

14 MARCH 2016

NO PLACE FOR CHILDREN

5
#FIVE

THE IMPACT OF
FIVE YEARS OF WAR
ON SYRIA'S CHILDREN AND THEIR CHILDHOODS





FIVE – A MILESTONE FOR CHILDREN

“For the 3.7 million Syrian children born since the conflict began, five years is literally a lifetime. A lifetime in which they have known little but violence, deprivation, and uncertainty. What are we to say to them and to all the children of Syria? That we don’t care if they become a lost generation, because of losses in learning and good health that will affect them for years to come? We cannot restore the precious years of childhood snatched away by this brutal war, but we can and must prevent their futures from also being stolen. For their futures are the future of Syria.”

*Anthony Lake,
UNICEF Executive Director*

Every Syrian child under the age of five has known nothing but a lifetime shaped by war – that’s an estimated 2.9 million children inside Syria and at least 811,000 in neighbouring countries.¹

Addressing the needs and rights of all children affected by this conflict is essential if we are to avoid the loss of an entire generation, and decades of development progress.

Any child who has lived through the last five years will never know the Syria their parents remember. Bombs have turned classrooms, health centres and parks to rubble. The streets where they should be able to play are blocked by checkpoints or littered with explosive remnants of war. Schools and hospitals have closed in the thousands.

Diseases once vanquished, have returned. Out of work and in debt, parents can no longer afford basic life essentials. The supply of water to neighbourhoods is often unreliable or contaminated. In some parts of Syria, once a developed and self-sufficient country, children are dying of severe acute malnutrition.

In Syria’s neighbouring countries, the number of refugees is nearly ten times higher today than in 2012. Half of all refugees are children. Some come by car, while others walk for days on end before reaching safety. Since the war began in 2011, 15,525 unaccompanied and separated children have crossed Syria’s borders, 306,000 Syrian children have been born as refugees.²

Syria is now the most deadly and complex conflict of our time; its impact is affecting millions and is being felt across continents.

Today, more than ever, it is a children’s crisis. More than eight million children inside Syria and in neighbouring countries are in need of assistance.³

Millions of children have grown up ahead of their time, some forced to become their family’s sole breadwinners, while others have had no choice but to marry and become wives and mothers. Many have joined the fighting at a younger age and often without parental consent.

Syrian children and youth want to do their part when peace eventually returns to Syria. Their situations may differ, but their dreams are the same: to have a future - and to rebuild Syria as peacemakers, doctors, engineers, educators and leaders. The tools they need are simple: equipped minds, healthy bodies and self-belief.

¹ UNICEF, Syria Crisis Humanitarian Highlights and Results, January 2016

² UNHCR, 2016

³ UNICEF, Syria Crisis Humanitarian Highlights and Results, January 2016

A HEAVY TOLL ON CHILDREN

- **Two million children without regular access to aid**
- **More than 200,000 children living under siege**
- **2.4 million children forced to flee to neighbouring countries**
- **Children recruited to fight from as young as seven years of age**

Four year-old Khaled was resting in his bedroom in Aleppo when the first bombs fell.

“Something came screaming from the sky and our house was on fire,” his father remembers. “It was chaos. And when I realized that Khaled was inside I felt like I was going mad. I tried to find him.” He wipes his eyes, as he remembers. The fire that resulted from the attack left Khaled alive, but permanently scarred. The family fled along with hundreds of others, seeking refuge in an informal settlement in northern Lebanon. “Children with life-altering injuries are falling through the cracks everywhere, particularly in refugee settings where there are no formal camps,” says Arwa Damon, a renowned journalist and the founder of an organisation delivering surgical care, INARA.⁴ UNICEF linked Khaled with the foundation, where he underwent surgery and months of after-care to repair his face.

More than 10,000 children were killed between 2011 and 2013.⁵ There is no verified data on the total number of children killed since then.

No place is safe for children in Syria. Violence has become commonplace, reaching family homes, playgrounds, schools, parks and places of worship. Since the onset of the war in 2011, Syrian families have been reporting grave violations against their children. In 2015, UNICEF verified almost 1,500 of those violations including killing, maiming, the recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict, abduction, arrest, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access for communities in need.

Of those cases verified, over 400 were of children killed and almost 500 were of children maimed. While this is only the tip of the iceberg, this represents 63 per cent of all grave violations against children verified by UNICEF in 2015. The majority of children were killed and maimed as a result of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. In cases where it was possible to verify the sex, 70 per cent of the victims were boys. More than 150 of these children were killed while at school, or on their way to and from school. Dar’a was the most affected governorate followed by Deir-ez-Zor, Idlib, Aleppo and Rural Damascus.

According to Doctors Without Borders, in the Damascus region, women and children below the age of 15 represented nearly 40 per cent of all war wounded and 31 per cent of the killed in 2015. In the northern and western areas including Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Homs, children under the age of five represented 17 per cent of the war wounded and nearly 20 per cent of the war dead.⁶

The last time Nuha (11) saw her brother, he was heading out to get her a scoop of her favourite ice-cream in the Old City of Homs. A mortar struck him, and he never returned. “I imagine him coming back with an ice-cream in his hand,” she says, standing quietly on the spot where he died.

A trend of particular concern is the increase in child recruitment. Children report being actively encouraged to join the war by parties to the conflict offering gifts and ‘salaries’ of up to US\$ 400 a month.⁷ In earlier years of the conflict, most children recruited were boys between 15 and 17 years old, and children were used primarily in support roles away from the front lines. However, since 2014, all parties to the conflict have recruited children at much younger ages – as young as seven – and often without parental consent. More than half of the UNICEF - verified cases of children recruited in 2015 were under 15 years old – compared with less than 20 per cent in 2014. Children are now receiving military training and participating in combat, or taking up life-threatening roles at the battle-front including weapons’ maintenance and treating and evacuating wounded fighters. Parties to the conflict are using children to kill, including as executioners and snipers.

