



LOST IN A DECADE



Why the world must act now to save a generation of internally displaced children from the deadly legacies of Syria's war

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Maryam and her sister were displaced after they lost their father 3 years ago. They now live in a camp in the northern countryside of Idlib, near the town of Patenta

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FOREWORD

Brothers and sisters, while I am grateful you have chosen to read this Human Appeal report, I must begin by expressing my sorrow that it even has to exist.

Ten years of brutal war has pushed a generation of Syrians past tipping point. Millions are displaced and unable to return home, countless friends and family members have been lost, and those lucky enough to survive are starving and freezing in makeshift tents. Children have been robbed of their childhoods, some before they are even born, knowing only a world full of tents and no hope of a stable future.

Human Appeal has been on the ground in Syria since the start of the conflict, doing our best to negate the impact of conflict on vulnerable people. We've provided food relief, WASH assistance, mobile health clinics, shelter support, and our Al Imaan Women & Children's Hospital has welcomed so many babies who we desperately strive to secure a better future for.

No child should reach the age of 10 and only have memories of drone strikes, streets filled with rubble, and parents going days without food just so they can eat scraps. But this is the reality faced by a generation of Syrians, lost to a decade of conflict that has its roots in a time before they were even born.

At Human Appeal we passionately believe that no child should have his or her life chances dictated by the luck of the draw. That's why we do what we do in Syria and across the globe. I urge you to read and remember the stories highlighted in this report. They should be our inspiration in ensuring that we never have to tell stories like theirs ever again.

Dr Mohamed Ashmawey
CEO of Human Appeal



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human Appeal is an international humanitarian and development organisation working across the globe to support the world's most vulnerable communities for 30 years. Since the Syrian conflict began, Human Appeal has been on the ground across the northwest supporting conflict-affected and displaced communities with maternal, paediatric and primary healthcare, nutrition assistance and emergency relief including food, shelter and seasonal support.

In this report, we utilise available data and first-hand case studies to demonstrate how internally displaced Syrian children are carrying the burden of the decade-long war's deadliest legacies - record hunger, growing protection threats and an education crisis - in the face of deadly COVID-19.

As the conflict marks its tenth brutal year, 2.6 million Syrian children remain internally displaced.¹ Hundreds of thousands have been born in the last decade never knowing the safety or security of a stable home.

Every day in Syria, children's rights are being violated. With 9 in 10 displaced families in poverty, negative coping mechanisms that directly impact children are rising - reducing food consumption, sending children to work, and early marriage.² Multiple displacements, school closures due to COVID-19, and the decimation of the education infrastructure have further stolen their right to learn.

Aid programmes remain chronically underfunded to meet the growing humanitarian needs in Syria, especially as the worsening economic crisis and currency depreciation grips the country, and millions of displaced children are being left unsupported.

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic is only further exposing the inadequacy of current efforts to address the world's worst displacement crisis.

Now more than ever must humanitarian responses to displacement invest in development that builds resilience and livelihoods to provide displaced families with the tools to build a future.

Whilst the global gaze is fixed on fighting COVID-19, Syria's future generations trapped in displacement must not be forgotten. They cannot be left to face another blistering summer or devastating winter in makeshift tents without access to basic services.

Human Appeal is calling upon governments, global aid organisations and the international community at large to reaffirm and uphold their commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Geneva Convention by renewing and scaling-up efforts to provide internally displaced Syrian children with what every child globally deserves - the chance to have a bright and stable future, free from harm.

Without urgent action, it is the nation's youth who will be left to face the present and future consequences of the ten-year war's most shocking legacies.



Children paddle in the floodwater that coursed through their camp in northwest Syria after heavy winter rains (February 2021)



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THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN CONFLICT

Protecting children around the world from harm in all its forms is morally and legally imperative. It is also fundamental in the pursuit of international peace and security. A number of global treaties and protocols have been established to ensure that the international community remains accountable for protecting the rights of children, particularly during armed conflict. All have been ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic.

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (1989)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is an international treaty establishing global standards to ensure the protection, survival, and development of all children, without discrimination. It was adopted by resolution 44/25 on 20th November 1989 at the Forty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly.³

Countries that ratify the treaty pledge to protect children from economic and sexual exploitation, violence, and other forms of abuse and to advance the rights of children to education, health care, and a decent standard of living.

The convention also addresses children's rights to a name and nationality, to be heard, to be fairly treated when accused of offenses, when deprived of parental care, and other rights. All rights are equally important, connected, and cannot be taken away from a child.

OPTIONAL PROTOCOL ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT (2002)

The optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 2002 in response to the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children, and the long term consequences it has for durable peace and security. It recognised the need to afford special protection to children in conflict, as well as the infrastructure supporting their development.

It condemns the targeting of children and direct attacks on schools and hospitals, and requires parties to conflict to take every feasible step to ensure that children below the age of eighteen do not take part in hostilities. Currently, 170 states have ratified the protocol.

