

CHILDHOOD IN THE SHADOW OF WAR: Voices of Young Syrians

Executive Summary

The unrelenting conflict in Syria has killed an estimated 300,000 people in the country— including nearly 12,000 children.¹ It has left 6.5 million people displaced within the country. Millions live in areas difficult to access with humanitarian aid, and an estimated 4.8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance live in hard to reach and besieged areas.²

Now in its fifth year, the armed conflict in Syria continues to increase in intensity. More and more civilians are being driven from their homes to seek safe shelter elsewhere in the country, or, increasingly, outside of Syria's borders. The conflict is spreading to and linking with violence in Iraq, including that wrought by Islamic State incursions, which have destabilized much of Iraqi territory and complicated the conflict in Syria.

The conflict has led to one of the largest movements of refugees in recent history. By the end of 2014 there were 3 million persons fleeing the conflict in Syria. By late-2015 there are 4.29 million Syrian refugees registered with UNCHR.³ Over 2 million or 51% of Syrian refugees are children under the age of 18 years.⁴ In Iraq 3.2 million Iraqis are displaced alongside Syrian refugees.⁵

Impact on Children

In addition to the risks of injury and death such violence presents, exposure to violence and lack of essential services can have enormously detrimental impacts on child development and well-being. Millions of families cannot access adequate life-saving assistance such as food, shelter and healthcare. For children, lack of access to education, loss of friends and family members and acute stress in their households after prolonged periods of displacement can have further, profound impacts on their development.

Save the Children is particularly concerned with the significant impacts on development and psychosocial well-being the conflict and resulting displacement have had on the children and families we are supporting.

¹ Save the Children. *Education Under Attack in Syria*. September 2015. P. 5.

² UN OCHA. <http://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/syria-country-profile/about-crisis>. Accessed 11/08/2015.

³ Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>, accessed 11/08/2015.

⁴ Save the Children. *Syria Crisis Response Dashboard*, updated 13 September 2015.

⁵ IOM Iraq. *Displacement Tracking Matrix: DTM Round XXVIII September 2015*.

Response and needs

Save the Children has been working in the region for decades and has mounted a robust response to the crisis within Syria, as well as in the neighbouring countries hosting the largest number of refugees. As the intensity of the crisis continues to increase we at Save the Children recognize the need to intensify its efforts, as well as adapt them to changing needs.

As of September 2015 Save the Children has reached over 2 million children with critical services in Syria, as well as in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, but the needs are increasing. Regional funding for the Syria crisis response stands at well under 50% of what is needed to provide an adequate response, and more cuts are inevitable. Without a renewed effort to adequately fund humanitarian responses in the region, the global community will fail the children of Syria and neighbouring countries.

About this report

Through the voices of children, parents and staff working in the region this report presents a glimpse into the struggles faced by refugee and displaced families in the region. What is highlighted, however, is the ability of children – with appropriate and sustained support – to mitigate the impacts of adversity and move forward with a sense of purpose and possibility in their lives.

Save the Children and all other humanitarian actors can and must do more, and require the appropriate funding to do so. The rights and needs of children and families in all neighbouring countries affected by the Syria crisis must be better met. Child and youth issues must take a more prominent place on the political agenda, and funding for quality initiatives that support and protect children and youth must be dramatically increased.

Child protection is a life-saving response in humanitarian emergencies, of which psychosocial support is a key element. Resilience and psychosocial well-being in boys and girls can be promoted through multi-layered interventions that enhance healthy development. However, protection remains significantly underfunded with only 26% of requested protection funding for the Syria response secured as of October 2015.⁶

Key Recommendations:

Key recommendations are presented at the end of this report to enhance the child protection and psychosocial response to the Syrian crisis in the region. These emphasize

- The need for a concerted political effort to end the conflicts in the region
- Address policy barriers that refugee and displaced families face in raising their children and living with dignity

⁶ Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015 – 2016. *Regional Monthly Update – August 2015: Protection*.

- Ensuring that donors fund, and humanitarian actors implement, evidence-based and appropriate programming that meets the developmental needs of children; especially the most vulnerable.