For many, recruitment is accompanied with indoctrination. In 2014, the UN verified more than 460 children abducted by parties to the conflict. One incident alone saw 150 schoolboys seized on their way home from exams in Aleppo. Months later, those released reported being beaten, indoctrinated and forced to commit violence.⁸

⁶ Doctors Without Borders (MSF), Documenting war dead and war wounded in MSF - supported medical facilities, February 2016

⁷ UNICEF and Save the Children, Small Hands, Heavy Burden, July 2015

⁸ Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2015

⁴ INARA - “ray of light” in Arabic - was founded in 2014

⁵ Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict, May 2014



“Attacking children in their playgrounds or at their school desks is a war crime. Those who attack and allow attacks on children must, one day, face justice as possible war criminals.”

The consequences of the colossal abuse of children’s rights in Syria could outlast the war itself by decades. How can we expect Syrian children to grow up respecting international law, and upholding it, if the rule of law failed them at their greatest moment of need? ”

Jan Egeland,

Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council and Chair of the UN-supported Humanitarian Taskforce on Access in Syria

Girls are being recruited too. Huda was just 14 years old when she found herself in her first battle facing armed men, with a weapon she barely knew how to use. “I was scared,” she says. “The commander gave me a gun and said get ready for the battle.” Huda survived and now lives as a refugee in Jordan. UNICEF verified more than 100 children killed or injured fighting in the war in 2015.

Twice as many people now live under siege or in hard-to-reach areas compared with 2013.¹¹ At least two million of those cut off from assistance are children, including more than 200,000 in areas under siege.¹²

Dr. David Nott, a trauma surgeon who worked in Syria, says the psychological consequences of siege can be just as devastating. “Children living under siege almost have to re-learn what it’s like to be a human being,” he says.

“The recruitment and use of children in combat has become commonplace in the Syrian Arab Republic.”

*Ban-Ki Moon,
UN Secretary General*

“Besieging communities in Syria targets children ruthlessly and relentlessly. Those responsible know that siege affects children first and foremost. Siege is being used to press for military advantage, in blatant defiance of International Humanitarian Law.”

*Dr. Peter Salama,
Regional Director, UNICEF Middle East and North Africa*

UNICEF’s teams waited for seven hours at the last checkpoint before being allowed to enter the besieged town of Madaya to deliver assistance in January 2016.

“When we finally entered the city in the dark, it was very clear that families had crossed the brink of disaster. Children stood under the rain watching with empty eyes, so weak they could barely walk. There was one sentence they repeated desperately ‘Do you have a piece of bread?’” says Hanaa Singer, the UNICEF Representative in Syria.

The UNICEF team and staff of the World Health Organization were able to screen 25 children under the age of five for malnutrition using the Mid-Upper Arm Circumference measurement. Twenty-two of the children showed signs of moderate to severe malnutrition.⁹ Two teenage boys were dying. As UNICEF staff worked to resuscitate them, Ali (16) passed away. His friend, Mohammad, lay emaciated beside him. While findings from the rapid assessment in Madaya are by no means a representative sample, and concrete conclusions cannot be drawn about the overall nutrition situation in Syria, they provide an overview of the situation in areas under siege.

“We were able to evacuate Mohammad with the support of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in the hope of saving his life. But it was too late. Mohammed was too weak and he died, two days later in the hospital,” says Singer.

According to Syrian medical organisations, over half of all premature deaths in areas under siege have occurred in children under 14 years old, a quarter of them infants.¹⁰

⁹ UNICEF statement, January 2016

¹⁰ Syrian American Medical Society: Slow Death - Life and Death in Syrian Communities Under Siege, March 2015

¹¹ OCHA, Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2016

¹² UNICEF and partners, No Lost Generation Syria Crisis Update, February 2016



©UNICEF JORDAN/AMMAN/2016/LYON
Ali (15) a Jordanian boy living in a neighbourhood with Syrian refugees

A STRUGGLE TO LEARN

- **Half of Syrian children (2.8 million) are not accessing education opportunities across Syria and the region**
- **More than 6,000 schools can no longer be used**
- **40 attacks on schools were verified in 2015**
- **Loss of human capital estimated to reach US\$ 10.7 billion if children don't return to school**

After five years of war, Syria's schooling rates have hit rock bottom. Gross enrolment ratio in basic education is down to 74 per cent.

Two decades of investment in learning have been lost. Net enrolment in primary education fell to 70 per cent in 2013, as low as the rate recorded in the 1980s.¹³

Five Syrian governorates account for nearly half of all children not in school: Damascus, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Idlib.

Mohammad (16) remembers the moment he saw his school in Aleppo bombed. "Our school sign was there, on the ground, just lying there," he says. In a Turkish refugee camp he turned outrage into resolve, volunteering to help children learn in a child friendly space.

"I used to want to be a teacher," he says. "But now I think I'll be a journalist, to tell people what happened in Syria."

By 2016, Syria had lost more than a quarter of its schools – more than 6,000 damaged by the violence, forced to close, used for the fighting or sheltering hundreds of displaced families.¹⁴ Classrooms emptied as teachers were killed and more than 52,000 left their posts.¹⁵

The loss of human capital formation due to the ongoing crisis in Syria could reach US\$ 10.7 billion, or about one fifth of the pre-war GDP, if children and youth don't go back to school.¹⁶

Finding space in over-crowded classrooms is only the first hurdle. Many lack the right papers to enrol. Outside of Syria, children struggle with unfamiliar curricula – sometimes in languages they do not understand. Some are ashamed to catch up in classes with younger students, after years spent out of school. Others, particularly girls, are afraid of the long walks to school through insecure streets.

“US\$ 1.4 billion to educate Syria's children is a number the world can afford. Losing this generation is a cost the world cannot.”