THE SIX GRAVE VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN DURING ARMED CONFLICT

1. Killing and maiming of children
2. Recruitment or use of children as soldiers
3. Sexual violence against children
4. Abduction of children
5. Attacks against schools or hospitals
6. Denial of humanitarian access for children

6 VIOLATIONS AGAINST CHILDREN IN CONFLICT (1999)

In Council Resolution 1261 (1999) the United Nations Security Council established six grave violations affecting children in conflict. They are based on their egregious nature and the severity of their consequences on the lives of children. The legal basis for these violations is enshrined in international law, which must be respected in times of armed conflict with special regard to children who often have no means to defend themselves against abuses. Signatories to the resolution are required to respect, protect and fulfil the full range of children's economic, social and cultural rights as well as political and civil.



TRAPPED IN A CYCLE OF HUNGER



Maryam lives with her four siblings, grandparents and mother in a small tent that does not protect them from the cold winter. Each morning, Maryam and her younger brother Ibrahim collect straw and plastic scraps to burn to keep warm.



The Syrian conflict has fuelled food insecurity on a monumental scale. Even before the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity was worsening with each passing year, but now the spread of the virus has plunged so many more Syrian families into hunger. 12.4 million Syrians, almost 60 percent of the population, currently lack access to sufficient food – a record high since the conflict began.⁴ It is estimated that 80 percent of the 1.4 million Syrians who will not survive without urgent food assistance are displaced.⁵

Internally displaced Syrians – 80 percent of whom are women and children – are facing exponential challenges to accessing food.

Multiple displacements due to unabated violence and bombings, further loss of livelihoods and movement restrictions due to COVID-19, and a deepening economic crisis are all fuelling mass hunger amongst the most vulnerable segment of the population.

Displaced families who have lost everything – their loved ones, homes, life savings, jobs – are without the means to earn a living to purchase sufficient food. In northwest Syria, more than three quarters of displaced heads of household are unemployed or have no stable source of income.⁶ Many have been forced to take out loans; more than 50 percent of households have taken on debt since displacement, primarily to buy food.⁷

The economic crisis and COVID-19 have caused food prices to skyrocket, further reducing household purchasing power and pushing displaced families into extreme poverty.

The economic fallout of COVID-19, including loss of employment, especially daily wage labour, deterioration in access to markets and disruptions to supply chains, has pushed the prices of food and commodities up.

In June 2020, the standard reference World Food Programme food basket cost more than the entire monthly salary of the highest paid Syrian government official at 84,095 SYP - more than a three-fold increase in just 8 months.⁸ By November, the cost of a food basket hit SYP 99,243 - the highest recorded price since monitoring began in 2013.⁹

Without the means to afford even a basic meal, displaced families are relying on aid to survive, but funding shortfalls for humanitarian food and nutrition programmes is trapping them in a cycle of hunger.

The grim destitution facing displaced families has pushed them into negative coping mechanisms. Humanitarian actors on the ground are reporting an increase in women and children resorting to desperate measures to survive, such as searching for food in rubbish containers and landfills. Moreover, instances of displaced parents forced to ration low quality food and skipping meals are daily occurrences and this is directly impacting the health of their children.

Chronic malnutrition among children reached some of its highest rates in Syria in 2020, with 1 in 8 suffering from stunting. Of 4.6 million Syrians in need of nutrition assistance in 2020, 74 percent were under the age of five.¹⁰

In the northwest, a region hosting more than 1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) after airstrikes bombarded Idlib at the start of 2020, the situation is even bleaker; more than a third of children are estimated to be stunted, or chronically malnourished.¹¹ Moreover, the number of children requiring hospitalisation for complications from severe acute malnutrition between January and October 2020 was three times higher than during the same period in 2019.

The chronic hunger facing internally displaced children right now is devastating, and the long-term health implications will greatly hinder their future development.

Increased emergency food aid coupled with robust livelihood opportunities must be implemented so that internally displaced families can build a sustainable income to feed themselves long term – a most basic and essential human right.



250%

rise in the price of a WFP standard food basket in November 2020 compared to 2019



3 in 4

Syrians in need of nutrition assistance are under five



1 in 3

children in northwest Syria are stunted



60%

funding shortfall for food and nutrition cluster programmes in 2020



3x

more child hospital admissions for severe acute malnutrition at the end of 2020 than 2019

YOUSEF & LUBAIDA'S STORY

Yousef (6) and his sister Lubaida (7) live in Bra'im Abi Al-Feda in the northern Idlib countryside. They suffer from severe growth deficiency and osteoporosis due to malabsorption syndrome, meaning they are unable to absorb nutrients from their diets. Their father, Muhammad, is unable to provide them with the nutrition they need as he cannot secure a stable income since they were displaced from eastern Homs six years ago.

"Whoever looks at Yousef and Lubaida thinks that they're two years old because they suffer from growth deficiency and malnutrition. But I'm not able to support their needs. They need atropine injections and nutritional supplements, but due to our displacement it's impossible to secure them. We've been displaced for 6 or 7 years now. The children hate the mud in the camp the most. The cold has also severely affected us here, and now the summer heat is coming."

Yousef and Lubaida need regular nutritional support and a rich diet due to their illnesses, but due to limited employment Muhammad has so far been unable to ensure that their needs are met.

"Their bones are very brittle and weak. They suffer from malabsorption but I can't get them the nutrition they need. There isn't much to eat. We sometimes receive some aid – bulgur and rice – but that's it. They haven't had meat for many months, not since last Ramadan. We couldn't even afford just 1 kilo of meat as it costs 50 for 60 liras. I work



Yousef, Lubaida and their father Muhammad were displaced six years ago from their home in Homs.

odd jobs if I find anything, but there aren't many job opportunities here."

