

Food Security and Wages in Syria



UN Humanitarian Aid



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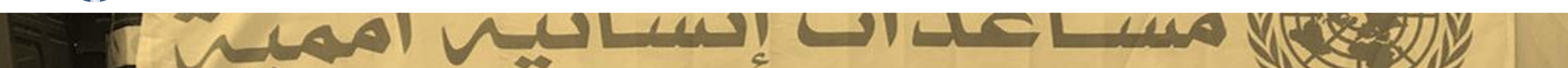


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1. Executive Summary

This report analyzes the cost of a minimum food basket for an adult in Syria and compares that cost with the statutory minimum wage over recent years. Using price data and standard food-basket quantities, the analysis shows that the minimum wage did not cover the cost of the food basket for most years (2020–2024). Although public sector salaries were increased in mid-2025, increases in fuel and transport prices eroded much of this gain and left households highly vulnerable.

Key findings

The Syrian pound lost nearly all of its value against the USD over the period analyzed.

The standard ‘survival’ basket used in this analysis totals $\approx 2,078$ kcal/day (per the basket table), slightly below the 2,100 kcal benchmark used in humanitarian guidance.

Calculations show the monthly cost of that basket typically consumed a large share of a worker’s monthly income; in some years it exceeded the monthly minimum wage.

Despite a **200%** salary increase in July 2025, Household Gas Cylinder prices rose by about **226%** and transport costs by **185%** during the same period, which undermined real purchasing power.

2. Introduction

The Syrian conflict, ongoing since 2011, has had devastating effects not only on security and infrastructure but also on the economic and social fabric of the country. One of the most pressing challenges has been the ability of households to secure their basic needs in the face of hyperinflation, currency depreciation, and widespread poverty.

This report focuses on the **relationship between wages, food costs, and essential living expenses** in Syria, with particular attention to the period 2020–2025. The objective is to: (1) define a **standard essential food basket** based on humanitarian guidelines, (2) compute the monthly cost of that basket using available price data, and (3) compare that cost with the minimum wage to assess affordability and the need for humanitarian assistance.

3. Methodology & Data Sources

Data sources

- Commodity Price dataset: commodity prices, dataset provided by World Food Programme Price Database.
- Humanitarian basket and kcal benchmark: “WoS Food Security Sector Emergency (used as source for grams/person/day).
- Wage data: minimum daily wages (source: World Food Programme).
- Statistics (poverty, food insecurity): WFP, UNDP reports.

Definitions & assumptions

Essentials basket (per person): items and grams/day are taken from the adopted standard basket. The basket used yields $\approx 2,078$ kcal/day (see Appendix).

Monthly conversion: Monthly quantity (kg) = $(\text{grams/day} \div 1000) \times 30$.

Wage conversion: Monthly wage = daily wage $\times 24$ (assuming 24 working days per month).

Cost calculation: Monthly cost per person = $\text{sum}(\text{commodity_monthly_qty} \times \text{commodity_unit_price})$ for each year.

Limitations

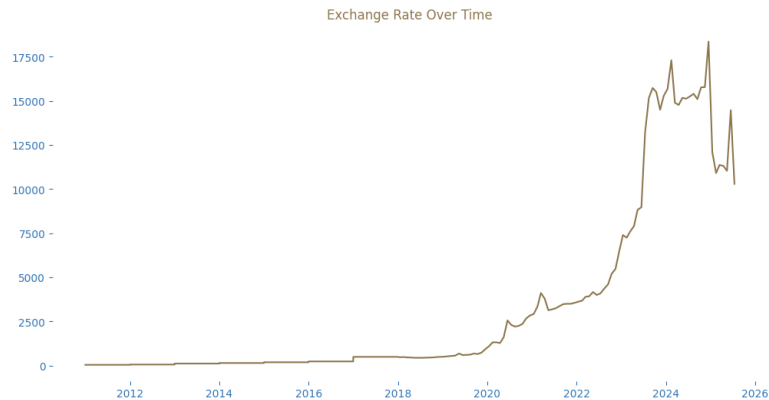
Not every commodity appears in every year in the dataset - analysis is restricted to items present in the chosen time window.

Local/regional price variation: when appropriate use governorate averages; report highlights national averages unless a regional analysis is included.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1 Exchange rate collapse and loss of purchasing power

Between 2011 and 2025, the Syrian pound depreciated dramatically against the U.S. dollar. As the figure below shows, the currency lost nearly **99.58% of its value** during this period. This collapse in the exchange rate directly translated into rising food prices, as both imported and locally produced goods increasingly followed the dollar benchmark.



4.2 Essential food basket (per person)

To assess the impact of this depreciation on daily life, we adopted a standard food basket defined by the **Whole of Syria Food Security Sector**.

This basket provides approximately **2,100 kilocalories per day for an adult**, representing the internationally accepted minimum requirement.

