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HITTING ROCK BOTTOM

HOW 2016 BECAME THE WORST YEAR FOR SYRIA'S CHILDREN



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for every child

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No child is spared the horror of the war in Syria, where children come under attack on a daily basis. Violence is everywhere, ripping apart places that children thought were safe -- places that should be safe: schools, hospitals, playgrounds, public parks and children's own homes.

Children have paid the heaviest price in this six-year war and their suffering hit rock bottom last year in a drastic escalation of violence.

At least 652 children were killed in 2016 alone - a 20 per cent increase from 2015¹ - making 2016 the worst year for Syria's children since child casualties have been formally documented. In less than one week in Aleppo, 223 children were injured and 96 were killed last September². Doctors were forced to leave children with low chances of survival to die because of limited capacity and lack of basic medical supplies³. Challenges to access in Syria stand in the way of getting the full scope of children's suffering and of responding quickly, effectively and to scale.

Beyond the bombs, bullets and explosions, countless children are dying in silence from preventable diseases that could easily be cured. But in today's Syria few doctors are left and access to medical care and facilities is increasingly difficult.

Coping mechanisms are eroding fast and families are taking extreme measures just to be able to survive. Child labour, early marriage and child recruitment are on the rise.

In 2016, over 850 children⁴ were recruited and used in the conflict – more than double the number in 2015. Children are being recruited at an ever younger age and are increasingly taking part in combat roles, including in extreme cases as executioners, suicide bombers or prison guards. These figures represent only verified instances and understate the scope of the problem.

The most vulnerable among Syria's children are 2.8 million⁵ in hard-to-reach areas including 280,000 living under siege where civilian movement, the flow of essential supplies and lifesaving humanitarian aid is heavily restricted. In some cases medical supplies have been removed from convoys, denying treatment to civilians which is a violation of international humanitarian law.

More than 1.7 million children inside Syria are out of school⁶. One in three schools⁷ cannot be used because they are destroyed, damaged, sheltering displaced families or being used for military purposes. In 2016, at least 87 attacks on schools and education personnel were recorded and more than 255 children were killed while at school or near school⁸. Some schools were attacked repeatedly like in Idlib, where 26 children and six teachers were killed in the heaviest attack on a school last year⁹.

Water has been used as a weapon of war by all parties to the conflict. In 2016, the UN documented 30 deliberate water cuts in Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, Raqqqa and Dara'a. Most recently, running water supply to Damascus was cut off for over four weeks, depriving millions of people¹⁰ of their access to safe water and raising the risk of waterborne diseases especially among children. At distribution points, children queued for hours in freezing temperatures to fetch water for their families.

After six years of war, nearly 6 million children now depend on humanitarian assistance, with almost half forced to flee their homes. Some children have

been displaced up to seven times before reaching safety. Over 2.3 million Syrian children are now living as refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq. Many took the "death boats" crossing the Mediterranean to Europe.

Neighbouring countries, fragile themselves due to instability and economic stagnation, have received 80% of all refugees from Syria¹¹. Across the borders in neighboring countries, while children and families are relatively safe from shelling and violence, they face other challenges to meet their needs. Many families are not able to send their children to school. Syrian refugees are not officially allowed to work, making them dependent on international aid, and pushing children- who are much too young- into the workforce, often in low paying and hazardous jobs or begging. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2011, thousands of children¹² crossed Syria's borders unaccompanied or separated from their families. The situation of more than 47,000 people stranded at the no man's land near Syria's southeastern border with Jordan continues to deteriorate.

Restoring hope for Syria's children

Thankfully, amid the horrors and suffering, there are many remarkable stories of children and families determined to pursue their hopes, dreams and aspirations for a better future. They are adamant to safeguard their dignity.

Last year, some 12,600 school children crossed active conflict lines in Syria to sit for their final school exams¹³. They came from hard-to-reach areas and some travelled for days. The bravery of children and teachers is extraordinary. They insist on learning by transforming basements, caves and old barns into schools and playgrounds. If enough desks are not available, children rotate the only available ones in makeshift schools or sit on the floor, determined, against all the odds, to learn.