Having already experienced the loss of two daughters due to similar conditions, Muhammad fears for Yousef and Lubaida's futures if he cannot find a stable income.

"What affects me most about seeing my children this way is that they have no future, it is lost. Without proper food and treatment, how could they. I see them being destroyed. Two of my girls died with similar conditions – malabsorption and malnutrition. Just four months ago another girl in our camp who was just 4 and a half years old died of similar things. I don't have anything to feed them.

"What affects me most about seeing my children this way is that they have no future, it is lost. Without proper food and treatment, how could they. I see them being destroyed."

"Our situation in the camp is like everyone else. We all rely on aid as there's no work, no opportunities. The camp's state is in a bad way and there's no services. People are just waiting for aid packages. There's also no school here so the children aren't learning."

Access to sufficient food is fundamental to lead a healthy and productive life. But without stable livelihood opportunities for those displaced by conflict, families like Muhammad, Yousef and Lubaida are forced to rely on inconsistent aid and it's trapping them in a cycle of hunger.

Human Appeal respects all those who we support. Therefore, whilst the stories are true, some names and personal details have been changed to protect privacy.

DEPRIVED OF PROTECTION



The protection crisis driven by the Syrian conflict has reached unprecedented heights. Verified incidences of the violation of all six grave violations against children are reported on an almost daily basis, revealing that the rights of children inside Syria not to be exploited or harmed are consistently not being met or protected.

Throughout the conflict, Syrian children have regularly been exposed to explosive weapon attacks and violence, and the killing, maiming, abuse, abduction and recruitment of children in armed conflict are some of the war's most horrific legacies.

It is estimated that a staggering 22,149 children have been killed since the conflict began, many by inherently indiscriminate and disproportionate methods.¹² And the killing of children has showed no sign of stopping. On average, one child was killed per day in Idlib due to escalating violence between April 2019 and January 2020 alone.¹³

The heavily eroded employment opportunities, skyrocketing prices and shortages of basic goods and services facing displaced families have led to a widespread deterioration of household coping mechanisms that have left children vulnerable to child labour.

Whilst child labour in Syria was an issue prior to the war, levels were low with 4 percent of children engaged in work between 2002 and 2011.¹⁴ The humanitarian crisis, now coupled with COVID-19, has exacerbated the problem. Children are being forced to work in conditions that are mentally, physically, and socially dangerous to support their families.

According to a recent multi-sectoral rapid needs assessment, child labour is prominent across the country, with incidents recorded in 12 of 14 governorates.¹⁵ In northwest Syria, a staggering 75 percent of IDP communities have reported child

labour as a top protection risk. This is due to greater challenges IDPs face in accessing sustainable livelihoods than host community households, resulting in children being sent to work to help alleviate financial constraints.¹⁶

Displaced boys are at greater risk of labouring than girls, and they are at greater risk of dropping out of school prematurely to participate in work, depriving them of their childhood, their potential and their dignity whilst harming their physical and mental development.

On the other side of the coin, displaced girls are facing a number of gendered protection threats that are limiting their freedoms and exposing them to sexual violence and abuse.

Intense overcrowding and lack of security in IDP camps and informal settlements are leaving girls vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment, causing immense psychological trauma. Fear of abuse is pushing them outside of humanitarian support by restricting their movements.

Moreover, extreme pressures and conflict-driven vulnerabilities have contributed to a distinct rise in the number of adolescent girls married before adulthood. Over 30 percent of registered marriages currently involve girls under eighteen.¹⁷ In 2020, 45 percent of IDPs recorded early marriage as a top three protection threat.¹⁸

The high level of violence against children, in all its forms, that has characterised the crisis represents a failure by all parties to the conflict to respect the special protections placed on children and violates the Geneva Conventions. They also raise concerns about the treatment of civilians in general and indicate violations of international humanitarian law, as well as the right to life and security of person.



22,149

children are estimated to have been killed since the conflict began



3 in 4

displaced children are at risk of increased violence and abuse due to rising extreme poverty



45%

of IDPs reported early marriage as a top 3 protection risk in 2020



12 in 14

governorates have reported instances of child labour

MAJED AND AYMAN'S STORY



Majed & Ayman must work to support their family.

Majed and Ayman* live with their sister and parents near Hezreh, northwest Syria. They were displaced from Homs three years ago, and have been living in tents ever since. The financial situation of the family is dire. Although their father is working as a mechanic, he is unwell and unable to earn enough to meet the family's needs, and so Majed and Ayman are working to help buy food. By sifting through rubbish piles in landfills they are collecting anything they can find to sell, and also regularly go to work with their father in a motor shop.

"My name is Ayman and I'm 11 years old. My brother Majed and I go to the rubbish dump every day to collect plastic bags, glass bottles and wood which my mother sells to buy us food to eat. Today we only collected some boxes. We didn't manage to sell anything. We didn't even get one lira, and nobody gave us food. I'm tired and hungry today. I know how to walk over the rubbish but sometimes I'm worried my little brother will fall in."

Ayman's younger brother Majed is just 9 years old. Instead of playing with their friends or going to school – things we would expect children their age to do – they have had their childhoods cut short so they can help their family eat.

