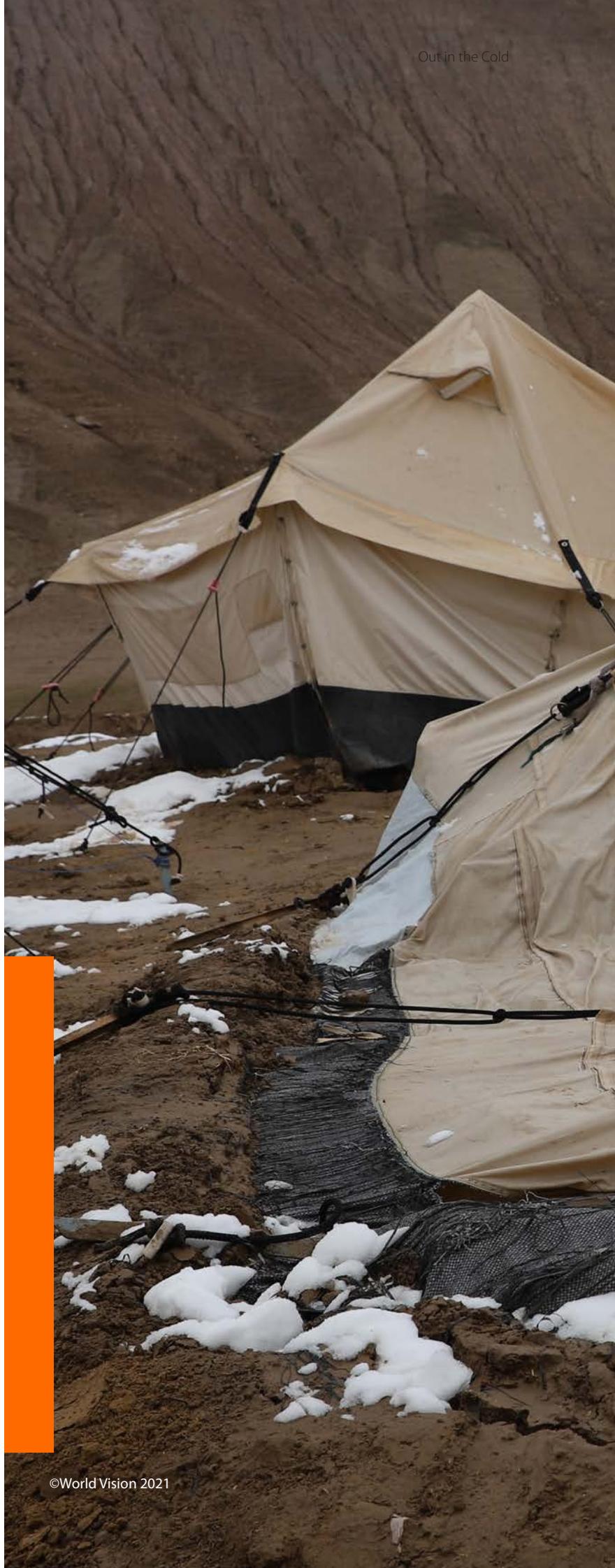
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# 1. Acronyms



FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHH	Female-headed Household
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MSNA	Multi-Sector Needs Assessment
NWS	Northwest Syria
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SGBV	Sexual Gender-based Violence
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund



## 2. Executive summary



Displaced female-headed households (FHHs) are economically vulnerable to the harsh upcoming winter for three significant reasons:

1. Accessing income poses several unique challenges to women in camps for internally displaced people (IDP) or refugees, the foremost being the cultural and gendered norms that strengthen stigma around women's economic activity. IDP or refugee camps and the closed communities where they live provide limited markets for their paid work and for the services they can provide.
2. The demands of women's unpaid work increases dramatically after displacement and prevents displaced women from participating in the economy. Displaced households often have a higher total dependency ratio – that is, women taking care of a higher proportion of dependent children and the elderly.
3. Displaced women who are heads of household with no other adult help have a double day, where they must fulfil both domestic duties and generate income outside the home. That means that displaced female heads face greater time and mobility constraints and may have to work fewer hours or choose informal and lower-paying jobs.

**In light of existing evidence and with the prediction of a harsh winter ahead in the contexts in question, World Vision spotlights the impact on displaced FHHs through a mixed-method research. The study aims to understand the challenges FHHs will be facing during the upcoming winter and the benefit of winterisation assistance in each of three large displacement crises: Afghani, Syrian and Ukrainian. It is worth noting, that every context has its different characteristics and not all findings are applicable to all three contexts. Overall, we looked at the following four areas.**

### Main challenges due to winter



Increased need for heating shelters



Increased need for insulation for tents



Livelihoods under big pressure



Food security under big pressure



Increased violence due to increased stress and pressure



Increased security threats due to longer nights



Inconsistent winter assistance



Increased care burden for sick children and children with disabilities



Increased need for medicine and accessing health facilities



Greater challenge with transports/essential travel



## 1. Income and negative coping mechanisms

- The majority of displaced **FHHs rely on assistance**, such as that provided by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). FHHs report food insecurity, high levels of debt and being unable to afford to heat their shelters and insulate their tents during winter or to buy winter utilities.
- This is because most displaced FHHs are **unemployed or engaged in daily wage labour**, especially in agricultural work with no stable income. Other constraints include inability to speak the language of the host community, need to care for dependents and family expectations.
- As a result, **food insecurity is leading to malnutrition** among family members, shelters in displaced camps are collapsing under the weight of rain and snow, and winter needs are hard to meet.
- FHHs are **unable to buy fuel, wood, electricity, or gas** to heat their shelters during winter. They resort to burning plastic bags and old clothes for heating and cooking, which carries health and safety risks.
- The soaring poverty and lack of income especially during winter forces FHHs to resort to other **negative coping mechanisms** such as accumulating debt, reducing food consumption, sending their underage children to work, and selling their underage daughters into marriage or sex work.
- FHHs are at **high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse** when attempting to secure their basic needs.



## 2. Physical and mental health

- FHHs are exposed to **increased health problems** during winter. The most cited are diarrhoea, fever and flu for children; pneumonia, asthma attacks and exacerbated aches in bones and muscles due to the cold weather for adults and the elderly.
- Many FHHs also face **challenges accessing health facilities** throughout the year and especially in winter due to transportation barriers, flooding, and distance. When health facilities are available, lack of medicines and high costs prevent them from accessing needed healthcare services.
- For many FHHs, **accessing sanitary pads** throughout the year is a problem, but especially during the winter when basic needs are greater. They resort to using washable pieces of old clothes or rags that carry the risk of infection.
- Some FHHs may not be able to access healthcare services during the upcoming winter due to **lack of information about healthcare providers**, the absence of a referral family doctor and the cost of consultations and diagnostic tests in the health facility.
- The cold weather, the inability to keep their children warm, inadequate housing and overall poverty takes a toll **on a FHH's mental health and parental stress** results in physical and emotional violence, neglect and subsequent behavioural issues among children.
- Women and children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to the cold and face additional challenges around **barriers to mobility** and access to essential health care services.

