

# THE GRADUATION APPROACH

Female-headed household displaced by conflict to Afrin.

Measuring graduation out of humanitarian assistance (to meet basic needs) with the Self Reliance Index in Afrin, NW Syria. (Cohort 1. 2022 - 2024)

July 2024



## OVERVIEW

Twelve years of conflict in Syria coupled with the devastating series of earthquakes that hit northern Syria and Türkiye in February 2023, has resulted in 6.3 million displaced people and 15.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance for their survival. USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) has supported GOAL and partner to implement multi-sectoral humanitarian response initiative, assisting over one million conflict-affected people in Northwest Syria. Through BHA's Economic Recovery Market Systems sector, GOAL and

Shafak (a Syrian NGO), have partnered to implement the Graduation Approach to lift 400 vulnerable households (2,000 people), out of the need for humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. By May 2024, 29 months into implementation 83% of participating households have graduated and would no longer qualify for food assistance, demonstrating how the Graduation Approach can contribute to GOAL's strategic intention, to move communities from **Crisis to Resilience**.

## THE GRADUATION APPROACH - SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGRAMMING

The [Graduation Approach](#) is an evidence-based approach to increasing self-reliance of the ultra-poor, IDPs & refugees. The Graduation Approach addresses the multiple constraints of the extreme poor in a single approach. It guides participants through a personalized pathway out of extreme poverty. It is important to note that the Graduation Approach targets at a household level, not at a systems level and is a 'big push' approach for socio-economic inclusion of extremely vulnerable households.

**As the purpose of the Graduation Approach is to lift vulnerable households out of the need for humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs, it is important that we can measure progress towards self-reliance.**

### THE GRADUATION APPROACH FRAMEWORK



### THE POVERTY ALLEVIATION COALITION (PAC)

was established in 2019 and is led by UNHCR, the World Bank, IPA (the research partner) and 12 implementing and technical members; GOAL is a founding member of the PAC. The Graduation Approach has been adopted by the coalition, as the approach combines social protection and development assistance to assist extremely poor households to become self-reliant. By December 2023, the Coalition has secured over 275 million USD in funding reaching more than 123,000 households.



### THE SELF-RELIANCE INDEX (SRI)

was developed jointly by members of the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative ([www.refugeeselfreliance.org](http://www.refugeeselfreliance.org)), with leadership from Refuge Point and Women's Refugee Commission to track refugee households progress towards self-reliance.

The SRI was developed through a three-year multi-stakeholder process involving over 25 contributing partners and is primarily intended to support practitioners in designing and providing effective refugee services. It may also assist in targeting populations for assistance, highlighting service gaps, and informing funding priorities.

**The SRI was created to track refugee household progress toward self-reliance.**

## AGGREGATE SELF-RELIANCE INDEX SCORES

**The SRI is designed to provide a rapid, high-level indication of key socio-economic status within a target household and uses twelve domains associated with socio-economic inclusion. The SRI's score has a range between 1-5 (with 5 indicating higher levels of self-reliance), it is used to track changes over time and is a powerful adaptive management tool, assisting in identifying households that are not making progress so that additional support can be provided.**

The table on page five details eight data sets collected over a 29-month period, January 2022 to May 2024 (last data set) from Graduation Approach participants in Afrin City. Between January 2022 and September 2022 all domains show a positive trajectory towards self-reliance except as expected Domain 9, those reliant on external assistance to meet basic needs.

**The crisis:** On the 6th of February 2023, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake hit northwestern Syria and southeastern Türkiye, killing more than 50,000 people and injuring more than 100,000, leaving thousands more homeless. The data collected in March 2023 just after the earthquake reflects the impact of the earthquake on already vulnerable households. All domains saw a downward trend except for

health status, financial resources, assistance, debt, relational and social capital. Following a rapid assessment (Feb. 2023), 55 severely affected households received a once off emergency cash transfer of \$700, 179 moderately affected households received \$350 in assistance as did 79 participants (all from the job pathway. By January 2024, (25 months duration), all domains had improved from the pre-crisis scores (March 2023) except health care, which is marginally below the pre-earthquake score.

**Results:** The overall score for the whole cohort after 29 months of implementation is 4.78, which is higher than the score pre-crisis (3.23) and substantially higher than the baseline score 1.84. Female participants are scoring marginally better than male participants (F 4.79, M 4.77). Scores are significantly higher for those taking the enterprise pathway (4.49) than the job pathway (3.56), and slightly higher for host community households (4.49), when compared to displaced households (4.36).