*Malala Yousafzai,
Global education activist*

¹³ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia: Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, Macro Economic Implications and Obstacles to Achieving Millennium Development Goals, September 2014

¹⁴ OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, Syria operations from Turkey, Issue 15, February 2016

¹⁵ UNICEF, Education Under Fire, September 2015

¹⁶ UNICEF, Economic Loss from School Dropout due to the Syria Crisis, 2015



“When I was little I loved to read,” says Mes’hal (16), a refugee in Jordan’s Za’atari Camp, scavenging goods with his wheelbarrow. “I used to think I was going to be a teacher. But now I’ve been out of school for three years. If I go back to school now, I’ll be too old. I’ll have to go back to Grade 5. And if I do that, who will support my family?” Mes’hal was able to enrol in a special non-formal education scheme for working children, teaching basic Arabic and Mathematics – part of the region-wide “No Lost Generation Initiative”. He keeps going to school, even though days are long and he gets tired. “A job is a job,” he says. “But if I can learn Mathematics, it will always remain mine.”

Samir (13) sits on a wall in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, next to his younger brothers, Abdulrahman (12) and Mohammed (8). They smile and joke with each other as they describe their old school in Aleppo. But the smiles soon slip when Samir reminds his siblings how they used to get there. “There was a building with snipers targeting the street. We used to run to cross it, so they would not hit us,” he says.

Until one day, they could not run any more. Forced out of school by the violence around them, they joined 2.8 million other Syrian schoolchildren – close to half of an entire school-age generation – deprived of their right to learn.

After more than a year of interrupted learning, Samir’s father was able to enrol his boys in a Lebanese public school in 2015. Thousands of new places had opened, through Lebanon’s “Reach Every Child with Education” programme. And to his delight, the brothers formed a rap group at school that performs to inspire other children to follow their dreams.

***Make the sky your limit, not the ceiling
All the ideas in the world started with
a letter***

From SAMIR & BROTHERS - Syrian refugee rappers

“When I grow up I will be able to write and rap. I want to write about what happened to my country. I’m so sad for my country,” says Mohammed. His brother, Abdulrahman has a different idea. “I’m going to write songs that make people laugh,” he says. “I don’t want to write about misery. I like joy.”