### 3. Gender-based violence and gender norms



- In some places, female IDPs face **discrimination and lack of social support** in their new communities even after many years of displacement.
- Displaced women are increasingly taking on the role of sole breadwinner, **bearing the full burden** of providing for their families with limited livelihood opportunities.
- Women in Syria and Afghanistan share **fears about being attacked, punished, or harassed** when accessing sanitation and water points, especially during winter when darkness comes earlier.
  - In Syria, widowed, single and divorced women face huge stigma and limited mobility. Economic and education opportunities are lost because women and adolescent girls must curtail activities outside the home to protect themselves from abuse.
  - In Afghanistan, since August 2021, the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan have increased control of girls' and women's freedom of movement, and reinstated the requirement to be accompanied by a *mahram* (male guardian) whenever a woman leaves home.
- Issues of **safety and freedom of mobility** have not been reported by Ukrainian refugees in Georgia or in Moldova. Ukrainian women feel safe and welcomed in both host countries, but with winter approaching, they are expecting many challenges to come and question their ability to meet the financial challenges of keeping themselves and their children warm.
- Previous studies show that Ukrainian refugees have **limited access to safe sex and family segregated shelters**.



### 4. Winterisation support

- FHHs in Syria and Afghanistan received inconsistent or insufficient winterisation assistance during the past winter.
- Ukrainian refugee women in Moldova and Georgia have **yet to face the challenge of a harsh winter** outside their homes, but they are expecting the worst and are calling for financial assistance for winter essentials, fuel and essential medicines.
- The provision of **seasonal cash assistance** consisting of an unconditional multi-purpose cash grant is the most convenient way to overcome the challenging winter season for displaced FHHs and to empower them to provide for their families.
- Distribution of **winter core relief items** is also needed especially when these items are not available in the market.
- **Ground levelling in camps** and strengthening infrastructure plays a major role in keeping the camps safe from flooding.
- **Cash-for-work projects and vocational trainings** boost the livelihoods of vulnerable people, especially in agriculture, and enhance their capacity to find jobs. However, FHHs with children face additional challenges to accessing these opportunities as they cannot leave small children alone.

To help address these findings, the report's recommendations include:



## For the International Community:

- Invest in age, gender and disability responsive needs assessments.
- Ensure being a FHH is a sufficient vulnerability criterion for households to be selected for winterisation interventions.
- Prioritise cash winter assistance for FHHs.
- Prioritise age, gender and disability responsive mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and recreational activities for FHH members, adapted and made accessible during the winter.
- Expand access to safe, quality childcare during winter and ensure quality childcare is affordable for refugee populations.
- Work on programmes that provide safe transportation for women or programmes that enable women to be accompanied by a trusted community member during dark winter hours.



## For Donors:

- Ensure winterisation assistance funding that targets FHHs and households affected by several vulnerability factors.
- Keep NGOs accountable for designing and delivering winterisation assistance to address the needs of the most vulnerable households.
- Mandate the integration of protection and MHPSS activities in all winterisation programmes.
- Provide funding for livelihood opportunities for FHHs and durable solutions for displaced populations.



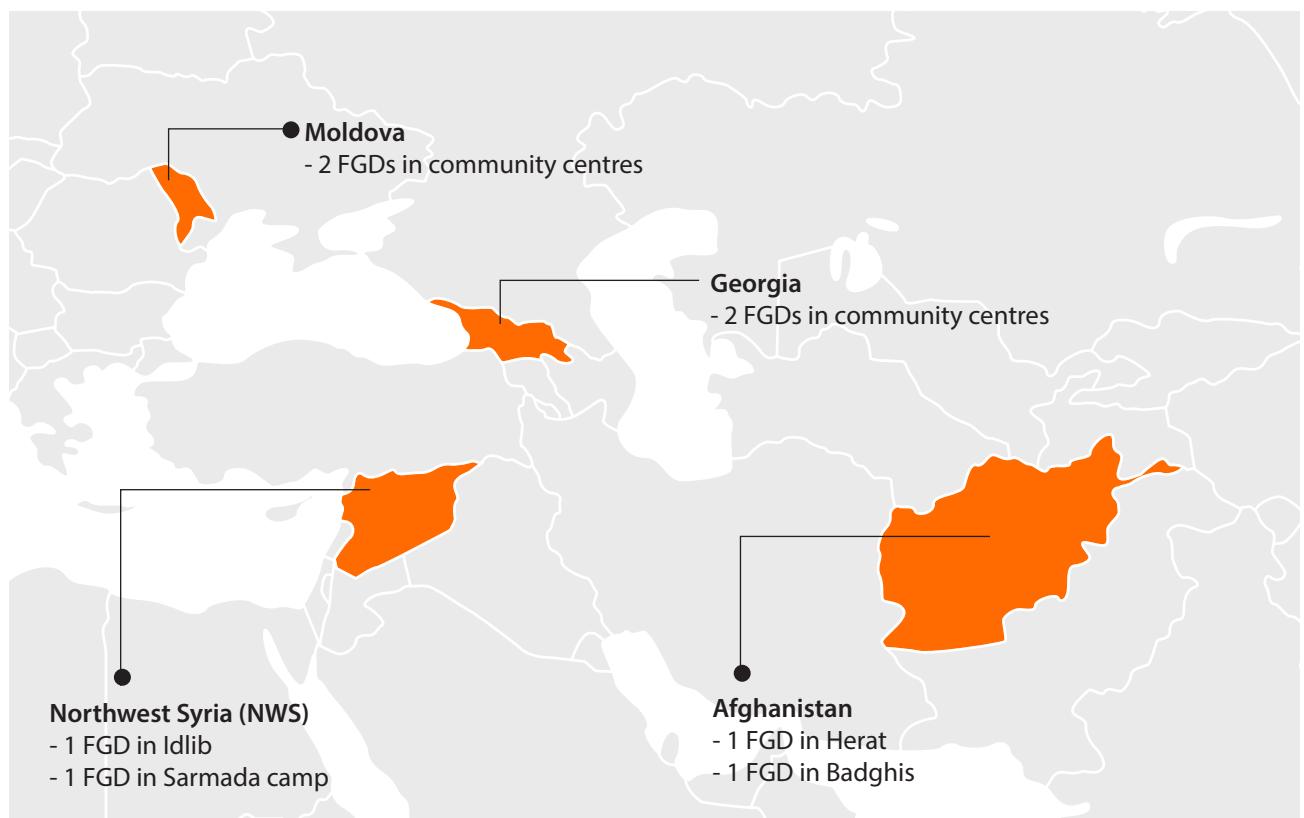
# 3. Methodology

This study aims to understand how displaced FHHs from or within **Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan** will cope with the harsh climate conditions of winter and how a household head's gender exacerbates the vulnerability of the household during winter. The study also assesses the effectiveness of the winterisation assistance provided to FHHs and draws recommendations on ways to improve the upcoming winterisation assistance.