Sample basket for full 2,100 kcal intake per day:

		Grams/P/Day	Kcals/P/day
Cereals	Rice	100	360
	Pasta	73.3	272.1
	Bulgur	100	342
	Beans	46.67	155.4
Pulses/Protein	Chickpeas	46.67	169.9
	Fish, Tuna	13.3	27.7
	Lentils	46.67	160.1
Fat	Oil	48.53	429.5
Condiments	Salt (Iodized)	6	
	Sugar	40	154.8
Total		530.05	2078.07

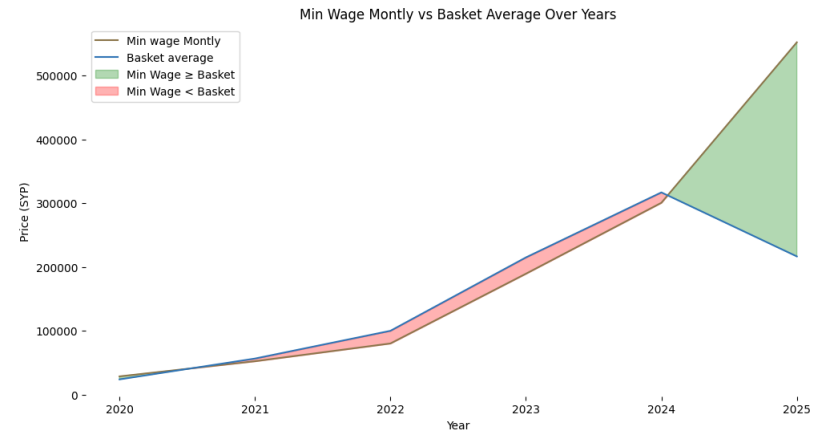
These daily quantities were converted into monthly requirements by multiplying by 30.

The monthly cost of the basket was then calculated using annual price data for each commodity between 2020 and 2025.

4.3 Comparing the food basket with the minimum wage

When comparing the monthly cost of the food basket with the **minimum wage** (calculated as daily wage × 24 working days), the following trends emerge:

- **2020–2024:** The cost of the basket consistently exceeded the minimum monthly wage. A single worker could not cover their basic food needs from wages alone.
- **2025:** Although salaries were raised by 200%, the increase only allowed the minimum wage to cover the food basket for a single person. However, this left no room for other essential non-food needs.



4.4 The impact of household gas and transport prices in 2025

The wage increase in 2025 did not translate into real improvements in living standards, as **fuel prices rose by around 226%** and **transport costs by 185%** during the same period. These hikes eroded much of the nominal wage gains and left workers with the same affordability gap as before.

Household Gas Cylinder and Transport Costs (2024–2025):

Year	Household Gas Cylinder (25Kg)	Bus Ticket
2024	45063 SYP	913 SYP
2025	146968 SYP	2604 SYP

In practice, workers found that even if they could afford food, they could not simultaneously cover transportation or energy needs.

5. Household-level implications and humanitarian needs

If an adult worker struggles to cover only their own basket, the challenge multiplies at the household level: Two adults (e.g., a couple) face a clear deficit.

For a five-person household, food alone would consume more than the entire monthly income.

This reality is consistent with official reports showing that:

- **Over half of Syria's population is food insecure**, with nearly 3 million severely food insecure.
- **Poverty has reached more than 90% of the population.**

As a result, reliance on humanitarian assistance has become not an exception, but a necessity for most Syrian households.

6. Socio-economic Implications

The analysis highlights several key dynamics:

- **Erosion of purchasing power:** Despite nominal wage increases, real wages remain unable to cover even the most basic needs due to inflation and currency depreciation.
- **Household vulnerability:** A minimum wage earner can barely secure their own food basket, while a five-person household faces a severe affordability gap.
- **Structural dependence on aid:** With 90% of Syrians living under the poverty line, humanitarian assistance is no longer supplementary; it is essential for survival.
- **Broader socio-economic impact:** Families are often forced to rely on multiple jobs, debt, or negative coping mechanisms (e.g., reducing food intake, pulling children from school, delaying medical care).

7. Conclusion

The findings show that the gap between wages and essential costs has grown dramatically, making it virtually impossible for households to sustain themselves without external support.

While the 2025 wage increase temporarily narrowed the gap, rising fuel and transport prices offset much of the gain.

Ultimately, the Syrian case demonstrates how prolonged conflict, economic collapse, and inflation converge to deepen food insecurity and poverty. Addressing this challenge requires not only humanitarian relief, but also structural economic recovery and stabilization policies.

8. References

World Food Programme (WFP), Syria External Situation Reports (2025).

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Accelerating Economic Recovery (2025).

Whole of Syria Food Security Cluster, Standard Food Basket Guidelines.

World Food Programme (WFP) - Syrian Arab Republic - Food Prices (2011–2025 dataset).



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