"We work to help our father so he can buy us bread as he can't earn enough money. He's sick and his leg hurts him. He works in a motor shop and can't go alone so we go with him to help pass him tools and things. I go to work because I love my father and want to help our family. We have no vegetables, no fresh bread, nothing. We usually eat oil and thyme with stale bread which is hard to eat as it's so dry it falls apart but that's all we have. We haven't had meat in a long time, not since after Eid last year. To keep warm, my mum makes a fire in the tent using a lighter I found on the road."

Ayman and Majed's mother describes how their desperate financial situation

brought on by displacement has led to circumstances where her children must secure an income in dangerous ways to support the family.

“Our financial situation is beyond desperate. My husband can barely make a basic income to afford our many needs. I wait a week for him to be able to afford vegetables. Instead, we get the cheapest things we can find that last longer, like soup and rice. There aren’t any schools in the camp, and we cannot send the children privately. One student costs 200 liras – that’s more than we make in a month.

I don’t want my children to go out to work but they have to help their father with money. I wish we could pay off our debts. Enough so my children don’t have to work on the streets. My husband is proud; he would rather his children pick up garbage than beg for money.”

For Um-Mohammad, it’s heart-breaking to see her children leave early in the morning and return at sundown, hungry, tired and dirty. Even after hours spent collecting rubbish, often they do not make any money at all.

“It started when the children saw others gathering things, and they started going with them. The children leave at 7 or 8 o’clock in the morning. In winter when the daylight is short, it’s even earlier. They don’t come back until sundown. When they return they smell very bad because of the garbage and it upsets me. They need a full bath but if I want to bathe them, we have to do it outside with just a bowl. Praise be to god that none of them have gotten sick yet. Sometimes one of them gets cut on glass and I clean and wrap it. Thankfully it heals. Sometimes they get some money, often they don’t get anything. Today, they got one lira, sometimes they can get five or ten. Some people help them when they see how they look.”

Devoid of parental supervision and forced to interact with strangers, selling

on the streets is putting Ayman and Majed at even further risk of abuse, exploitation, and kidnapping.

“Sometimes the children tell me that someone has stopped them to ask them to get in their car and they get scared and run. What is their intention? We don’t know. I tell them to watch the road, only walk on the side and don’t fight with other children. Don’t talk to anyone and if someone tries to stop you don’t stop, I say. If someone tells you to ride in their car don’t. When other children go with them I tell them to watch over them and make sure they don’t get hurt. I’m afraid for my children, but what can I do?”

I see other kids are playing with their parents, but mine are going out to work. If I could, I would not let them go. I want them to stay by me. I’m scared for them but we can’t afford clothes or an education for them – nothing. What have these children seen for their age? Only work.”

Like most parents, Um Mohammad desperately wants her children to have a safe and happy future. She wants to be able to meet her family’s basic needs so Ayman and Majed never have to go out to work, and can be free to be children. But ongoing conflict is leaving them with few options at breaking out of poverty.

“Here in the camp is no life. We hope it changes for the better, and that we can return home. Here you don’t feel stable, or at home. It’s a temporary life. We are almost waiting for death, waiting for comfort. Hopefully we can go back to our families and loved ones who are still alive. I want our children to see their grandparents and friends again.

We haven’t ensured their future, nor their childhood. A child wants to play and learn with their friends. They want clean clothes and toys. That’s what a child wishes for. They want to have dreams for the future. They can’t have any of this. For my children, I wish for



A group of children rummage through landfills in search of items to sell, such as plastic and glass bottles.

them to be the best people, educated and smart, and to have a good future. I want them to be living happily married with their children – not like what has become of us now.”

For children forced to work to support their families, physically and psychologically perilous situations are a daily reality. Displaced families have been pushed into desperate measures due to extreme poverty, and so many feel they have been left with no choice but to leave their children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse just to put food on the table. So many displaced children engaged in labour like Ayman and Majed have had their rights violated and childhoods robbed by the Syrian conflict, and the world must act now to stop the cycle of abuse and violations against children in Syria.

“I’m scared for them but we can’t afford clothes or an education for them – nothing. What have these children seen for their age? Only work.”

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ROBBED OF AN EDUCATION

Although education is a fundamental right, universal access to quality education in Syria is a far cry from reality. A decade of brutal, indiscriminate airstrikes has damaged or destroyed 1 in 3 schools across the country, and resulted in the unemployment of at least 200,000 education workers.¹⁹ 2.4 million Syrian children are currently out of school, and many of them are displaced.²⁰

Syria's education system has been left in tatters. What's left is completely overwhelmed and unable to meet growing demands, exacerbated by constraints due to COVID-19.

Most education facilities are not equipped to provide protection and social distancing, and thousands of teachers have not been paid for more than a year, leading to widespread shortages of qualified personnel. For children living in informal camps or dilapidated buildings without access to running water, let alone electricity, the idea of remote learning online via a computer or mobile phone is impossible.

Before coronavirus hit, 1 in 3 Syrian children were out of school. Now, it is estimated that COVID-19 has pushed 50 percent more children out of formal learning in northern Syria.

Even those with access to schooling experience overcrowded classrooms, poor teaching quality and lack of learning materials. There is an urgent need for extra resources whilst education programmes remain chronically underfunded.