The study adopts a qualitative approach in terms of desk review and descriptive case studies to gain an in-depth and multi-faceted overview of the issue in the three different contexts and in real-life settings. The desk review aims to contribute toward a stronger conceptual understanding of

the major threats of winter, and FHHs' susceptibility to these threats in the context of Northwest Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. The desk review analyses raw data from the most recent needs assessments conducted by World Vision offices in the countries in order to analyse the needs of different household members. To gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and complement the desk review findings, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted from four different displacement contexts, two in Syria, two in Afghanistan, two in Moldova and one in Georgia (Figure 1). Additionally, KIIs were conducted with project team and technical experts involved in winterisation responses to each of the three displacement crises.

## Location and number of FGD (10 FHHs were invited to each FGD)



# 4. Findings and Discussion



## 4.1 Impact of winter on displaced FHHs

Climate change is being felt in the Middle East, especially in Syria, causing more severe weather. *"The extreme weather conditions caused by climate change have been particularly felt in Syria during the last years, winters became longer and colder and can extend from mid-November till the end of April,"* says Hazem Allash WASH programme coordinator in Syria. Climate change in Syria also causes flash floods in the winter which often inundate IDP camps. Despite the fact that FHHs are twice as likely to be hosted by others compared to male-headed ones,<sup>1</sup> they are still considered the most vulnerable during winter. *"During winter FHHs face additional challenges to secure their basic needs, they lack work opportunities and face additional restriction in their mobility as risks of rape, kidnap and harassment increase during wintertime and early darkness,"* says Ahmad Abunajem, livelihood coordinator in Syria.

Afghanistan is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, and one of the least equipped to handle what is to come. A World Vision technical field expert in Afghanistan says *"drought, floods and extreme weather are affecting the displaced population in Afghanistan. Winter season lasts for six months and the temperatures in some areas can drop to -23 degrees Celsius."* A study conducted on the winter vulnerability of households in Kabul, found that FHHs are the only group who are comparatively more susceptible to winter threats. The study found that susceptibility to winter threats is determined by individual household characteristics such as level of indebtedness, access to social networks, ability to access credit and ownership of productive or saleable assets,<sup>2</sup> all of which are influenced heavily by the gender of the household's head.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, 2021, *Key Highlights, Post Distribution Monitoring Survey: Distribution Of Winter Clothes For Children, 2020-2021 Winter Season Rural Damascus Governorate*, [Link](#)

<sup>2</sup> Jo Grace, 2003, *One Hundred Households in Kabul: A study of winter vulnerability, coping strategies, and the impact of cash-for-work programmes on the lives of the "vulnerable"*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. [Link](#)

<sup>3</sup> UN Women and Care International, 2022, *Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine*. [Link](#)

In Moldova and Georgia during most of the winter, the weather is cold and life is very challenging in light of multiple crises. *"This winter is especially hard because it comes against the backdrop of several crises in recent years (Covid-19, energy crisis, gas crisis, the war in Ukraine, etc.), Moreover an inflation rate of more than 30% leads to increases in the prices for both products and services,"* says Ana Gavrilita, project coordinator at Food Bank, World Vision's partner organization in Moldova. Ninety per cent of Ukrainian refugees in host countries such as Moldova and Georgia are women and children.<sup>3</sup> Women will struggle to find job opportunities especially during this winter. They heavily rely on assistance and face difficulties in securing their basic winter needs. *"FHHs are more vulnerable to the upcoming winter because they have increased responsibilities at home, with very little income coming from cash and food assistance. They cannot accommodate their winter needs,"* says Michel Gerges, cash, voucher programme and food project manager in Moldova.



#### 4.1.1. Livelihood and food security

In Syria, internally displaced FHHs live in extremely vulnerable and precarious situations during winter. They are mostly unemployed or have no stable source of income. FHHs in camps work in agriculture during all seasons to meet their basic needs. They work long hours and get low pay. Hala from Sarmada camp says *"My income is equal to US\$1.50 dollars per day. With this income it is impossible meet the family basic needs."* In fact, and according to the multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) conducted in NWS, 36% of male- and female-headed households reported they had lost their main source of livelihood during the past year, and 40% of respondents reported their household source of income as daily wage labour, followed by humanitarian assistance. A study conducted by UNICEF in 2021 showed that unemployment was more than four times higher among FHHs than among male-headed households.<sup>4</sup>

Displaced FHHs in Syria struggle to survive the country's debilitating economic crisis, their low incomes rapidly lose value in the face of spiralling price inflation and many report that they face food insecurity. Rawda, 55 years old from Idlib says *"We are mostly affected by the rising price of bread; every family member needs at least two pieces of bread on each meal to feel full and we cannot even meet this need now."* The findings from the MSNA in NWS shows that 60% of women have low diet diversity compared to 45% of men. In addition to food, fuel, gas, wood, medicines, insulation material for tents, solar panel, batteries and winter core relief items are consistently cited among the most needed items during winter.

**“*My income is equal to US\$1.50 dollars per day. With this income it is impossible to meet the family basic winter's needs*”**  
Hala in Syria

Wadha from Idlib says *"The main items we struggle to have during winter is fuel or wood for heating, but what we need more is food. We can keep warm by covering up with blankets but nothing can replace the food for ten family members."*

Internally displaced women in Afghanistan are engaged in a variety of informal work at home that generates limited income during winter, while their male partners migrate to urban centres in Afghanistan to engage in vulnerable employment and daily wage labour. *"Most of the women in the camp break pistachios or wash clothes for other people"* says an IDP woman in Herat. A study conducted in 2003 found that that 52% of FHHs in Kabul had been working infrequently, performing tasks such as sewing, embroidering and washing clothes.<sup>5</sup>

Since the transition of governance in Afghanistan, the price of staple foods has shot up and immense humanitarian needs are on the rise in the displacement camps and the poor rural areas of the country. Displaced FHHs in Afghanistan cannot buy fuel or wood to keep their homes warm or other necessities such as winter clothes to cope when temperatures drop. A woman from Badghis says *"Our tents are collapsing and we cannot keep them warm. Last year ten children died in the camp because of the cold weather and the malnutrition together."*

Enormous challenges lie ahead as FHHs in both Herat and Badghis are not getting enough to eat and experiencing the highest level of food insecurity. In fact, the MSNA shows that 13% of IDPs in Herat and 16% in Badghis suffer from malnutrition as measured on the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) scale. Overall access to electricity is low in these overwhelmingly poor parts of the country and households rely on collecting and burning wood to cope with the lack of power. In Badghis, FHH report regular water shortages and have no other option but to use unclean water.

**“*Our tents are collapsing and we cannot keep them warm, last year ten children died in the camp because of the cold weather and the malnutrition together*”**  
Woman in Badghis, Afghanistan

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, 2021, *Key Highlights*.

<sup>5</sup> Jo Grace, 2003, *One Hundred Households in Kabul*.