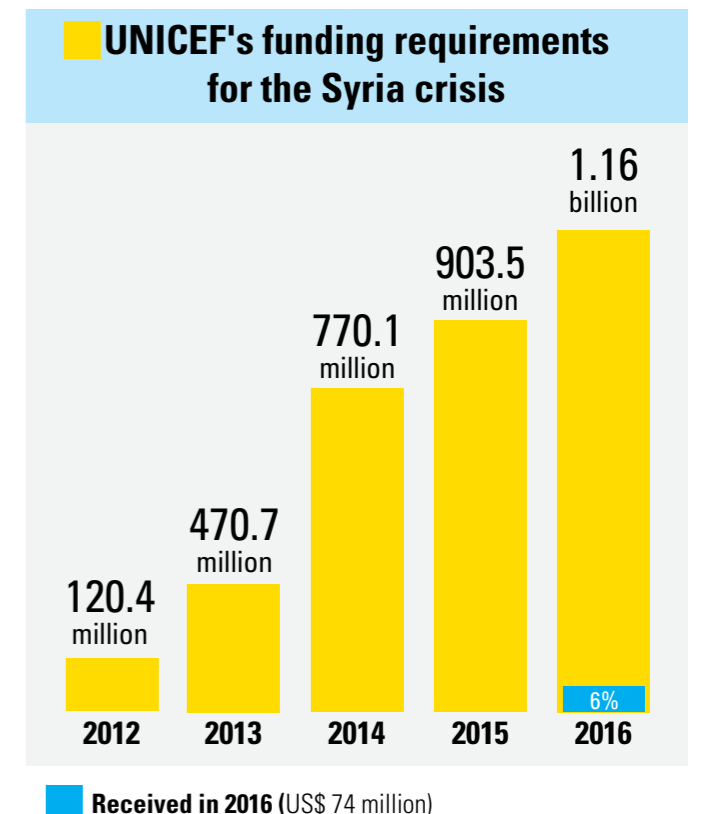
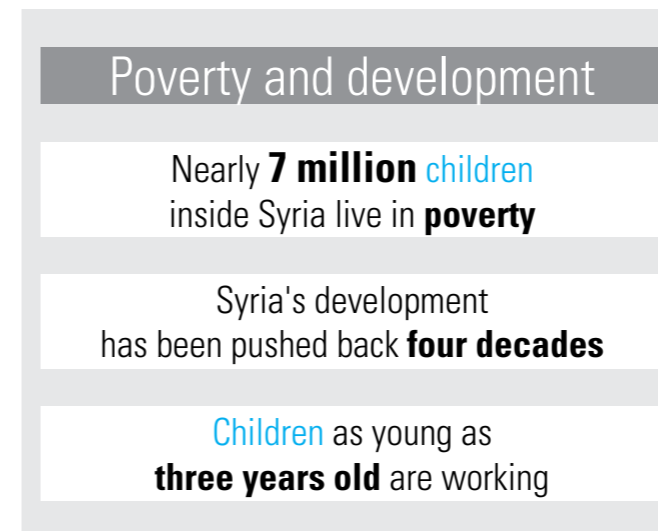
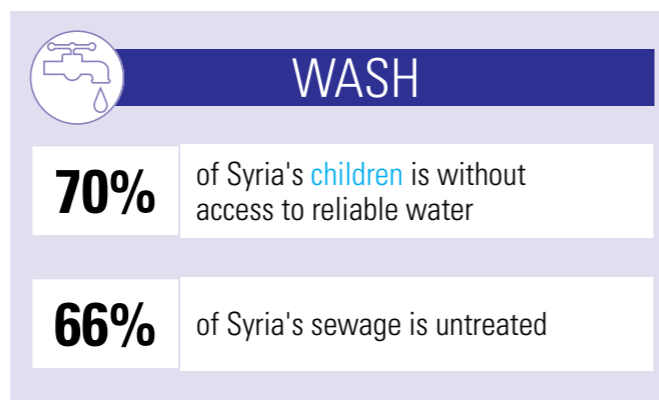
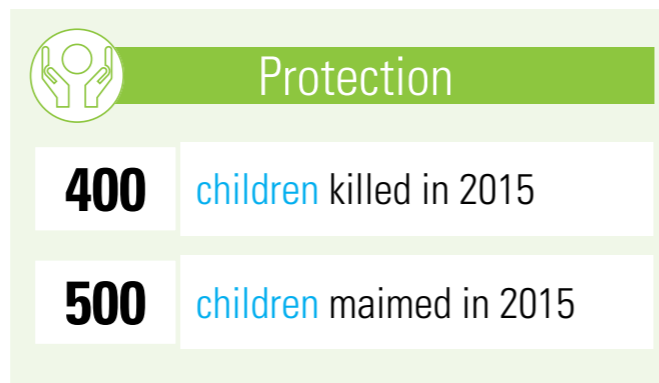
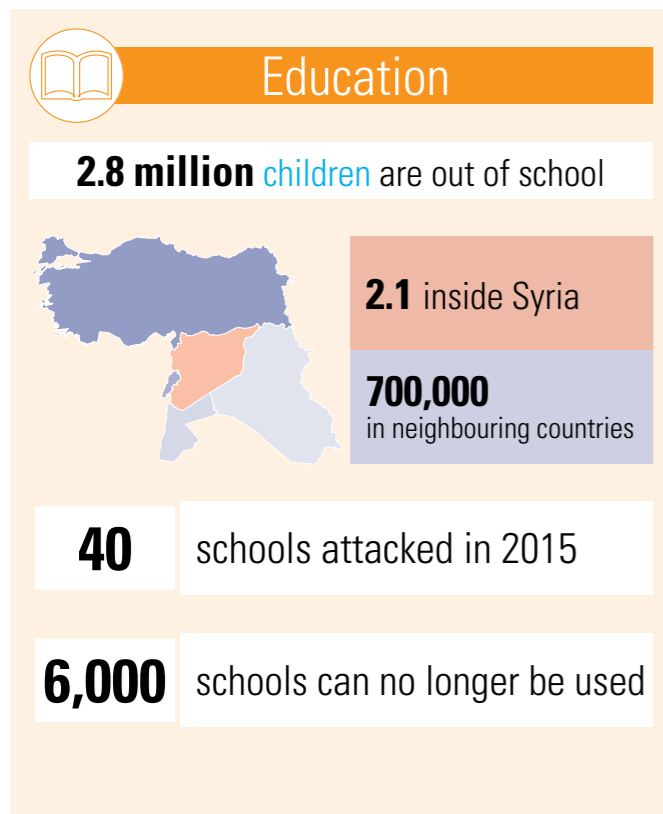
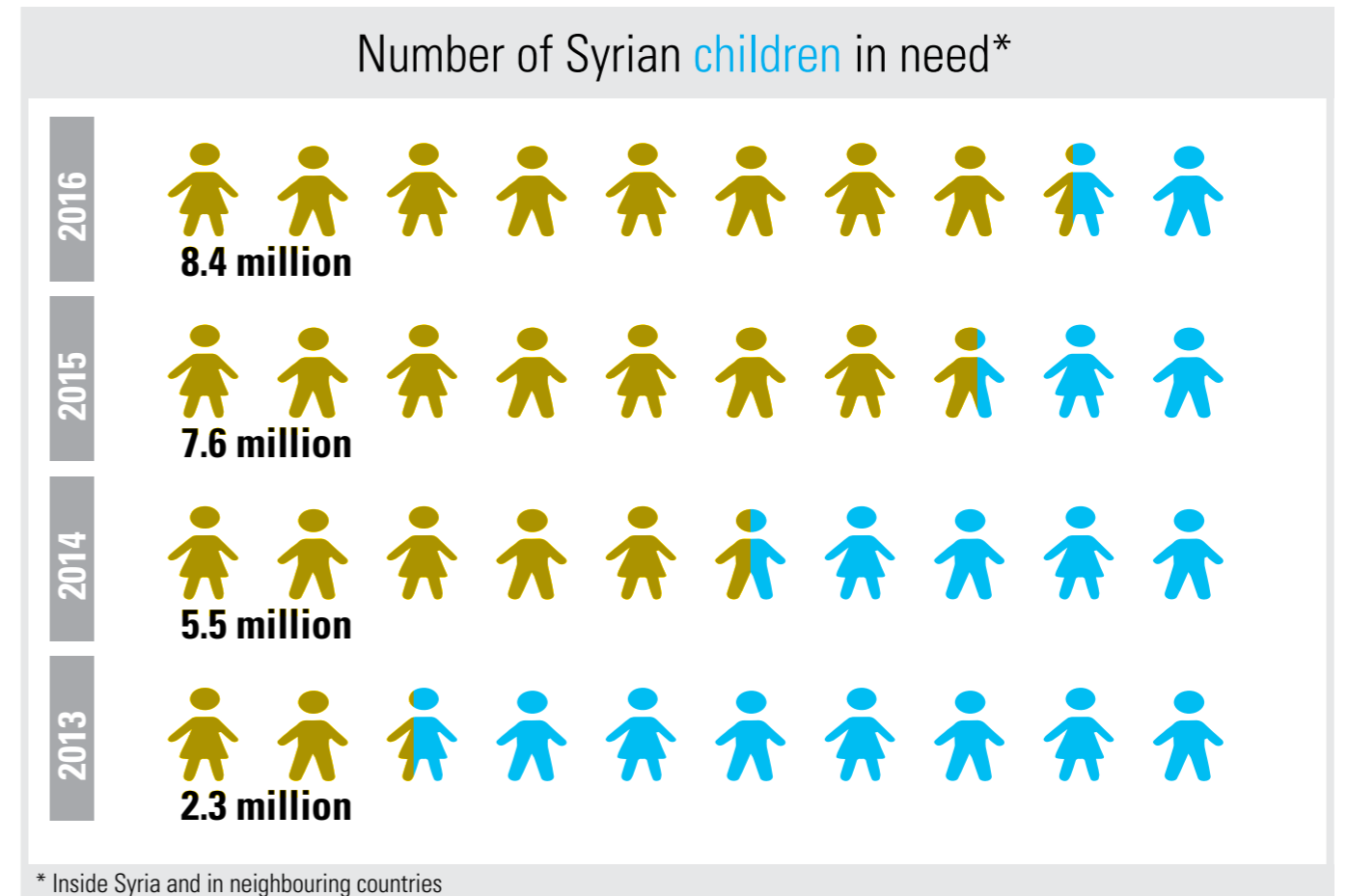