In refugee host countries, governments have made significant commitments to provide every Syrian child with a place in school, with double shift schools, registration drives and catch up classes.

Children affected by the crisis in Syria continue to dream of a brighter future.

We asked a few of these children about the "Syria they want." Rami (12) a refugee in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley said: "I wish to live in Syria again. I wish for the war to end and for wars all over the world to end. I wish for peace so every child can live in their country. I wish to become a teacher so I can teach the children in need."

The dreams, hopes and aspirations of Syria's children can come true if we continue to help them.

They are Syria's future. We must support each and every child.

WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN IN NEED¹⁴?

5.8 million
in need inside Syria

2.8 million
in hard to reach areas

280,854
in besieged areas¹⁵

2.3 Million Syrian Children

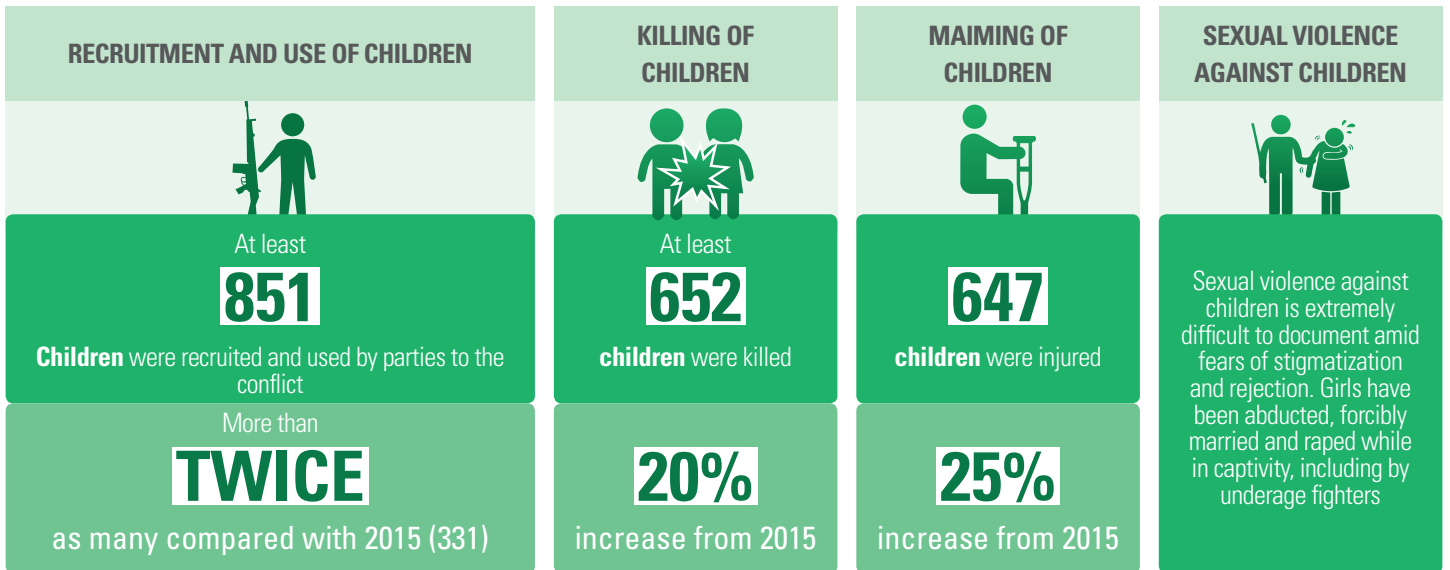
Refugees in Turkey, Lebanon,
Jordan, Iraq and Egypt¹⁶

“The prolonged siege of Madaya is pushing people to the brink – some seeing death as the only way out. A mother of five who felt she could no longer feed and care for her children; a 21-year-old newly-wed who had lost her husband in the war and couldn’t find the strength to continue alone; a 16-year-old girl who could not see a future for herself. All of them tried to take their own lives – a last resort – an escape from their daily horror. Coping mechanisms of people are eroding.”

Mirna Yacoub, former UNICEF Deputy Representative in Syria on a convoy to besieged Madaya.