**Data shows that, even in the face of a substantial shock, and with short term emergency interventions, vulnerable households participating in Graduation Approach programming are recovering and have become more resilient when compared to baseline scores.**



The aftermath of the 2023 earthquake in Northwest Syria

### DROPOUTS

Of the 396 households (1,980 people) selected to participate in socio-economic programming using the Graduation Approach

- 68 HHs (17%) dropped out, higher than the 10% attrition anticipated.
- Less women dropped out than men 35 of 68.
- More displaced HH dropped out than host community participating HH's 60 of 68.
- More dropped out before the earthquake 45 of the 68.

The two main reasons for dropouts are household that moved to another location (40/68), not uncommon for IDPs who can be displaced multiple times. Secondly, household who sold the productive assets (23/68), usually to meet basic needs. These dropouts could potentially be prevented by early identification of households in crisis to provide additional guidance and support. The remaining five dropped out for various other reasons.

At 29 months, 82.6% of the remaining 328 participating households have met the graduation criteria and would no longer qualify for food assistance.



More participating households graduated from:

- 87% of male households graduated, while 79% of female HHs graduated)
- 87% of host community households graduated, while 80% of displaced HHs graduated.
- 100% of those taking the micro-enterprise pathway graduated, but only 13% of those taking the job pathway.

Data set	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Comparison to pre-earthquake score
Date	Jan 2022	May 2022	Sept 2022	March 2023	July 2023	Oct 2023	Jan 2024	May 2024	
# of implementation months	1	5	9	15	19	22	25	29	
# of GA participants sampled	396	396	394	337	332	328	329	328	
Female / Male	39% 61%	39% 61%	39% 61%	38% 62%	38% 62%	37% 63%	37% 63%	37% 63%	
Host / IDP	29% 71%	29% 71%	29% 71%	31% 69%	31% 69%	31% 69%	31% 69%	31% 69%	
Pathway - Job/ Enterprise						23% 77%	23% 77%	23% 77%	
<b>Domain 1a: Housing adequacy</b>	4.21	4.32	4.63	3.97	4.52	4.66	4.65	4.89	↑
<b>Domain 1b: Rent</b>	1.83	1.89	2.98	2.30	2.93	3.16	3.44	3.00	↑
<b>Domain 2: Food</b>	3.69	4.02	4.65	4.34	4.70	4.81	4.79	5.00	↑
<b>Domain 3: Education</b>	1.65	2.19	3.16	2.77	3.09	3.88	4.39	4.52	↑
<b>Domain 4: Health care</b>	2.78	3.11	3.97	3.14	3.04	3.36	3.96	4.68	↑
<b>Domain 5: Health status</b>	2.41	2.50	2.73	2.94	2.92	2.94	3.00	3.00	↑
<b>Domain 6: Safety</b>	3.08	4.16	4.15	3.14	3.25	4.10	4.45	4.84	↑
<b>Domain 7: Employment</b>	1.47	1.70	3.11	2.18	2.60	4.00	3.79	4.12	↑
<b>Domain 8: Financial Resources</b>	1.30	1.57	2.57	2.85	3.30	4.39	4.29	4.98	↑
<b>Domain 9: Assistance</b>	2.45	2.50	2.40	4.00	3.71	4.90	4.96	5.00	↑
<b>Domain 10: Debt</b>	2.47	3.03	3.55	3.80	4.19	4.84	4.75	5.00	↑
<b>Domain 11: Savings</b>	1.23	1.32	3.41	2.10	2.48	3.15	3.94	4.40	↑
<b>Domain 12a: Financial social capital</b>	3.31	3.60	4.58	4.91	4.98	4.99	4.99	5.00	↑
<b>Domain 12b: Relational social capital</b>	3.70	2.16	4.33	4.68	4.80	4.99	4.85	5.00	↑
<b>SRI Score (0-5)</b>	1.84	2.19	3.23	3.07	3.38	4.28	4.40	4.78	↑
Female / Male								4.79/4.77	
Job / Enterprise								4.49/4.86	
Host / Displaced								4.79/4.77	
<b>% Reached Graduation</b>	0%	0%	29%	11%	50%	79%	80%	82.6%	
Female / Male								79%/84%	
Job / Enterprise								13%/100%	
Host / Displaced								87%/80%	

Crisis Event - Earthquake, February 2023

# MEASURING GRADUATION

**The Graduation Approach must have context specific and clearly defined, gender-inclusive and measurable graduation criteria, that must incorporate:**

- Improved food security
- Increased income levels
- Access to financial services
- Enhanced social inclusion.

With the investment in collecting data for the SRI to monitor and adaptively manage programming, Shafak, Refuge Point and GOAL worked together in 2023 to explore how the SRI domains could be used to set graduation criteria and the data (not the score) used to measure graduation.

To graduate, a household must meet minimum criteria across all 4 domains as described below.