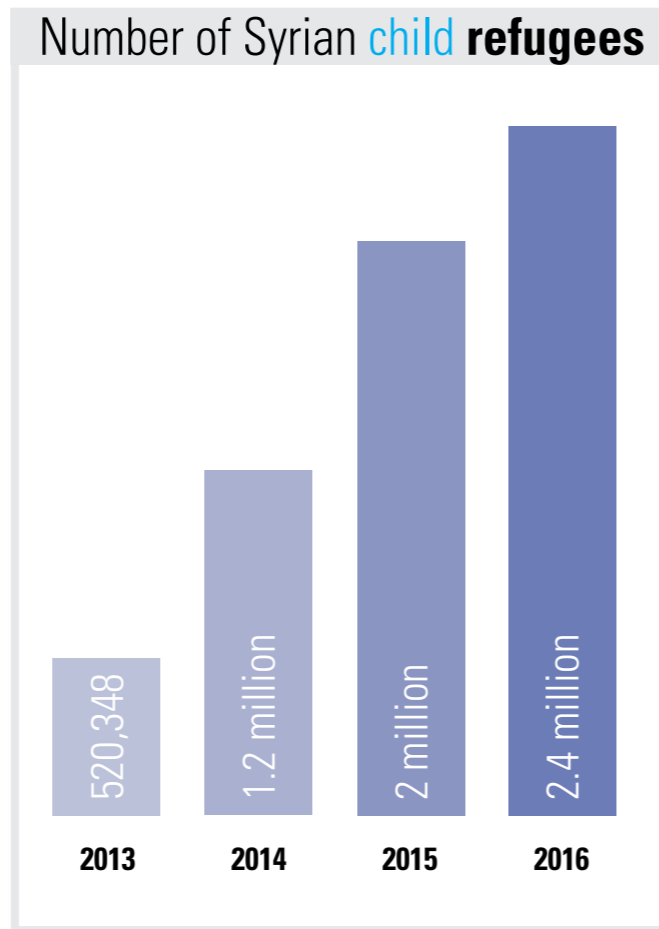
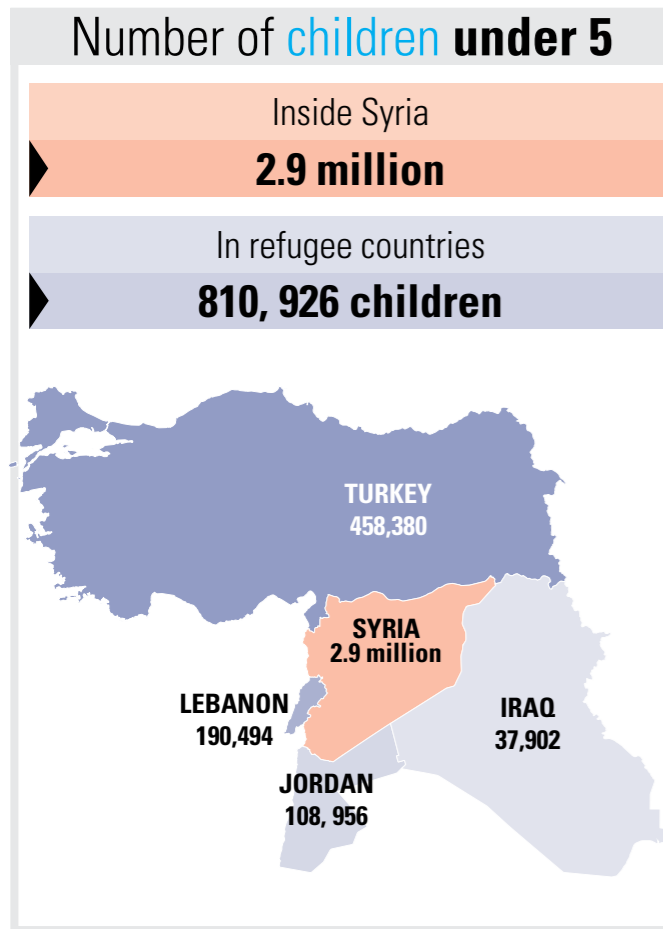
“Without the provision of education, Syrian parents see no choice but to leave the region and embark on what have become for so many ‘death voyages’ to Europe.”