The MSNA conducted in Georgia shows that 100% of Ukrainian FHHs could not secure a job ahead of the upcoming harsh winter. Many lack local language or English skills (49%), 18% struggle to find decent, well-paid jobs matching their skill sets. Others cannot leave small children to look for work (8%). For instance, a woman says *"My children go to a Georgian school only 2-3 hours per day and it is not enough for me to search for a job."* Another woman adds *"It is hard to find a job. I need to speak either Georgian or English."* The government of Georgia, as well as different NGOs and INGOs provide various assistance to Ukrainians who have arrived in the country, including cash assistance. According to the MSNA, 9% of the households are not able to meet their food needs and 12% are not able to meet their clothing needs especially when the rent is high and their financial resources are limited or already gone. *"The rent price starts by US\$500-600 and often increases after few months,"* a woman says. Another one adds *"The support provided by many aid programmes is already over and the cost of living is high. I am anxious about the upcoming winter."*

The majority of Ukrainian refugee women in Moldova cannot work during the upcoming winter as they are consumed with childcare and domestic work while their male partners cannot leave Ukraine due to military action. *"Elderly women get sick and*

*have no opportunity to work. Middle-aged women have children or nieces and nephews that can't be left alone,"* says an interviewed woman living in Moldova. However, all women agreed that the accommodation provided in centres and in host communities and the financial assistance of 2,200 Moldovan lei (around US\$112) per family member helps them meet their basic needs, restores a sense of normalcy, and helps them become more resilient. *"Since we do not work for various reasons, we do not have an income and we live from the cash assistance we get each month. Of course it is not much, but it is a big help for us,"* says another Ukrainian woman in Moldova.

The crisis in Ukraine, and the COVID-19 pandemic before it, is worsening gender and intersectional inequalities and discrimination towards FHHs. The care burden on women increased significantly due to lack of access to education facilities. Engaging in volunteer activities further pushes women into informal sectors of the economy. Poverty and dependency on social payments among FHHs are predicted to increase.<sup>6</sup>

Many Ukrainian refugee access food through on-site cooking and catered hot meals in large accommodation centres, while others living in host communities or with relatives receive commodity vouchers to purchase food from local shops or

<sup>6</sup> IRC, 2014, Are We Listening? [Link](#)

receive food packages through distribution sites. Transportation barriers, cold weather, snow and rain limit access to food assistance, as such food packages are not distributed in all districts in Moldova. Refugee women have to pay for local transportation to reach the distribution points. *"I need an operation soon and I have no one to help me. I am all alone, my son has physical disability and I have to go to Chisinau (capital city of Moldova) every day to get food packages, as they are not distributed in our district and the transportation fees are expensive,"* says Elena, a refugee who lives with relatives in Moldova. Availability of food through aid distributions that meets the dietary needs of pregnant or breastfeeding women and newborns are restricted to people displaced by the conflict in Ukraine. A woman in Moldova and another one in Georgia says *"We use the money provided by the assistance to buy meat and dairy products for our small children."*

#### 4.1.2 Negative coping strategies

FHHs in Syria and Afghanistan are unable to buy fuel, wood, electricity or gas to heat their shelters during winter and they resort to using methods of heating and cooking which are unhealthy and unsafe. World Vision field experts in Syria say *"To heat their shelters, households resort to burning plastic bags and old clothes. These practices have a bad impact on their health, on the environment and increase the risk of fires in the community."* FHHs struggle to stay warm in winter amid price hikes for daily necessities. All of them live below the poverty line and can barely afford daily basic needs. They survive by reducing their food consumption, selling their assistance and borrowing money. *"Women in the camps are*

***"To heat their shelters, households resort to burning plastic bags and old clothes. These practices have a bad impact on their health, on the environment and increase the risk of fires in the community". Wash coordinator in Syria***



*experiencing the worst conditions. They have nothing to eat, children fight with each other for food,"* says a woman in Badghis. The MSNA in Syria shows that in 25% of surveyed households, one of the members sometimes goes all day and night without eating at least once during the last month.

Debt accumulation linked to food purchases put FHHs at risk of hunger. FHHs have so far been able to avoid hunger through borrowing, but with little prospect of paying existing debt due to diminishing livelihoods and growing expenses, it is likely that FHHs will lose this lifeline in the near future. Fawziye from Idlib, Northwest Syria, says *"Today my son went to buy bread for us and the baker refused to give it to him because of the accumulated debt since last year."* In Lebanon, Syrian refugees in FHHs are economically more vulnerable compared to refugees in male-headed houses and were found more likely to have borrowed money to pay for medicine and healthcare.<sup>7</sup> UNICEF found that, within Syria, FHHs were much more likely to be dependent on charity, remittances or borrowing than male-headed households.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> UN Women and CARE International, 2022, *Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine*. [Link](#)

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF, 2021, *Key Highlights*.

In the context of poverty in Syria and Afghanistan, child labour increases during wintertime as the loss of seasonal informal jobs and incomes force FHHs to send their children, especially boys, to work to help them survive the harsh season. Other children are forced to work longer hours or enter more precarious and exploitative situations to secure the family needs. Hayat, 38 from Idlib says “*I have two sons aged 10 and 16 and both go to work to support the family income*”

Early marriages increased in tandem with soaring poverty in winter as well. **There are reports of destitute parents in Afghanistan even promising baby girls for future marriage in exchange for dowries.** “*When a girl child is born, her family promises her to a boy child and receives some money each month in return until they both get older to marry,*” says a woman in Herat. Another adds “*Last year, 10 girls in the camps were sold. By selling a daughter a family can get an amount varying between US\$2500 – 4500.*” The MSNA in NWS found child labour is the highest child protection risk for boys in Idlib with a rate of 13%. It also found that early marriage is reported in 71% of assessed communities, with economic drivers behind 55% of early marriages.

A study of Syrian refugees in Jordan found that children in FHHs are more likely to have engaged in child labour instead of attending school.<sup>9</sup> The same study showed that lack of access to washing machines or hot water means that girls in Syrian refugee camps in Jordan often have to support their mothers with washing clothes and other labour-intense domestic tasks instead of attending school.

Cases of child labour are reported by Syrian refugee FHHs in Egypt, especially for young boys.<sup>10</sup> In Afghanistan, a study showed that 48% of FHHs had a boy under 15 working sporadically in daily wage labour for minimal returns, where the women were not working themselves.<sup>11</sup> It also found that families with poor socio-economic circumstances are more likely to marry off a female child, due to marriage providing the child with greater financial security through her spouse. It also alleviates their own household expenses.