**Graduation Criteria** define a certain measurable threshold that outline the conditions necessary for a household to build a sustainable livelihood, have a healthy family, and meaningful social connections within their community that together promote long-term well-being and resilience. To achieve Graduation, a household must meet all mandatory Graduation Criteria.

# THE 4 SRI DOMAINS SELECTED TO MEASURE GRADUATION:

## Domain 2. Food

**Purpose:** To determine whether the household is eating sufficiently (food secure)

**SRI Domain:** 2

**Graduation threshold:**

How would you describe your household's food intake yesterday?

4. Household was able to eat 2-3 full meals

## Domain 7. Employment

**Purpose:** To determine whether the household is engaged in income-generating activities.

**SRI Domain:** 7

**Graduation threshold:**

How would you describe the income-generating activities that household members are engaged in, in the last 3 months?

3. Regular part-time (including self-employment)
4. Full-time (including self-employment), without necessary legal documentation
5. Full-time (including self-employment), with legal documentation, if necessary.

## Domain 10. Debt

**Purpose:** To determine whether the household has incurred debt to cover any basic needs.

**SRI Domain:** 10

**Graduation threshold:**

Do you currently have any debt (no matter how small) for any of the following?

0. No debt.
6. Investment.

## Domain 12a. Relational Social Capital

**Purpose:** To determine the networks and relationships available to the household.

**SRI Domain:** 12b

**Graduation threshold:**

Are there people that you or your household members ask for advice and/or information?

Are there people who ask you or your household members for advice and/or information?



So that Graduation Programming would be market facing, a Market Assessment was undertaken in peri-urban areas in Azaz and Afrin cities in Northwest Syria by GOAL Shafak and a consultant in 2021. A key finding is the mismatch between training aspirations and market demand for use of those skills, which results in poor return on investment in training. To illustrate this point, none of the participants interviewed who had previously undertaken vocational training, had found a job or enterprise as a result.



The assessment informed the design of context specific **Graduation Approach Strategy** (English & Arabic versions). Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and resource guides were designed specifically to guide Coaches in implementation. These SOPs could be adapted to other contexts.



**Targeting:** 396 Graduation Approach participants (39% female, 71% IDP, 29% Host), 1,980 household members (Av. Household size is five) were selected from the existing food assistance (cash) caseload.



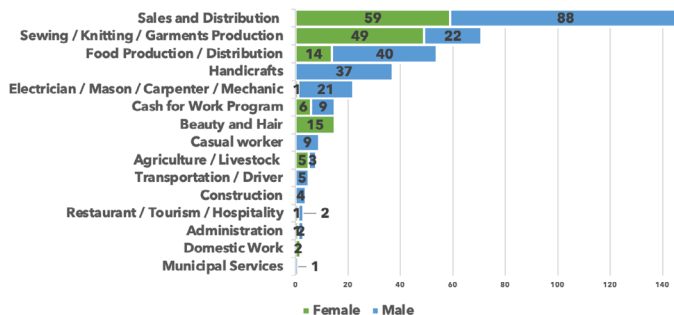
**Consumption Support**  
(Unconditional cash transfers)

**Cash transfers** - 396 households receiving cash transfers for 7 months to cover basic needs while participants are upskilling and establishing / finding their micro-enterprise or job. The average value of each transfer: \$57/month (\$168,350 distributed)



**Market Facing Skills & Pathways to Jobs & Enterprises**  
(self/employment)

The following graph illustrates the types of **jobs and micro-enterprises** pursued by Graduation Approach participants by gender. Sales, clothing production and beauty & hair are the livelihoods most often pursued by women. Sales, food production and handicrafts (trades) are most often pursued by male participants.





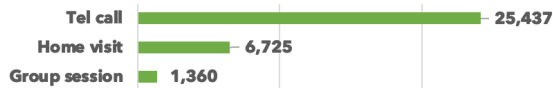
### Financial services & Asset Transfer

16 Village Savings & Loans Associations (VSLAs), formed, 5 female only, 318 registered members, 34% are female, 5% are non-GA participants (other community members), Total value of savings \$7,960, Average saving/member \$14, Average value of loans: \$26, 8 VSLA groups reformed for a second cycle, 1 group is female only, 2 VSLA groups reformed for a third cycle, 1 group is female only, Average value of micro enterprise loans \$700



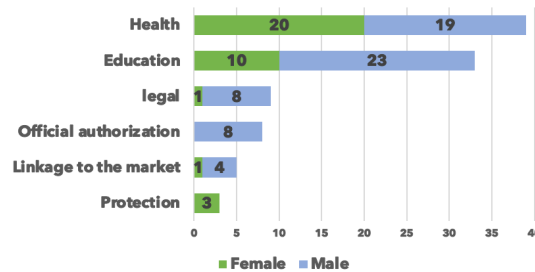
### Coaching/ Mentoring

Jan. 2022 – June 2024. The Coach to household ratio is 1:50. Coaches interact and support Graduation Approach participants and their households members through telephone calls, in person visit to households and through groups sessions



### Coaching/ Mentoring

Jan. 2022 – June 2024. Coaches also refer household members to appropriate local social services and markets



The **innovation** in this programme was to use the SRI data (not score) to **define graduation criteria** and **measure those graduating** using the recommended context specific parameters of; food security, employment, financial services and social inclusion.