Access to education is critical to breaking out of poverty, but IDP children in Syria are disproportionately missing out on their right to learn due to a number of unique compounding factors.

The availability of adequate infrastructure in areas hosting large numbers of IDPs is extremely limited. 32 percent of collective shelters housing displaced families are estimated to be schools.²¹ This is leaving areas with significant numbers of IDPs, such as in the northwest, with fewer functional educational facilities, limiting access to education for their children.

Moreover, even where schools are physically accessible, the associated costs of sending a child to school is often unaffordable for displaced families in extreme poverty. With little or no sustained income, for many parents investing in education means sacrificing other critical needs such as food and shelter.

IDP children who do manage to attend school are learning in overcrowded classrooms in makeshift tents or damaged buildings vulnerable to the harsh weather with insufficient water and sanitation facilities, electricity, heating or ventilation.

Continued bombings and 6 months of national school closures have pushed IDP children further out of the education system. Some children will never return to a classroom as they are forced into child labour and early marriage to support their families.

Displaced children's access to education is not only critical to building valuable skills that can equip and empower them to break cycles of poverty, but can also protect them against exploitation.

Education can protect girls from early marriages, pregnancy and exploitation, and it allows greater economic empowerment and future work opportunities. For boys, staying in school can help to limit their exposure to child labour and recruitment into armed groups.



A young boy is learning to write on a piece of broken board at his tented school in a displacement camp in Idlib.



Internally displaced Syrian children not only need increased funding for education programmes, but also better integrated programmes that address the unique factors that limit their access to quality education.

Factors such as the cost to households and psychological barriers must be as equally considered as adequate teaching and availability of learning materials when creating education programmes for displaced children.

Only by recognising and responding to the nuanced needs of IDP children can the current education crisis be adequately addressed, and Syria's future generations be saved from missing out on development and economic opportunities in years to come.

"Incation has been stolen by the conflict. Without widespread and coordinated action to repair Syria's education system, the endemic lack of formal learning will continue to limit the development of Syria's youth, as well as generations far into the future.



2.45 million

Syrian children
are out of school



32%

of schools are
housing vulnerable
IDP families



50%

more children have
been pushed out of
education in northern
Syria due to COVID-19



1 in 3

schools in Syria are
destroyed or damaged
beyond use



Ahmad (7) was displaced from Saraqeb one year ago due to bombings. Before a teacher recently arrived at his camp in northern Idlib, he didn't go to school at all. Now he studies in a tent or under the trees with little resources but some pens and paper. The rain and cold is what Ahmad dislikes most about going to school now.

MAYADA'S STORY



Mayada is 12 years old and lives with her parents and four siblings in a single tent in a camp in the rural Idlib countryside in northwest Syria. Forced to flee her home in Al-Ma'arra due to airstrikes in 2019, she has been displaced multiple times over the course of two years. Like so many Syrian children, the story of Mayada's displacement is chequered by tragedy and loss.

"My mother doesn't work, and my father can't now because he was injured by a landmine when he was walking. His eye, leg, fingers and stomach were hurt. He struggles to walk.

I miss my best friend from back home. Last time I saw her was when the war struck our village. Now I don't see or talk to her anymore since we left. When I said goodbye to her, I told her that I loved her and I hoped we could come home and see each other again. I don't know where she is now."

For Mayada, adapting to her new life in a makeshift tent without protection from the harsh elements is a daily struggle.

"Our situation now is awful and life in the camp is very difficult. The hardest thing is living in the tent. There's 7 of us living here.

"Every 2 or 3 months we've had to move to a different village because of bombings and so I haven't been able to study."

The youngest is my 6-year-old brother who I spend most of my time with because he's the smallest."

"When it rains we get soaked and everything gets muddy. When the tent flooded this winter, we were all sick. My little brother got so sick we thought he wouldn't survive. In the summer we can't even sit inside the tents because it gets so hot, and scorpions get in. We can't fast during Ramadan because of the heat."

Among the grief and turmoil that the conflict has imposed on her life, Mayada's education has been severely impacted, and regular upheaval to her daily life due to ongoing violence has set her back from reaching her potential.

"I am only in the second grade because we've been displaced by airstrikes so many times. Every 2 or 3 months we've had to move to a different village because of bombings and so I haven't been able to study. Some villages we've moved to haven't had a school at all."

A warm, secure place to learn and a safe space to call home is what Mayada misses most about her life before her family were forced to flee their village.

"What I miss most about my old home is that it had nice furniture. Our clothes were pretty and clean. We had a garden too. I had a bed there and my friends and I would sit in it. We decorated it and drew hearts on it. We would play and laugh and brush our hair to go to school in the morning.

In my old village, we used to study in a nice class, with proper seats. We had bags, notebooks and pens. We had clean floors, and our classes were warm with heaters. We had everything but here we have nothing."

Like hundreds of thousands of children now living in camps across northern Syria, school for Mayada is a leaking, makeshift tent without basic resources to help her learn.

"The school tent leaks water in the winter and we get soaked and can't sit down. Studying in the tent is really hard as it keeps raining on us and the floor is made of dirt so it's really muddy. Our clothes get dirty on the way home. In summer it gets so hot that we can't breathe. We keep sweating and we can't talk at all.