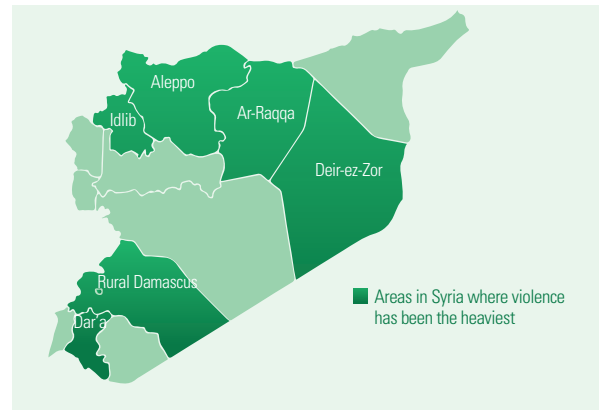
GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN 2016¹⁷

Grave violations against children are committed by all parties to the conflict in Syria. UNICEF has verified this data. Actual numbers are likely to be higher:



“A father in Aleppo lives with the trauma of letting his daughters go to school. They left their makeshift home one morning with their schoolbags on their backs. Only their lifeless bodies returned after a shell slammed into their classroom.”

Geert Cappelaere, UNICEF Regional Director, Statement to the UN Security Council



EDUCATION



87

attacks on schools and education personnel in 2016¹⁸



255

Children were killed or injured at or near school¹⁹.



1.75

MILLION

children out of school in Syria²¹



530.000

Syrian **refugee children** out of school

1 in 3
SCHOOLS IN SYRIA

DESTROYED

DAMAGED

SHELTERING
DISPLACED
PEOPLE

USED FOR
MILITARY
PURPOSES²⁰



“ I have never been to school but can imagine what a classroom looks like. I'd love to go to school, so that one day I can become a teacher. ”

Assia, 10, refugee in Lebanon, has never been to school



©UNICEF/Lebanon/2016/Romenzi

HEALTH



In 2016, over

338

attacks²² on hospitals and medical personnel



More than

HALF

of public health facilities are closed or partially operational²³

Inside Syria, Immunization levels have dropped from

over
80%
pre-conflict

to

41%
in 2015²⁴



Trauma is the cause of

30%

of permanent disability²⁵

“ After six years of crisis in Syria, the health sector is facing critical challenges hitting civilians the hardest. Targeting of health facilities and health staff increased sharply in 2016, killing and injuring hundreds of medical personnel and civilians. Very few health facilities still function, making it even harder for people to get the medical assistance they urgently need. Children are missing out on their routine immunizations, exposing them to the risk of disease. ”

Dr. Bachir Tajaldin, Internist

NUTRITION

INSIDE SYRIA



1/4

of **children** are stunted in hard-to-reach and besieged areas²⁶



Across Syria

7

MILLION

people are food insecure²⁷



2.4

MILLION

people are at risk of becoming food insecure²⁸

REFUGEES



40%

of refugee **children** under the age of five in

JORDAN

living in camps are anaemic³¹



1 IN 4

children and one in four women of childbearing age are anaemic²⁹



Almost

10%

of women of childbearing age are acutely malnourished³⁰



1/4

of Syrian refugee **children** in

LEBANON

are anaemic³²

“ Inadequate food as a result of the long siege is leading to poor nutrition among children and is weakening their immune system. Ordinary diseases that could easily be treated are now leading to death. Joud a 15-year old girl from Deir Ez Zor died from a respiratory infection. That could have been easily treated if it wasn't for her deteriorating immune system. ”

UNICEF staff member



Two brothers feeding fire in a primitive wood stove so they can get a hot meal at this cold day in a besieged area near Damascus. One of Syria's harshest winters has arrived in the war-torn country leaving millions of children under the mercy of a harsh weather that adds to their suffering.