**“We do not know what will happen for us, the food price is going up, the fuel price is increasing. We will have to borrow money from someone else during winter, how else can we do?”**

Ukrainian woman in Moldova

Many Ukrainian refugees in Moldova and Georgia look towards winter with anxiety. Winter is the hardest time of the year and with high inflation all refugees and residents of Moldova will be hit by the massive rise in the cost of fuel, vital to heating homes. “*Everyone is trying to register on the government website for compensation during the winter season. This will help us a lot,*” says a refugee woman in Moldova. A relatively widespread use of coping strategies is predicted to cover for the lack of cash during winter, including using savings and buying on credit. “*We do not know what will happen for us, the food price is going up, the fuel price is increasing. We will have to borrow money from someone else, how else can we do?*” says a woman in the discussion group. “*We need to buy less clothes and reduce the outgoings related to kids' entertainment,*” says a woman in Georgia. In fact, the MSNA in Georgia showed that 85% of the households surveyed secure their basic needs by using their hard-earned savings in addition to the aid provided, 6% have asked for loans and credit, while 3% are resorting to begging, and 1% are reducing their food consumption.

#### 4.1.3. Access to health care and menstrual hygiene

Members of FHHs in Syria and Afghanistan are exposed to increasing health problems during winter. The most cited were diarrhoea, fever and flu for children; pneumonia, asthma attacks and exacerbated aches and muscle pain due to the cold weather for adults and the elderly. Amina from Idlib says “*My son is asthmatic, and his health is worsening during winter.*” Internally displaced FHHs in Syria

<sup>9</sup> Colette Salemi, 2018, *Services for Syrian Refugee Children and Youth in Jordan: Forced Displacement, Foreign Aid and Vulnerability*. [Link](#)

<sup>10</sup> Mirette Bahgat, 2015, *Survival Strategies and Coping Mechanisms of Syrian Female Head of Household in Egypt*, American University in Cairo. [Link](#)

<sup>11</sup> Jo Grace, 2003, *One Hundred Households in Kabul*.

face challenges accessing health facilities due to distances of travel and the cost of transportation.

When health facilities are available, access to medicines and treatment of chronic diseases is challenging for the families who struggle to pay for them. Wadha from Idlib says "*We have access to a nearby health facility but they don't give us medicine there and we have to buy them ourselves.*" The MSNA in NWS showed that 21% of IDP respondents face barriers to accessing health services including lack of medicine and medical items, lack of transportation due to inaccessible roads especially during winter, and cost issues.

In Afghanistan, reaching health facilities is a big challenge for FHHs, most of whom live in rural areas and the available services are located far from them. The cost of transportation is high. The MSNA conducted in Afghanistan shows that on average households spend one and half hours to reach their nearest health services.

Many FHHs in Syria and Afghanistan say that they cannot afford to buy sanitary pads and resort to using pieces of old clothes or rags (pieces of fabric that they cut from old clothing), which they wash again and again during menstruation. The use of unsanitary or overused cloths exposes women to infection and abdominal pain. A woman from Herat says "*During menstruation period, we use old cloths over and over because we are not able to buy hygiene and menstrual items.*" Another woman adds,

*"I have severe abdominal pain and many infections because I cannot buy sanitary pads."* In Syria, some women leading households are aware that poor menstrual hygiene can pose serious health risks, like reproductive and urinary tract infections which can result in future infertility and birth complications. For this reason, they borrow money to buy sanitary pads for their daughters and give them the sanitary pads they receive through assistance, while they keep using old cloths for themselves.

A number of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova and Georgia reported not being able to access needed healthcare services. Lack of information about healthcare providers, referrals from a family doctor and the cost of consultations and diagnostic tests in the hospital were reported to be reasons for not accessing these services. *"The first appointment was free, but for everything else you have to pay,"* says a woman in Moldova.

Women with health conditions reported they could not fully access their medication. The MSNA in Georgia showed that key reasons given were lack of finances to access health centres, hospitals and clinics (25%) and challenges buying medicines due to the lack of finances (27%). *"During one distribution at church, we received a bag full of common medicines. There is only a little left and we are praying that we don't run out,"* says a refugee woman in Moldova. *"My son is asthmatic and I am not sure I can buy the medicines during winter,"* says a woman in Georgia.



<sup>12</sup> UN Women and Care International, 2022, *Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine*.

Ukrainian refugees report relying on natural products to avoid buying medicines. *"At first symptoms of cold we fight with folk remedies. We buy lemon and tea. As a last resort, you need to buy medicine. And in this case, some medicines are not given without a prescription from a doctor,"* says a woman in Moldova. Other women are worried about their children's health during winter. *"We have access to poor nourishing food items, our children do not get the vitamins they need and I am very worried about their health."*

Ukrainian refugee women in Moldova have access to dignity kits with sanitary pads and other essential items to support their hygiene needs, while in Georgia some women get sanitary pads through assistance and others are buying them. A study conducted by CARE and UN Women shows that women displaced in Ukraine have inconsistent access to WASH, such as menstrual health or hygiene requirements.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Mental health and well-being

Displaced women leading households in Syria and Afghanistan face a wide range of displacement challenges that negatively affect their well-being, the well-being of their children and impact the relationships within household. Among these challenges women cite those related to the cold weather and poverty: the inability to keep their children warm, inadequate housing, and some cite their children's disabilities. During winter, large families rarely go outside due to the temperatures, they cram into squalid single rooms or small apartments with very limited space and crumbling sewage systems. They struggle to meet their basic needs of food and basic utilities. Emotional problems include sadness, grief, fear, frustration, anxiety, anger

**"I always feel sad during winter because we live in the same room with very limited income and we have problems in the sewage system which lead to flooding in our house." Rajaa from Syria**



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and despair. Rajaa from Idlib says *"I always feel sad because we live in the same room with very limited income and we have problems in the sewage system which led to flooding in our house."*

Parental stress impacts relationships with children. Mothers who report stress due to the challenges of displacement say that they tend to resort to physical violence with their children. Fawziya from Idlib says *"I am very stressed by the displacement situation and often physically abuse my children, I feel helpless."* Nadira from Sarmada camp adds *"Yesterday I hit my granddaughter, I was angry because I did not have money to buy oil and sugar."* A mother's poor mental health often results in her taking a bleak outlook on life and makes her unable to address daily tasks, such as providing for her children which results in child neglect.<sup>13</sup> The MSNA conducted in Syria shows that 15% of displaced caregivers resort to violence within their homes as a coping mechanism in cases of stress. In addition to women, children and particularly girls face high risks of being victims of violence as they spend the majority of their time at home due to community restrictions on their movement.

<sup>13</sup> World Vision, 2021, *Shattered Lives: Understanding the Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs of Women and Children in Northwest Syria*. [Link](#)

Many Ukrainians in Moldova and Georgia have experienced severe trauma and loss. The war in Ukraine is taking a heavy toll on the mental health of those who have had to flee to safety and on children who have had to endure violence and displacement. *"It is emotionally difficult for us; we are very worried about our children and relatives,"* says a Ukrainian refugee. The MSNA in Georgia showed that the main stressors for caregivers are the lack of income and job opportunities (58%), the uncertainty about the displacement (53%), and the inability to meet their basic needs (24%). The main stressors for children are war-related and survival trauma (32%). More than half of the households surveyed are not aware of available mental health services. UN Women and CARE International indicate that there needs to be specific attention paid to the gender specific needs of women impacted by the crisis in Ukraine, such as psychological support and sexual and reproductive health.<sup>14</sup> From the FGD, a few women raised the importance of meetup groups to connect with other refugees, share experiences and get needed support. *"It is good that we can gather at events where the children meet each other. It is an opportunity for them to talk about their experiences,"* says a woman in the FGD group (of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova).