When I tell my mum that I don't want to go to school because I struggle with the cold and mud, she says "go and study, see your friends, play with them, and succeed in school". I have to learn so I can read and write and teach my siblings."

Despite her devastating reality, Mayada is hopeful about the future.

"If I couldn't go to school here, I'd be sad that I couldn't study or see my friends. My favourite subjects to study are Arabic and mathematics. I think I'm a good student, my teachers always tell me "good job" and "well done". When I grow up, I want to be a doctor to help people, or a teacher to help children, like my teachers help me."

Mayada is just one of 2.4 million internally displaced Syrian children whose fundamental right to sustained, quality education has been stolen by the conflict. Without widespread and coordinated action to repair Syria's education system, the endemic lack of formal learning will continue to limit the development of Syria's youth, as well as generations far into the future.

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Mayada's favourite subjects are Arabic and mathematics. She hopes that by studying hard, she can become a doctor or teacher to help people.

“It’s time to look beyond temporary fixes and provide displaced children with the tools to build a future”

For a decade, Human Appeal has witnessed first-hand how the Syrian conflict has torn apart families, destroyed livelihoods, broken healthcare and education systems, and drastically reduced whole communities’ abilities to secure enough food, protection or adequate shelter for themselves or their children.

In northwest Syria, people have been pushed to the brink of destitution. When hostilities erupted and brought fresh violence to Idlib at the start of 2020, families of mostly women and children were again forced to flee, and they are losing more and more faith in humanity with each new displacement. Every family forced to flee is another child’s education ripped away, a future stolen.

Now, as the coronavirus spreads through Idlib’s camps, families have been left without any means to protect themselves. Overcrowding is making distancing impossible, and lack of sanitation is stopping any chance of safe hygiene.

The humanitarian assistance reaching displaced communities is not nearly enough to meet demand, and cross-sector services remain chronically under-funded, leaving hundreds of thousands without support on a daily basis. This is even before we begin to think about how to rebuild people’s lives, it’s no wonder that a generation of Syrians is at breaking point.

Displacement camps of makeshift tents erected in their thousands are not equipped to meet the needs of the 6.6 million internally displaced Syrians

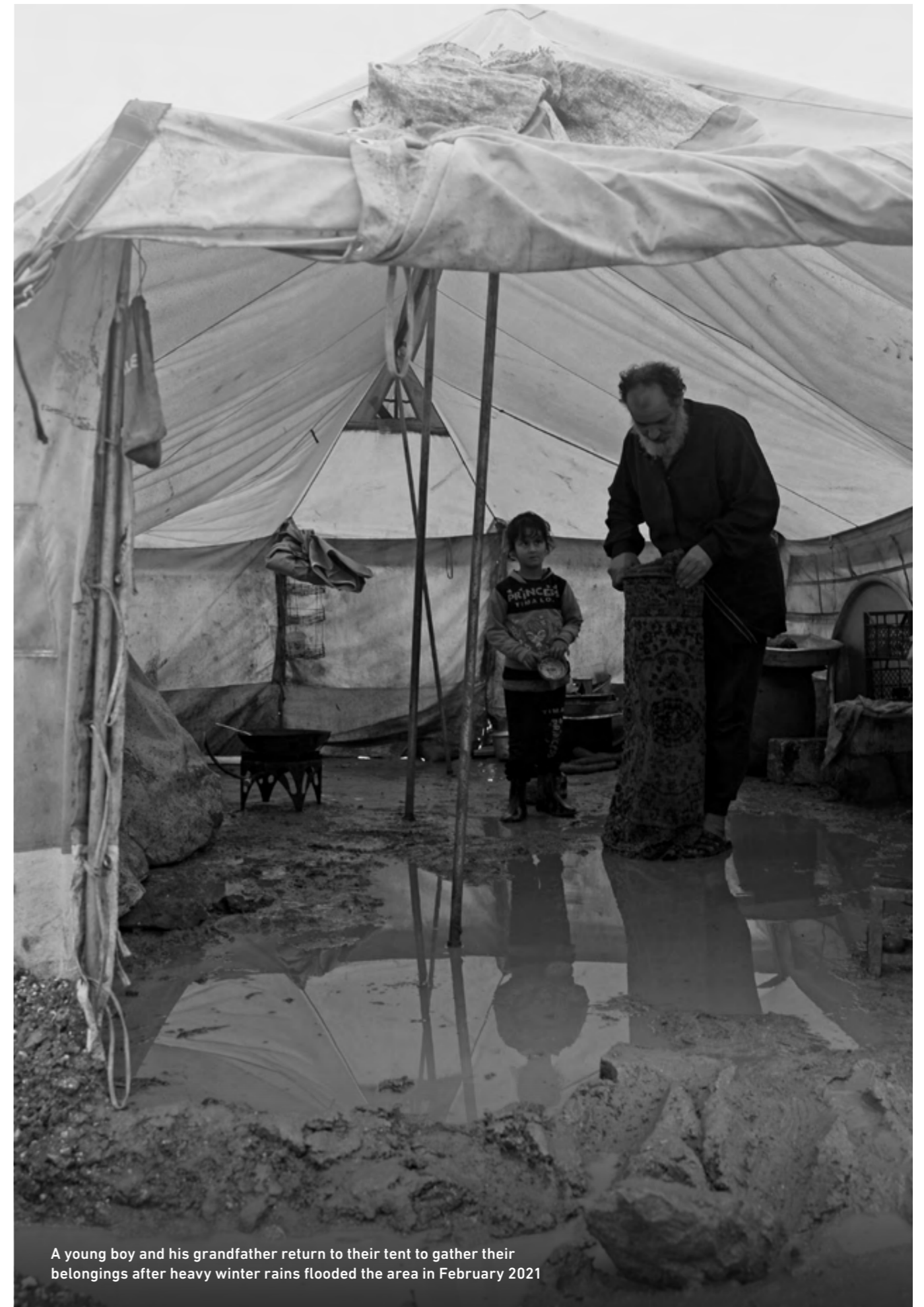
who have lost everything in the conflict, and the devastation wrought by the floods witnessed in camps this winter alone is only further exposing the reality that current responses to displacement are inadequate.