©UNICEF/2016/Syria/Rural Damascus/Amer Alshami

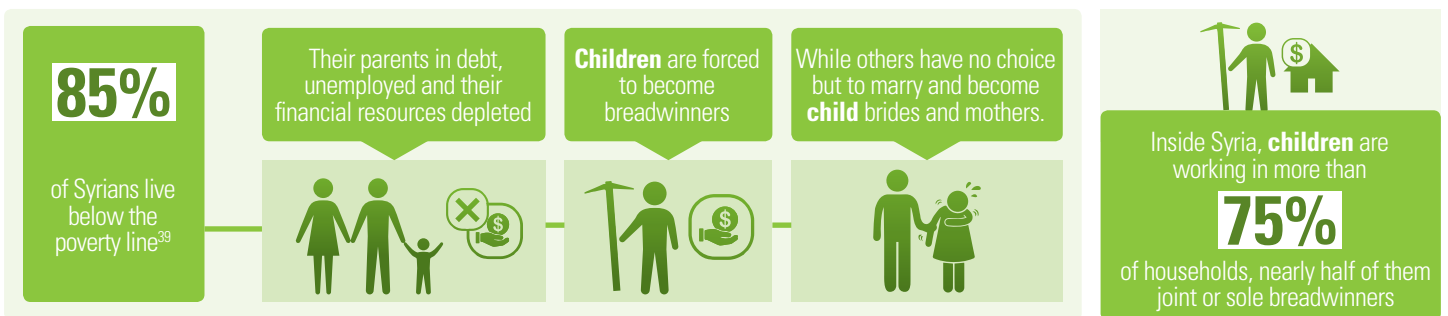
WATER AS A WEAPON OF WAR



“ Children and families in Aleppo are facing a catastrophic situation. These water cuts are coming amid a heat wave, putting children at a grave risk of waterborne diseases ”

Hanaa Singer, UNICEF Representative in Syria, August 2016

CHILD LABOUR³⁸



Refugee Children's types of work

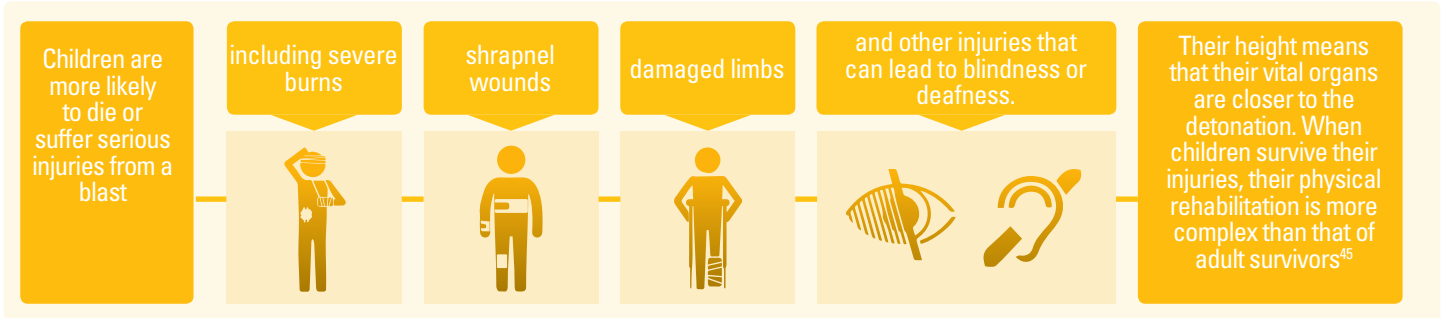


“ I don't know how to read or write. I only know how to draw the sky, the sea and the sun. I've waited tables, I served beans, corn, hummus, water pipe, potatoes, seeds. I've cleaned the shop and served ice cream to children. I don't know how to fill the cone but I help Mohannad do it. I want to leave my house. It's like a prison ”

Fares, (6) a refugee in Lebanon



EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS AND UNEXPLODED REMNANTS OF WAR



Majed, 13, and Omar, 11, headed to a public park near their homes in East Aleppo to play and ride their bikes. The two children found a strange green metal object that looked like a soda can,

“I stepped on it, and it exploded. I was worried about Omar. Two men came and rushed us to the hospital. I watched Omar die in the car five minutes later... I will never forget that day” Majed, 13 years old.