*Gordon Brown,
United Nations Special Envoy on
Global Education*



Places 03/27/14

THE IMPACT OF FIVE YEARS OF WAR ON SYRIA'S CHILDREN AND THEIR CHILDHOODS



GROWTH UNDER FIRE

- **Nearly 70 per cent of population without reliable water**
- **Return of certain infectious diseases**

“Tremendous pride and unbearable pain.” That’s what Maher Ghafari, an engineer with UNICEF, feels when he sees children and elderly men queuing in the heat for water in his hometown of Aleppo.

Five years of destruction, power and water cuts, blockades and price rises have brought public services in Syria to a point of collapse.

In the last year alone, staple food prices have doubled. A kilogramme of rice now costs an average family more than six times what it did before the war. Bread costs double. Livestock herds have been decimated by 30 to 50 per cent, cutting essential protein out of children’s diets. A regional drought in 2013 reduced fruit, vegetable and grain harvests.¹⁷

Unsafe drinking water and poor hygiene practices are multiplying the risks of infections and illness among children. More than two-thirds of children – 70 per cent – in Syria are without safe and reliable water.¹⁸ In the worst conflict-affected areas and the poorest refugee settings, safe water is either scarce or costs too much. In collective shelters or households hosting displaced families, toilets have to be shared with dozens of people and hygiene conditions are poor. Only one third of Syria’s sewage is now treated.¹⁹

The violence has destroyed water infrastructure and in some cases, parties to the conflict have cut water deliberately, using it as a tactic of war. Earlier this month, UNICEF reported that water in Aleppo was cut for 48 days. In the summer of 2015, water was cut more than 40 times.²⁰ Nearly eight million people in Aleppo, Rural Damascus and Da’ara were affected.²¹

Children across the country are getting sicker, more often. Nutrient-draining diarrhoea is increasing with over 100,000 cases just in the first half of 2015 – as many as in the whole of 2014.²²

Few health workers are now left to monitor and protect children. Half of all medical staff have fled Syria and only one third of hospitals are functional. Each doctor used to look after the needs of around 600 people – now it’s up to 4,000.²³ In some areas, conditions are much worse. For example in Aleppo, only 10 paediatricians are left to care for an estimated 140,000 children.²⁴

“First the health centre in the village closed down,” says Nadia, mother of 14 month-old Hala from Idlib. “Then the closest one became too expensive and dangerous. Nadia feels guilty that her daughter hasn’t received any vaccinations.

Over the course of the war, diseases have returned to Syria. “When I heard that polio was back in Syria, I was in shock,” says Dr. Moazem Hossain, UNICEF’s regional chief of child survival, recalling the 2013 polio outbreak. “It was like stepping into a time machine and going back 15 years.”

Polio paralyzed 36 children in Syria and spread to Iraq before it was contained by a series of immunization campaigns in Syria and the neighbouring countries, the biggest in the recent history of the region.²⁵ No new cases of polio have been recorded since January 2014.²⁶ But other diseases continue to emerge including measles, leishmaniasis and hepatitis A.

Today, cholera is on Syria’s borders; in neighbouring Iraq. Without medical care and safe water to protect children, the risk of a large-scale outbreak rises.

¹⁷ OCHA, Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2016

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ Water and Sanitation Cluster, Water and Sanitation Statistics, 2016

²⁰ UNICEF press release, March 2016

²¹ UNICEF, 2016

²² UNICEF press release, July 2015

²³ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, Macro Economic Implications and Obstacles to Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, September 2014

²⁴ Physicians for Human Rights, Aleppo Abandoned, November 2015

²⁵ UNICEF, Polio Outbreak in the Middle East, July 2014

²⁶ UNICEF, Reaching Children Affected by Syria Crisis, 2016

INVISIBLE WOUNDS

- **Nearly seven million children inside Syria live in poverty**
- **Children as young as three are working**
- **Girls are marrying at a younger age**

Development gains, hard-won since the 1980s, have been wiped out.

Since 2010, Syria has regressed 23 places on the Human Development Index.²⁷ The violence has cost at least three million people their jobs, affecting the welfare of over four times as many dependants.²⁸ Four in every five people inside Syria now live in poverty.²⁹ Syria's development has been pushed back four decades.³⁰ UNICEF estimates that seven million Syrian children live in poverty.³¹

In refugee communities, the conditions are not much better. Almost all of the 2.4 million child refugees from Syria are poor. Only the minority finds their way to refugee camps. More than 75 per cent live among the already poor host communities.³² Since there are limitations on refugees working legally, children as young as three are working or begging to sustain families.³³

Yasmeen (12) used to be at the top of her class. Now she lives with her uncle in a crowded apartment in Lebanon paying a high rent of US\$ 300 per month. "I get up every day at 4 am, work for ten hours to earn six dollars," she says. "Look at my hands – they are rough as rocks. And my back aches. Do you know how it feels to live like this when you are 12?"

Many girls are forced to marry at an ever young age.

"I will stand by my daughter. I will make her understand my situation and hopefully I will motivate her to study. I won't allow her to marry young and I won't allow her not to continue her education," says Qamar (14) who got married at the age of 11.

A third of all Syrian marriages in camp settings in Jordan are among girls under 18 – triple the rates of 2011.³⁴ Girls as young as 12 and 13 are becoming mothers– damaging their bodies.

Of the families interviewed in areas where conflict is the heaviest, 98 per cent reported signs of profound psychological and emotional distress in their children.³⁵ Young children are more likely to have nightmares, wet their beds or regress in their normal development. Older children, particularly adolescents, share their younger siblings' fear and loneliness, but they are more likely to experience frustration, anger and shame.³⁶

Loss of dignity was a common theme for young people, whose lives have been turned upside down. Boys were particularly vulnerable, and almost half as likely to admit difficult feelings to friends and family.³⁷ One in five teenagers surveyed inside Syria reported such high frustration at their family circumstances that they considered joining gangs or fighting in the war. Girls reported a more direct experience of powerlessness ranging from feelings of insecurity outside the home and parental restrictions within it. One fifth of the girls said they barely ever went outside.³⁸

"I used to wake to the sound of birds, not bullets," says Rawan (17) a refugee in Turkey. "I used to go to a school that had walls, a roof and a desk. I used to see my loved ones every day. Here I cannot even go out to see my brothers." Her friend Aya says they see each other rarely, because they don't go out. "Some parents don't send their daughters to school because the classes are mixed," she explains.

Dr. Rabih El Chammy, Director of Lebanon's Mental Health Department, understands what Syrian young people are going through – based on years of experience working in refugee settings and with child survivors of conflict. "We see the psychological impact of conflict as one of the biggest factors hindering children's learning and their social development," he says.