## 4.2 Protection, gendered threats and barriers faced by displaced FHHs

### 4.2.1 Safety and freedom of movement in public spaces

Members of displaced Syrian FHHs do not leave their accommodation or shelter due to fear of harassment and rape. The fear of sexual abuse and kidnapping is exacerbated by early darkness during winter. In Syria, widowed, single and divorced women face substantial stigma which restricts their mobility.<sup>15</sup> Economic and education opportunities are lost because women and adolescent girls must curtail activities outside the home to protect themselves from abuse.

An earlier study by World Vision confirmed the correlation between displacement and increased



*"I obliged my daughter to drop-out from school because I fear the kidnapping especially during early night time in winter."* Fawziye in Syria

exposure to GBV, limited safety and freedom of movement, and more restrictive gender norms in NWS. Amina, from Idlib says *"When my daughters go to school, they should be accompanied by their brother. They cannot walk alone."* Iman adds, *"I go out only during the day, never during the evening because I fear to be harassed or kidnapped."* Fawziye says *"I obliged my daughter to drop-out from school because I fear the kidnapping."* For Syrian refugee families in Egypt, FHHs who were unable able to move from the locations they resided in limited their interactions with the surrounding community, and particularly limited their movement at night, a situation which impeded their freedom of movement.<sup>16</sup> In Afghanistan since August 2021, the *de facto* authorities in Afghanistan have increased control



<sup>14</sup> UN Women and Care International, 2022, *Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine*.

<sup>15</sup> World Vision, 2022, *Women and Children of Syria's Widow Camps: Hardest to Reach, Most at Risk*. [Link](#)

<sup>16</sup> Mirette Bahgat, 2015, *Survival Strategies and Coping Mechanisms*.



of girls' and women's freedom of movement and reinstated the requirement to be accompanied by a *mahram* (male relative) whenever a woman leaves home which limits a lot women from FHHs.

Women and girls living in camps in Syria and Afghanistan face challenges accessing sanitation facilities and they perceive the real threat that darkness poses to safety. Women in camps struggle to meet their sanitation needs with some measure of dignity and privacy.

Improper clothing limits or even forbids women's freedom of movement during the day. Covering

clothes and veils ensure participation in public activities and allows women to leave their homes for outside activities. For instance, Rajaa from Idlib says *"My daughters are beautiful and the best way for them to move in public spaces without being harassed is to be veiled."*

Ukrainians refugees say they experience a warm welcome when arriving in Moldova and Georgia, and they have not experienced any limitations or safety concerns when moving in public spaces in the country. However, this finding might not apply to all Ukrainian refugees in other host countries. There are reports in the media and from NGOs about Ukrainian refugee women and girls being raped and trafficked in the places where they sought safety.<sup>17,18,19,20</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Gender-based violence and discrimination

As mentioned above, an earlier study by World Vision confirmed a direct correlation between displacement and increased exposure to GBV. A study of Syrian refugee families in Egypt found FHHs face specific security threats and hostility from neighbours, more so than male-headed households, and have experienced various harassments incidents. To seek help with this, they asked NGOs to relocate them to safer areas.

Female Syrian refugees in Lebanon are especially at risk. Many arrived without their husbands or fathers and were unaccustomed to financially providing for their families. As in most cases of displacement, there are fewer economic opportunities available for women and girls, forcing some to resort to negative coping strategies such as early marriage and survival sex. They are also exposed to a heightened risk of GBV as stress and tensions within and between households increase. There are severely limited health and psychosocial services available to meet these needs, which means women and girls could be reluctant to report the challenges they face. Many refugee women and girls have experienced sexual violence, abuse, threats and exploitation since their displacement. A report by IRC recommended, alongside health and psychosocial support services, economic support to increase self-reliance and mitigate the risks faced by women and girls.

<sup>17</sup> Open Democracy, 2022, *Borders and Belonging: Human smuggling or human trafficking?* Podcast. [Link](#)

<sup>18</sup> Euractiv, 2022, *Ukrainians face rape, trafficking risk while those in Poland cannot access abortion.* [Link](#)

<sup>19</sup> Global Citizen, 2022, *Why do refugee women from Ukraine face unique risks of violence and exploitation?* [Link](#)

<sup>20</sup> The Telegraph, 2022, *Refugees fleeing Ukraine at increasing risk of human trafficking, Red Cross warns.* [Link](#)

Women, who make up most of the displaced people inside and outside of Ukraine, face significant safety and protection risks, incidents of GBV, and conflict-related sexual violence. According to the study they have limited access to safe sex- and family-segregated shelters. In Moldova, Ukrainian refugees raised very few safety issues related to the crowds at distribution points. None of the women in the discussion groups mentioned any GBV situation against her or her family members. *"There were petty challenges in getting your trolleys or in getting in line for humanitarian aid. But this is normal, it happens everywhere when there is a crowd,"* says a woman in the group in Moldova.

#### 4.2.3 Changing gender roles and relationships in the household

Some studies<sup>21</sup> highlighted the positive impact of displacement on women's agency and economic empowerment, as they take on new responsibilities in the household which brings them more decision-making power in the short-term. Unfortunately, it is not visible in places like Afghanistan or Syria. It is true that Syrian women are increasingly taking on the role of sole breadwinner, bearing the full burden of providing for their families with limited livelihood opportunities. Ten years into this crisis, Syrian women continue to display tremendous strength and resilience. They need both support and resources to lessen their dependency on aid and to access livelihoods to provide for themselves and their families. Hayat from Idlib says *"I am strong and resilient and I will keep supporting my children during the struggle."*

Female IDPs in Syria face discrimination in their new communities. Many women reported harassment and violence from host community members, which impacts women's mental health and their working capacity. Displaced women reported having no friends or relatives on whom they can count to help them in their new community. Women experiencing loneliness and social isolation lead to a variety of physical and mental conditions. Amina from Idlib says *"I feel disrespected by the community because I am displaced and it hurts me a lot. Displacement made us vulnerable, it did not give us any strength."* Rawda, 55, from Idlib says *"We used to live in our village surrounded by our friends and relatives who were*

**"We used to live in our village surrounded by our friends and relatives, now we are left alone and trying to do everything by ourselves. We are resilient, but we are also very vulnerable."** Rawda in Syria

*always ready to help. Now we are left alone and we are trying to do everything by ourselves. We are resilient, but we are also very vulnerable."*

In Afghanistan, newly displaced FHHs face additional challenges as their needs are acute and they do not feel welcomed by the host community. Without any work opportunities, they struggle to meet their basic needs. A study conducted in Kabul, Afghanistan, found that more FHHs were squatting illegally and speculated that FHHs may be more vulnerable to eviction, particularly if they have no social connections nearby.<sup>22</sup>

Gender roles are changing for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova and Georgia. While many men have become unemployed and are primarily engaged in the armed forces, women report taking on new roles and multiple jobs to make up for the lost family income. *"When I come home from the centre with groceries, my mom always names me by "our breadwinner!" This is so new to me and I understand that now I have to take care of my family,"* says a woman in the discussion group in Moldova.