UNICEF'S RESPONSE IN 2016

| Sector | Inside Syria | Sector | In Host Countries |
|---|---|--|---|
|  WASH | <p>14,418,231 people with improved and sustained access to safe drinking water and sanitation through infrastructure operation and maintenance services.</p> <p>825,447 individuals benefiting from access to lifesaving/emergency WASH facilities and services</p> |  WASH | <p>500,727 people accessed adequate quantity of safe drinking water in camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq</p> <p>435,701 people received hygiene promotion sessions in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq</p> |
|  HEALTH & NUTRITION | <p>851,196 children under the age of five vaccinated against polio</p> <p>1,659,290 people accessed primary healthcare outpatient consultations</p> <p>18,946 children treated for moderate acute malnutrition and severe acute malnutrition</p> <p>1,119,256 children and pregnant and lactating women screened for acute malnutrition</p> |  HEALTH & NUTRITION | <p>17,625,916 children under the age of five vaccinated against polio in Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt</p> <p>111,536 children supported to access routine immunization</p> |
|  EDUCATION | <p>3,160,090 children (5-17) in formal education reached with Back to Learning supplies (textbooks, stationery, and school bags)</p> <p>328,371 children accessed non-formal education opportunities</p> |  EDUCATION | <p>650,915 children enrolled in formal education in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq</p> <p>33,136 children enrolled in non-formal and informal education opportunities in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan</p> |
|  CHILD PROTECTION | <p>1,866,260 individuals reached with mine/ Explosive Remnants of War Risk Education activities</p> <p>630 children who are survivors or at risk received specialized child protection services</p> |  CHILD PROTECTION | <p>509,857 children benefited from structured sustained child protection or psychosocial support programmes</p> <p>37,583 children received specialized protection services (reunification, alternative or specialized care and services)</p> |
|  EARLY RECOVERY & LIVELIHOOD | <p>1,706 vulnerable families received regular cash/in-kind transfers, implementation began in October 2016</p> |  BASIC NEEDS | <p>19,317 vulnerable families received cash assistance in Jordan and Iraq</p> <p>263,782 persons received one-off emergency cash or cash voucher assistance in Turkey and Lebanon</p> |
|  NON-FOOD ITEMS | <p>672,392 children who received NFIs including seasonal clothing</p> | | |

On behalf of Syria's children, UNICEF is appealing for:

- **An immediate political solution to the conflict.** All parties to the conflict and those who have influence on them owe it to the children of Syria to put an end to this brutal war once and for all. It is time for the warring parties to realise that there are no winners in this conflict – children only suffer loss and devastation. The only way out of this horror is through negotiations with a primary consideration for the best interests and fundamental rights of Syrian boys and girl.
- **An end to all grave violations against children:** All grave violations⁴⁶ against children must stop and those committing them should be held accountable. Nothing justifies atrocities committed against children in a war that is not of their making. Civilian infrastructure including schools, playgrounds, clinics, hospitals and water facilities, should never become military targets.
- **Unconditional and sustained access to all children in need, including those living under siege.** Humanitarian workers should be able to deliver sustained and much needed aid for children, conduct assessments and train personnel all over Syria, no matter who controls the area. Sieges continue to be used as a medieval tactic of war in 13 areas across Syria.
- **Provide refugee host governments and communities** with sustainable and consistent support for all vulnerable children, regardless of their status. Assistance should continue supporting livelihoods for families in need through social protection, cash transfers and education. Increase support to the “No Lost Generation” initiative as a platform to empower children and young people to rebuild a peaceful future for Syria.
- **Continued financial support** – donors have been extremely generous in supporting UNICEF’s work inside Syria and in neighbouring countries. UNICEF is appealing for US\$1.4 billion to continue providing assistance to all children in need inside Syria and in neighbouring countries.





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Amid destruction and fire, our wound is deep

We want to say it loud, but our voice is weak
We may be children, but our cry comes from the heart
We want to erase fear and be the change
We want to say it loud: everything is possible

Someone listen, someone hear
We want our childhood back
Together we can hope
We will be stronger and grow
With pain, fear and tears we write this song
Our hearts beat back to life

Our faces will glow and light this long darkness
Dreams we built together will all come true
We want to say it loud: everything is possible

Our smiles are everywhere
Our hearts are beating again
Together we can hope
We will be stronger and grow
With pain, fear and tears we write this song

Our hearts beat back to life
back to life

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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