UNICEF and its partners have established 597 child-friendly spaces in Syria and neighbouring countries, providing a safe haven where over 1.3 million children are given the opportunity to play and access specialized services based on their needs.³⁹

²⁷ UNDP, Human Development Report, 2015

²⁸ Syria Centre for Policy Research, UNDP and UNRWA, Alienation and Violence, 2015

²⁹ ibid

³⁰ United Nations, Syria Response Plan and Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, 2016

³¹ UNICEF's calculations based on Syria Centre for Policy Research, UNDP and UNRWA, Alienation and Violence, 2015

³² UNHCR, Stories from Syrian Refugees, 2016

³³ Inter-agency Assessment of Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, 2013

³⁴ UNICEF, A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan, 2014

³⁵ UNICEF and International Medical Corps, Mental Health/Psychosocial and Child Protection for Syrian Refugee Adolescents in Za'tari Refugee Camp, July 2013

³⁶ Mercy Corps, Syria Adolescents Assessment, No One Hears Us, January 2015

³⁷ UNICEF and International Medical Corps, Mental Health/Psychosocial and Child Protection for Syrian Refugee Adolescents in Za'tari Refugee Camp, July 2013

³⁸ Inter-agency Assessment of Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, June 2013

³⁹ UNICEF, Reaching Children Affected by Syria Crisis, 2016



©UNICEF JORDAN/RAMTHA/2016/LYON
Qamar (13) playing with her daughter Raneem (1) in Ramtha, Jordan

GLOBAL COMMUNITIES IN DANGER

- **Region hosts eight times the number of Syrian refugees as Europe**
- **One in every five people in Lebanon is Syrian, and one in seven in Jordan**
- **Turkey hosts more than half of all Syrian refugees**

Seven year-old Malak has thin arms and long brown hair that she flicks back each time she smiles. She's missing a tooth, and is proud of the one growing in its place. But when the men in her rubber dingy started throwing her clothes and bags into the icy Mediterranean, she prepared to die. "We were about to drown, my mother and I," she says. "But then we saw a light from the fishermen and they took us to the shore."

Malak has no idea what awaits her in Europe. She is still mourning what she left behind. "Once I had so many friends," she says. "I wish they had all come with me."

In the long-term, meeting commitments to Malak and all Syria's children will take peace, a restoration of their dignity, and fair treatment from the international community. For five years, families across a fragile region have provided a welcome that wealthier countries have yet to match.

The poorest communities have taken in millions of Syrians, sharing their electricity, water supplies, classrooms and homes. Many of these towns and villages - particularly those in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq - already host displaced families from other conflicts in the region.

The number of Syrian refugees in these neighbouring countries is staggering - more than eight times the number in Europe. Children are paying a high price. One out of every seven people living in Jordan is now Syrian. In Lebanon, it's one in five.⁴⁰ In the Turkish province of Killis, the number of Syrian refugees has exceeded the number of the local population.

As host governments work to extend basic health and education services to refugees, local children sometimes find those same services harder to access.

Iraq, with 300,000 Syrian refugees, is embroiled in a violent conflict of its own. More than 3.3 million Iraqis have been internally displaced.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Jordan has been reclassified as the second most water scarce country in the world.⁴²

Children across continents - in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and North America - are now touched by Syria's crisis. Many long for home and hope to return. They wish for nothing more than a better life, one with prospects and dignity.

"How the world responds to this movement of Syrian children and families is fundamental to prospects for peace," says Dr. Maha Yahya, Senior Associate at the Carnegie Middle East Centre and an expert on citizenship, pluralism and social justice. "These children will one day return to what is left of their country. And they will need outside help to engage positively, to unlearn the lessons of a divisive war and recommit to living in a diverse society."

It's what Syrian children themselves want, more than anything else.

In the Greek island of Lesbos, little Malak agrees. "I will go back," she says. "And I will make Syria like it was before."

⁴⁰ UNHCR, 2015

⁴¹ UNICEF, Humanitarian Situation report, January 2016

⁴² Joint Report of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN Women, and WFP in Jordan, 2015



AGAINST ALL ODDS

The challenges and champions of humanitarian response

The humanitarian response to Syria's crisis began as a traditional emergency relief programme for UNICEF. Five years on, it has grown into the largest response in recent years.

"What matters is the modality of implementation. I urge all of you to have Syrians at the forefront of the strategies – and women particularly. Speak to us, please. Don't just speak in our names," says Dr. Rouba Mhaisse, Founder of Sawa for Syria, an initiative in Lebanon that works on integrating refugees and host societies.

The international community has provided over US\$ 11 billion since 2011 to support Syria's families and the struggling region. Donations have increased 55 fold from when the crisis began – up from US\$ 40 million to over US\$ 2 billion in 2015.⁴³

For children reached by aid, the response has made a difference. Many lives have been saved, and others changed for the better. In 2015 alone, UNICEF and a large network of local and international partners were able to deliver live-saving nutrition and hygiene supplies to over a million women and children inside Syria, including 750,000 in hard-to-reach areas, bring school supplies and support to 1.8 million children region-wide, help 730,000 out-of-school children keep up with learning in their camps and poor communities, and to improve water supplies and sanitation for seven million.⁴⁴

Each child and parent helped through the international relief effort was able to recover something important – health, learning or optimism. Those who have worked hardest, and gone furthest to support Syrian families have been Syrians themselves, as well as their regional neighbours.

Hamid (17) volunteers at a child friendly space in a refugee camp in Turkey. "I help them clutch onto life," he says, as he cherishes his dream of becoming a doctor.

Susan, a mother of three, volunteers to persuade women to vaccinate their children against polio in the war-torn southern town of Dara'a. "Why should children suffer?" she says, as she waits to speak to mothers queuing to collect water.

Azzam (22) lives under bombardment in Aleppo. As a youth volunteer, he helps children traumatized by the fighting work out their feelings of despair.

Muzoon (17) walked miles through the Za'atari Refugee Camp to persuade families not to marry off their daughter, but send them to school instead. "I hear about lost generations, but I am not lost," she says. "I am here, and ready to learn all I can."

And Reema, displaced four times, teaches children in an area under siege inside Syria. She bursts into tears as she tells us that on that very same morning she got news that her brother was killed. "But this is where I find peace and distraction, with the children"

Against all odds, it is people like Hamid, Susan, Azzam, Muzoon and Reema, who represent millions of Syrians ready to do whatever they can to help themselves and their people. Their experiences are a testament to the resilience of the human spirit.