Most of us are lucky to have fond memories of our childhood homes, but thousands upon thousands of Syrian children do not have that luxury. They remember only bombed out communities and rows upon rows of indistinguishable tents. It’s extremely heart-breaking to think that four and five-year-old children – even up to seven or eight years old – have never known anything but the tents they were born in. We wouldn’t accept this life for our own children, and we should not accept a world where this happens to them.

Displaced families desperately need long-term solutions – they must be provided with the opportunity to finally begin rebuilding their lives after a decade of insecurity. It’s time to look beyond temporary fixes and provide displaced children with the tools to build a future.

It is a tragedy that so many Syrians have been lost to 10 years of conflict. It would be an even greater tragedy if, through the world’s inaction, we fail in our mission to rescue the life chances of the generations of children born in the crisis.

Ubeyd Sakin
**Human Appeal Head
of Mission for Syria**



A young boy and his grandfather return to their tent to gather their belongings after heavy winter rains flooded the area in February 2021



TOWARD A BRIGHTER TOMORROW



A Human Appeal doctor performs a new-born health check at Al Imaan Hospital in Idlib

HUMAN APPEAL'S COMMITMENT TO BUILDING RESILIENCE

Human Appeal has been supporting conflict-affected and displaced communities in northwest Syria since the conflict began. For ten years, we've been improving access to maternal, paediatric and primary healthcare, delivering nutrition assistance, and providing emergency relief including food aid and seasonal support.

As the crisis shows no sign of stopping and humanitarian needs continue to grow, we're adapting the way we respond to displacement. We'll continue to be on the ground providing emergency relief for vulnerable Syrians for as long as it's needed, but we want to ensure that the displaced communities we serve are equally assisted to achieve long-term stability so they can rebuild their lives.

By forming productive partnerships with local organisations, sector clusters and global institutions, such as UN OCHA and the Turkish Red Crescent, Human Appeal is investing in development that supports community resilience.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO MATERNAL & PAEDIATRIC HEALTH SERVICES IN HARIM DISTRICT

Since 2014, we've partnered with UN OCHA to improve displaced communities' access to lifesaving and life-sustaining maternal, paediatric and general healthcare services in northwest Syria. Originally located in Big Orem Aleppo, in August 2019 we were forced to relocate the hospital to Sarmada in Harim, Idlib due to being targeted by airstrikes.

Al Imaan Hospital for Women and Children is the only facility of its kind in the area and supports a population of around 100,000 people, the majority of whom are displaced. The vital services the facility provides include comprehensive emergency maternal, obstetric and neonatal care, the provision of essential medicines, and major and minor surgeries. Our hospital staff have also successfully been delivering education initiatives to improve child nutrition by increasing rates of breast and complementary feeding, most recently adapted to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our attached mobile clinic has been a lifeline for displaced people in hard-to-reach areas and those who do not have the means to travel to a health center or hospital, such as heavily pregnant women and new mothers. Through the mobile clinic we've been able to provide reproductive healthcare services across IDP camps in Idlib, including antenatal and postnatal care, as well as deliver health and nutrition education campaigns directly to communities most in need.

In response to influxes of newly-arrived IDPs, in early 2020 we expanded our operations and established a primary healthcare center in Little Hir Jamus. The center is equipped to provide similar services to our mobile clinic, with the addition of a dedicated psychosocial support service for trauma-affected families.

Between July 2020 and January 2021 alone, Al Imaan Hospital, mobile clinic and primary healthcare center supported 45,132 people and safely delivered 2,908 babies.

ENHANCING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO COVID-19 IN IDLIB & ALEPPO

Internally displaced communities are some of the most ill-equipped to protect themselves against coronavirus. The overcrowding of camps and informal settlements and lack of sanitation facilities are making it impossible for the most vulnerable to practice distancing or safe hygiene. That's why since the first recorded case of COVID-19 inside Syria, Human Appeal has mobilised to support efforts to control the virus.

We began delivering essential family hygiene packs directly to the most vulnerable IDP communities across Idlib containing PPE and items to improve safe hygiene practices such as handwashing soap, household cleaning materials and detergent.

In partnership with UN OCHA and Qatar Charity we've also set up three community-based isolation centres in Idlib and Aleppo to improve access to COVID-19 isolation and supportive therapy services.

With global statistics indicating the 95 percent of confirmed COVID-19 cases can improve with adequate isolation and supportive care, the centres are acting as a much-needed first line defence to help alleviate the burden on existing health facilities in the region, and increase their capacity to receive patients requiring intensive healthcare.