In addition to providing an overall trend to monitor progress for a cohort participating in socio-economic development using the Graduation Approach, the SRI can also be a powerful **adaptive management tool**. It can be used to identify vulnerable households that are not progressing, so that additional support is planned, provided, and monitored more closely, which should contribute to the percentage of households graduating and a better return on donor investment.

## GRADUATION APPROACH PROGRAMMING MOVES EXTREMELY VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS FROM CRISIS TO RESILIENCE



Malakeh Shaheen (37), June 2022

**Malakeh Shaheen** (37) is a widow, she has been displaced many times and is currently resident in Afrin, NW Syria. She cares for her elderly mother (85) and aunt (82), both are frail. Malakeh was previously in receipt of humanitarian assistance to meet her families basic needs. Malakeh participated in business skill training and received a \$700 micro-enterprise grant and became a member of a saving and loan group.

Working from her modest home, Malakeh's dairy enterprise was providing enough income to meet her families needs, when the Syria - Türkiye earthquake struck in February 2023, damaging her home and assets. In the aftermath of the earthquake, Malakeh received another grant (\$700) to help her cope with the impact of the earthquake. She repaired her home, purchased the necessary raw materials, and got her dairy enterprise up and running again. Malakeh and her family are no longer dependant on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs.



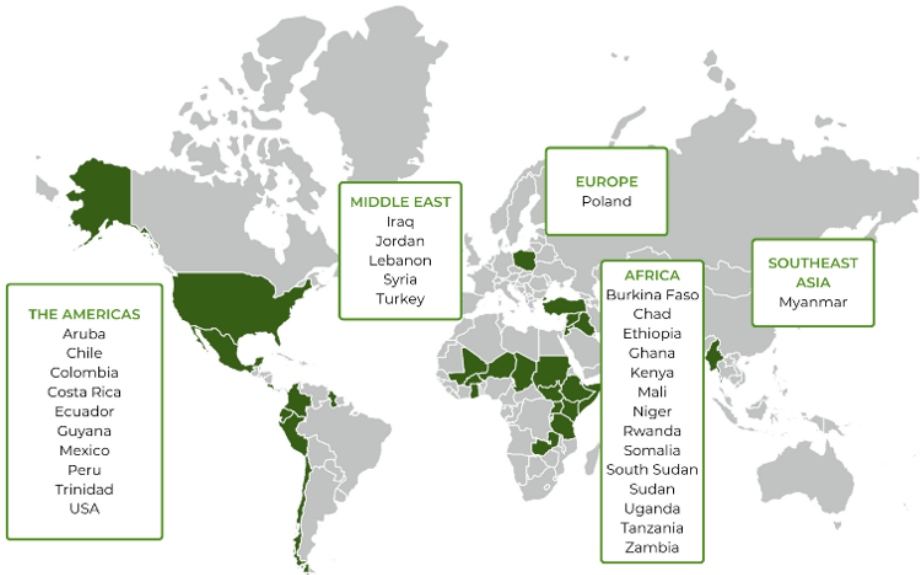
Mahmoud (32), December 2022

**Mahmoud** (32) is married with four children and cares for his elderly parents, who live with him. He and his family have been displaced many times, from El Golan (South of Syria) to Jdidet Artuz and Ghouta (Damascus), where he suffered severe injuries that led to the amputation of his right forearm and right foot, his family was displaced again to Afrin-NWS.

With support from his Coach, Mahmoud decided to invest in his brothers grocery shop. With business skill training and a business grant of \$700, he invested to expand the shop and become the sole owner. The grocery shop was doing well when the Syria / Türkiye earthquake hit in February 2023, damaging one of the shop walls and the refrigerator. With a small crisis modifier grant \$350, Mahmoud was able to repair the damage and begin to trade again. His family is no longer reliant on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs.



### SELF-RELIANCE INDEX GLOBAL ROLLOUT



The Self-Reliance Index is currently being deployed by 64 agencies in 29 countries.

**Self-Reliance:** is the social and economic ability of an individual, a household or a community to meet essential needs (including food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity – developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern and reducing their vulnerability and long-term reliance on humanitarian assistance.

#### SUPPORT

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