⁴³ OCHA, Financial Tracking Service, Syrian Arab Republic, 2016

⁴⁴ UNICEF, Reaching Children Affected by Syria Crisis, 2016

CROSSING LINES OF FIRE

Delivering humanitarian assistance to areas under siege and across conflict lines can be a combination of frustration, persistence, teamwork and immense risk. UNICEF works on the ground in Syria with UN sister agencies, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other non-governmental and community based organisations.

But delivering assistance in Syria can often be perilous. Since the crisis began, 85 humanitarian workers have been killed including 19 since January 2016.⁴⁵

“As we waited again that winter day, I was watching the buildings around us - dark, empty, their walls pock-marked by bullets and huge gaping holes. The road was littered with garbage. Al-Waer used to be an up and coming part of Homs. It’s now a desolate place. When the convoy finally reached the area, the scene changed to one of total jubilation. Children, women, young and old came out to celebrate this breakthrough, despite the bitter cold. Many asked ‘why did it take so long?’”

*Geoffrey Ijumba,
Head of UNICEF Field Office in
Homs*

KEEPING HOPE ALIVE

In 2013, organisations came together to highlight the unprecedented plight of Syria’s children, articulating concerns about the possible loss of a generation of children to violence and displacement.

The result was the “No Lost Generation Initiative” – an alliance of international agencies, donors, governments and NGOs committed to safeguarding the future of Syria’s children, adolescents and youth.

The initiative became a call to take action and protect the intellectual and emotional development of a young generation, to prevent their prospects of becoming another casualty of war.

At the heart of the initiative lies the belief that children hold the key to their own recovery, and that their potential must be preserved in trust for a peaceful future. Since its launch, it has inspired partnerships across Syria and the region – to restore learning and provide opportunities for young people to participate in recovery and reconciliation.

Through the initiative, UNICEF and partners have been able to reach 1.8 million children with learning supplies, 717 schools have been built and rehabilitated and 730,000 children have attended non-formal learning centres in their camps and poor communities. The initiative was accompanied by extensive advocacy efforts to shed a light on abuse of children’s dignity – the silent toll of child labour, child marriage and domestic violence.⁴⁶

Thanks to a massive region-wide effort, access to education among Syrian refugees in the five host countries has increased from 33 per cent in January 2015 to 53 per cent in December 2015.⁴⁷

“Lebanon’s “Reaching All Children with Education” strategy was the most ambitious plan for refugee education anywhere in the world. In just two years, we had to achieve the kind of growth in school places that another country would struggle to achieve in 20. We guaranteed a place in our regular public school day for up to 65,000 Syrian children, learning alongside their 200,000 Lebanese peers. And then we opened second shifts in 250 public schools across the country, just for refugees where over 100,000 children enrolled in the 2015-2016 school year.

Schools hosting Syrian refugees received extra support – rehabilitation, training for teachers, and supplies for Syrian and Lebanese students. For those children who could not enroll, we provided non-formal education. This was a true partnership – between international organisations, donor governments and our own education system.”

*Fadi Yarak,
Director General at Lebanon’s
Ministry of Education and Higher
Education*

⁴⁶ NLG update for the London Pledging Conference, February 2016

⁴⁷ Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and Education Sector Working Group

⁴⁵ Report of the Secretary General to the Security Council, February 2016



FIVE STEPS TO PROTECT A VITAL GENERATION

“I don’t know how I see the future. I am kind of in between hopeful and hopeless. Maybe in time I will be able to answer this question. I just wish there was such a power on earth that could bring back the things I have lost.”

Mohammed (13), a Syrian refugee in Turkey

Over the next five years, Mohammed will leave his childhood behind. He hopes his adult life will begin in peace.

For today’s young Syrians, it is not too late. They continue to hope for a life of dignity and possibility. They still cherish dreams of peace, and have the chance to fulfil them.

But that depends on all of us. Earlier this year, 160 humanitarian organisations called for long overdue action. The joint message was simple “More than ever before, the world needs to hear a collective public voice calling for an end to this outrage. Because this conflict and its consequences touch us all.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Joint Appeal to end the suffering in Syria, January 2016

Starting today, and for as long as necessary, there are five steps that all those with responsibility towards Syria’s children can take for this vital generation.

1 PROTECT CHILDREN

Ending the violations of children’s rights in Syria has to be a priority, including guarantees for children’s safety and protection, while the search for peace continues. All parties to the conflict in Syria have an obligation to respect International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law, including immediately ending all attacks on education, health and water facilities, and preventing the killing and maiming, abduction, torture, detention, sexual violence and recruitment of children.

2 LIFT THE SIEGES AND IMPROVE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Inside Syria, humanitarian access should not be a solitary gesture of good will. Only through all parties to the conflict fulfilling their obligations to enable immediate, unhindered and sustained access to all hard to reach and besieged areas can humanitarian teams reach trapped children in need – not only to provide them with essential supplies, but also to be

able to undertake needs assessments, provide on-site treatment, and evacuate wounded and sick children.

3 INVEST IN LEARNING

UN agencies and NGOs partners of the “No Lost Generation Initiative” have appealed for US\$ 1.4 billion in 2016 to support around four million children and youth inside Syria and in neighbouring countries access formal and non-formal education opportunities. Providing out of school children with learning is one of the most significant challenges.

4 RESTORE DIGNITY

Lasting peace depends on restoring dignity to Syrian children and protecting their rights, no matter where they are. To let go of despair and pain, they need sustainable and consistent support. They need to reconnect to a nurturing society. This means developing clear and fair policies to protect children and help them

cope with the extreme stress they face.

5 TURN PLEDGES INTO COMMITMENTS

Funding targets are not being met while children’s needs continue to grow. Humanitarian appeals for Syria in 2015 were only half-funded. Pledges made during the London donors’ conference last February are welcome and timely. Now they need to be delivered in full, and soon. Shattered cities cannot be rebuilt in a year – and neither can shattered lives. For 2016, UNICEF has appealed for US\$ 1.1 billion to continue providing children inside Syria and in neighbouring countries with the assistance they need. To date, UNICEF has received only US\$ 74 million.





FOR MORE INFORMATION

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