Each isolation centre is fully staffed, furnished and equipped to cope with the increasing numbers of suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19 and provide round the clock care. Each centre consists of six tents with capacity for 48 beds, oxygen tanks, water storage facilities and solar power sources. The centres are equipped to support 1,500 people over the course of the first phase of the project, including 150 children

REBUILDING COMMUNITIES WITH SAFE, SECURE BRIQUETTE HOMES

In response to the growing displacement crisis in northwest Syria, Human Appeal is building one of the most developed shelter initiatives for displaced families in Idlib. Starting in 2021, we'll be constructing a community village of 1,000 briquette houses to home displaced families currently living in tents and other inadequate shelter across the region.

Each home will have four rooms – a kitchenette, bedroom, private bathroom with a toilet, and a foyer. Families will have their own water storage facilities, including a 1,000 litre tank for general, everyday use, and a tank specifically for drinkable water, meaning women and girls will no longer have to travel great distances to fetch water,

Families who will benefit from the initiative will no longer bear the burden of how to heat their tents in the bitter winter months as the briquette homes will naturally provide much greater insulation and protection from the elements. Moreover, they will be pre-wired for electricity, including the installation of lighting and sockets, future-proofing them to be connected to a mains solar power source once installed.

Inside the village, there will be a school so children will have uninterrupted access to a stable and secure, well-equipped learning environment to gain valuable skills, and a mosque to enable the community to fulfil their religious obligations.

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Displaced families who will benefit from this shelter initiative will finally have a stable home after so many years of insecurity. Many children who will be homed here will have a proper roof over their heads for the first time ever. They will have a bathroom and a toilet within their own house, and dedicated spaces to eat, cook and sleep – a really strange experience for them. What is extremely normal and taken for granted by us, will to them seem like an extravagant luxury.

FATIMA KATERGI
HUMAN APPEAL SENIOR PROGRAMME
COORDINATOR FOR SYRIA

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A Human Appeal contracted builder works to lay the paving for the entrance to a new Primary Healthcare Centre for displaced families in Mashad Ruhin.

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE & CLEAN WATER FOR IDPS IN MASHAD RUHIN

In 2020, we began our long-term partnership with the Turkish Red Crescent to implement two vital development programmes that support a community of 36,000 newly settled IDPs in Mashad Ruhin.

First, we built and established a primary healthcare facility to provide the community with access to vital life-saving and life-sustaining healthcare services. The facility provides sexual, reproductive and pediatric health services, mental health and psychosocial support, basic trauma care and essential medicines for 6,000

people based in Mashad Ruhin, as well as 30,000 IDPs in adjacent settlements.

Next, we've recently provided access to clean, safe water to the whole community by drilling a water well, water tower and pipe network. The water from the well is collected in a reservoir and pumped directly to homes where it is stored in an 800 litre water tank for everyday use, meaning families now have their own uninterrupted access to running water without having to leave home.

The well not only provides clean mains water to 1,228 houses, or more than 8,000 people, but also services other public buildings within the community, such as mosques, schools and Human Appeal's new Primary Healthcare

Centre. The project has also generated livelihood opportunities for young men and women who have been employed and trained on borehole operations and maintenance to encourage community ownership, ensure long-term sustainability of the project.

Thanks to increased access to water, the newly settled community are also at decreased risk of contracting COVID-19 along with water-borne diseases like cholera and diarrheal disease. Women and girls who no longer have to travel to fetch water will be able to spend more time on building skills that will empower them long term.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report, we've highlighted just some of the shocking ways in which internally displaced Syrian children are disproportionately paying the price of the conflict's deadliest legacies.

Ongoing conflict and the spread of COVID-19 in Syria saw the number of Syrian children experiencing hunger, protection threats and barriers to education reach record heights.

Grave violations of children's rights continue to take place every day unchecked, and displaced children are without adequate protection against violence in all its forms. Millions of Syrian children who have known nothing but nylon tents are growing up without ever experiencing the safety and comfort of a place to call home.

An entire generation truly have been robbed of reaching their full potential, and those with the power to enact real change have not done enough to protect the rights of children in Syria. The physical and mental scars of the ten-year war will stay with Syria's youth far into the future.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, now more than ever must responses to the world's worst displacement crisis adapt to focus on protecting rights and building long-term resilience.

The road to peace and security in Syria is long and complex, but internally displaced communities must be provided with the building blocks, basic services and opportunities to achieve stability at last. After ten long years, Syria's children cannot wait.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Foster greater collaboration and coordination between governments, local aid groups and international NGOs supporting displaced communities in Syria to identify underserved populations and close funding shortfalls for nutrition, protection, shelter and education programmes.
- Adapt current responses to displacement and invest in development initiatives that build long-term resilience and livelihoods for internally displaced communities.
- Uphold global commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Geneva Convention, especially for displaced Syrian children who have lost everything in the ten-year conflict.
- Uphold international law and hold parties to the conflict responsible for the abduction, killing and maiming of Syrian children accountable for war crimes.

ENDNOTES

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- ² UN OCHA (2020)
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HEAD OFFICE

Human Appeal
Pennine House
Carrs Road
Cheadle, SK8 2BL
United Kingdom

0161 225 0225
humanappeal.org.uk