**"When I come home with groceries, my mom always names me by "our breadwinner!" This is so new to me and I understand that during this winter I have to take care of my family."** Ukrainian woman in Moldova

<sup>21</sup> Zeynep Kaya and Kyra Luchtenberg, no date listed, *Displacement and women's economic empowerment: Voices of displaced women in the Kurdistan region of Iraq*. [Link](#)

<sup>22</sup> Jo Grace, 2003, *One Hundred Households in Kabul*.



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Ukrainian refugee women who crossed into Moldova seeking safety, protection and assistance feel stronger and more resilient, but with the coming winter they are anticipating many more challenges and question their ability to stay resilient in light of all these challenges, especially the financial challenges to keep themselves and their children warm. *"We became more independent. We learned what it is like to lose everything! Everything you have, even your home. We became stronger, though we don't know how long that strength will last."* Another one adds *"The cold season is coming up. We will have to pay double, maybe even triple to get the fuel. We don't have money. We need winter clothes and we do not know how to get that."* A study has shown that women are crucial in the humanitarian response in Ukraine, however they have been excluded from decision-making processes to an extent. Decision-making and leadership roles have increased at a family level and, to a certain extent, a community level, but not the formal decision-making level.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4.2.4 Living with a disability

Women living with disabilities inside Syria and Afghanistan face barriers to access essential health services and care during the winter season due to road conditions, floods in IDP camps, limited mobility and inaccessible ambulances or public transportation not adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Stigma and negative attitudes hinder their potential and the full realisation of their rights within their homes, schools and at a community level. In Afghanistan, women with disabilities are deprived of informal home-based work opportunities. Iman from Idlib says *"My eyes are subject to infection and inflammation due to the cold wind during wintertime. I am almost blind. I need many medicines and I cannot access them."*

Children with disabilities lack access to essential healthcare services and medicine. Lack of access to proper medical and psychological care has

<sup>23</sup> UN Women and CARE International, 2022, *Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine*.

“

***The most challenging during winter is to ensure the access to medicine and to follow-up with doctors. Medical care is expensive and we struggle to ensure it and my son's condition is worsening day-by-day.***

Amina in Syria

prolonged or worsened injuries and disabling conditions among children. Amina from Idlib says “*The most challenging during winter is to ensure the access to medicine and to follow-up with doctors. Medical care is expensive and we struggle to ensure it and my son's condition is worsening day-by-day.*” The most severely disabled children have the highest care needs and can be the most negatively affected by cold temperatures for a long period of time. This means that their homes are most likely to need to be heated more and for longer periods of the day and night which is a challenge for FHHs. Rajaa from Idlib says “*If we don't heat the place during wintertime, my daughter's condition gets worse.*”

Ukrainian women living with disabilities in Moldova or whose family members live with disabilities face challenges in accessing free healthcare especially when it comes to surgeries and medicines as these services are not covered by any assistance. “*My son has physical disability due to a knee injury. I don't know how to get the money to ensure the operation cost,*” says a woman in the discussion group. Another adds “*I have to pay more than 1,000 euros for the surgery only and it does not include the post-surgery rehabilitation price. I expect that most of our income will be spent on treatment during winter and it makes me worried about securing our basic needs.*”

## 4.3 Benefits of winterisation assistance

### 4.3.1 Benefits for female-headed households

FHHs in Syria do not receive regular winterisation assistance. Some of them said that the last time they received assistance was two years ago. Others said that they never received any as they were not targeted for this type of assistance. While the

household costs and needs go up during winter, winterisation assistance provided in Syria allowed vulnerable FHHs to keep warm by paying for basic goods including clothing, fuel and electricity for heating and blankets.

Heated shelter and the ability to buy basic goods during winter improved the mental health and well-being of FHHs. Winterisation assistance buffers the negative impact of stress on mental health by increasing positive emotions such as happiness and hope. Rawda from Idlib says “*Receiving the winterisation assistance was similar to coming back to life after dying. I was very anxious about my son's health since we couldn't heat the house. This assistance came just on time during the coldest months.*”

In Afghanistan, women in the FGD group said they have never been targeted for winterisation assistance. In fact, women think that if provided, the winter assistance could help them to stay safe in the cold weather. It could also have a positive impact on their mental health by reducing the level of daily stress. “*If necessary, winterisation assistance is provided, poor people will stay safe against cold weather and will not worry about keeping their children warm during winter.*”



Ukrainian refugees in Moldova have yet to face the challenge of a harsh winter outside their homes, but they are anticipating a difficult situation. Many of them are calling for urgent financial assistance during the winter months, especially for those out of work amidst a backdrop of rising prices for winter essentials, fuel shortages and unavailable medicines. *"Everything is very expensive now, from clothes to utilities. We really need warm clothes, blankets and winter shoes. This would really help us save money for medications. We all understand that in cold temperatures people, especially children, can become ill very quickly,"* says a Ukrainian refugee woman. Another adds *"When winter assistance is provided, we could save money to buy medicines and to get proper treatment in case of illness."*

#### **4.3.2 Benefits for children**

Children living with severe disabilities have the highest care needs and can be most affected by cold temperatures for long periods of time. This means that their homes are the most likely to need to be heated and for longer periods, which was previously and inconsistently ensured through the winterisation assistance provided in Syria. Rawda from Idlib adds

*"My children with disabilities used to benefit a lot from the winter assistance provided, they suffer from lots of pain without heating."* Women in the FGD group in Syria also report a significant improvement in their children's mental health and readiness for education after receiving the assistance. Amina from Idlib says *"When they are kept warm, my children can study at home and be comfortable and it makes them feel better about themselves."*

In Afghanistan, women think that winterisation assistance provided to the poor can ensure their food security and prepare them and their children for the cold winter, decrease sickness and provide children with a safe environment free from plastic bag smoke and fire accidents. *"If winter aid is distributed fairly to the most vulnerable, our children can eat, pregnant and lactating women can have their nutritional needs met, and diseases and death rate among the youngest children can be decreased."*

#### **4.3.3 Suggestions to improve winterisation programmes**

World Vision field experts from Syria, Afghanistan and Moldova agreed that the provision of seasonal assistance consisting of unconditional multi-purpose cash grants is the most convenient way to overcome the challenging winter season for displaced FHHs. Studies show that cash assistance programming for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is more likely to empower female beneficiaries to provide for their families. There is also evidence that cash assistance to refugee and host families reduces tensions between the two.

World Vision technical field experts say that a winter cash grant will support refugee families and prevent a further deterioration of their living conditions in the current challenging economic environment.

*"When they receive gift-in-kind assistance, households tend to sell them for 50% of their original price to get money in return. Households also sell received clothes since they might not fit with differences in sizes. In my opinion, the best way to overcome winter challenges is through winter cash assistance,"* says Obadah Mubaid, grant manager in Syria. *"We are working on a project that will assist around 4,628 families/month for five months with cash for winter assistance. Each family will receive US\$200/month. The assessment conducted during summertime showed us that winter cash assistance is the most needed and it will allow FHHs to choose and buy their winter utilities themselves."*



According to a study, IDP families within certain areas of Syria indicated that their greatest need is for shelter repairs – which are particularly pertinent as winter approaches.<sup>24</sup> World Vision field experts in Syria, Afghanistan and Moldova say the distribution of core relief and seasonal items for the winter season is also needed especially when items are not available in the market and cannot be bought through winter cash assistance. *"We can provide gift-in-kind assistance for items unavailable in the market and cash assistance for items that households can buy directly"* says a field expert in Syria. *"We received funds to implement a project to support refugee families and vulnerable Moldovan families with winter shoes and warm blankets. For smooth project implementation, we will collaborate with the Territorial Social Assistance Structure to reach out to Ukrainian families living in host communities"* says Ana, a project coordinator in Moldova. The possession of core relief and seasonal items such as winter clothing kits, winter jackets, sleeping bags and plastic sheeting enhances FHHs' resilience in harsh winter conditions. The assistance will be prioritised for the most vulnerable people, including FHHs.

Field experts agree that WASH assistance is also needed during the winter season. To prevent flooding, WASH field experts in Syria focus on ground levelling, strengthening basic infrastructure, ensuring an emergency response capacity and market access.

Field experts also indicate that coordination with partners and relevant clusters will be key to ensuring the effective and efficient delivery of



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winter assistance in the countries analysed. They say that winter assistance requires a needs assessment during the months of August and September to identify specific winterisation needs related to cash, WASH, livelihoods and shelter.

From a funding perspective, World Vision field experts in Afghanistan and Syria say that funding shortfalls prevent IDPs in Afghanistan from receiving winter assistance. The danger is that further cuts will push families into making irreversible choices such as taking on unmanageable debt, or sending children to work rather than school or, disastrously, offering a daughter for early marriage to reduce the number of mouths to feed at home.

Finally, field experts agreed that cash-for-work projects provide paid work to boost the livelihoods of vulnerable people. Agricultural and vocational training for youth is important to enhance their capacity to find a job. However, this type of programme predominantly targets males and is limited in impact because IDPs face major barriers such as the absence of an export market, inflation and the loss of the purchasing power.

NGOs alone cannot overcome poverty and its related suffering. To end poverty and address suffering exacerbated by climate change, we must address the political challenges of improving the governance of the countries and work toward political stability.



<sup>24</sup> Shannon Doocy and Emily Lyles, 2017, *Humanitarian Needs Among Displaced and Female-Headed Households in Government-Controlled Areas of Syria*. [Link](#)

# 5. Conclusion

This report shows that life for displaced families is tougher than for families who are not displaced. Life for FHHs is tougher than for male headed-households. And that life is even tougher for families in winter than the rest of the year – especially this winter due to the rising costs of commodities and winter essentials. The intersection of gender, displacement and climate makes life for FHH, such as those in and from Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan, extremely tough.

For FHHs, displaced from or within Ukraine, Syria or Afghanistan, the impending winter threatens to be one of the most difficult periods of their lives. FHHs are more likely to have lower income and resort to negative coping mechanisms to survive. They will have reduced physical or mental health outcomes and lack the related services to treat these needs. They will be exposed to GBV, SGBV, stigmatisation and the limitations of traditional views of gender roles. Families with member living with disabilities will be further challenged.

The report also finds that the needs of FHHs, and women and girls in general, are often not heard, let alone met in many winterisation projects. World Vision offers 17 recommendations to improve an aid system that predominantly prioritises the needs of male-headed households in winterisation support for displaced people and leaves their female-headed counterparts out in the cold.

Finally, investing in durable solutions is a key component in displacement crises, especially after decades of conflict. Such solutions are instrumental in assisting refugees in accessing either protection or rights.



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# 6. Recommendations



## NGOs:

1

Invest in age, gender and disability responsive needs assessments, with the aim of exploring specific vulnerabilities, barriers and capacities due to the onset of winter.

2

Ensure being a FHH is a sufficient vulnerability criterion for households to be selected for winterisation interventions.

3

Whenever feasible, prioritise cash winter assistance for FHHs, while considering the proximity of functioning markets and the availability of the needed winter items.

4

In addition to cash assistance, consider three additional types of winterisation activities, especially for FHHs living in refugee camps and shelters: 1) distribution of solid eco-friendly fuel and heating devices; 2) personal insulation (distribution of winter clothing and blankets); and 3) shelter insulation. All three are confirmed as effective ways to improve FHHs' preparedness for the cold season.

5

Provide legal, safe and sustainable livelihood opportunities, including cash-for-work, especially for FHHs and women with disabilities, while taking actions to decrease household and childcare responsibilities for women (such as flexible hours, transportation to the workplace, childcare services, etc.)

6

Through local partnerships prioritise social integration and cohesion events and age-appropriate meetups for IDPs as well as refugees in host countries, to create peer support structures and improve a sense of community for the vulnerable population.

7

Ensure provision of accessible and well-equipped sexual and reproductive health services (at youth centres, women and girls' safe spaces, mobile services, community-based organisations) for displaced populations during winter.

8

Engage men and boys, women and girls, community and faith leaders in awareness raising and behaviour change activities around addressing increased gender inequality and GBV risks during winter.

9

Provide extra medical supplies, nutritious meals and snacks, targeting the most vulnerable girls and boys (with disabilities, with chronic diseases, from large families).

10

Ensure that winterisation assistance is delivered ahead of the start of the cold season to allow vulnerable households to plan and prepare for the winter.

11

Partner with local actors to scale up community-based or online skills training opportunities, including digital, especially for FHHs, both local and refugees.

12

Prioritise age, gender and disability responsive mental health and psychosocial support and recreational activities for FHH members, adapted and accessible during winter.

## Donors:

**1**

Ensure winterisation assistance funding that targets FHHs and households affected by several vulnerability factors (households headed by children, persons with disability, etc.) to be available early enough for effective implementation.

**2**

Keep NGOs accountable for designing and delivering winterisation assistance to address the needs of the most vulnerable households in a dignified manner.

**4**

Provide funding for livelihood opportunities for FHHs, designed to accommodate women's triple role (combination of formal employment, domestic and communal duties).

**3**

Mandate the integration of protection and MHPSS activities in all winterisation programmes.

**5**

Invest in durable solutions to assist displaced people in accessing either protection and rights.



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