

**SUBMISSION TO  
UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL  
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC  
REVIEW, SYRIA**

## KEY FACTS

### Economic impact of the ten-year conflict:

- Half of the Syrian people living in Northern Syria are children; and nearly all (94 per cent) of them are living in areas of severe, extreme, or catastrophic education conditions.
- The Syrian war has cost US\$1.2 trillion — which almost equals the European Union's budget over a decade.
- Even if the war stopped today, the cumulative economic cost will continue to be paid to the tune of an additional US\$ 1.4 trillion in today's money through to 2035.
- By 2035 the negative impacts on children's health and education bring the total cost of war up to US\$ 1.7 trillion, in today's money.

### Denial of humanitarian access for children and GBV survivors:

- Syria is the most dangerous country to deliver life-saving assistance and humanitarian services to, with 272 aid workers killed as of December 2020.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 90 per cent of children are in need of humanitarian assistance, a 20 per cent increase in the past year alone.
- Denial of humanitarian access has served to disconnect children from mental health and psychosocial support, education, food, shelter, healthcare, clean water, sanitation and protection.
- The consequences are not only felt in the immediacy but also the longer term as children will be unable to support any resolution, peace process, or recovery process.
- Each year 20,000 Syrian women and almost 53,000 Gender Based Violence (GBV) survivors – including children – may face reduced access to activities aimed at preventing GBV if the UNSC cross border resolution is not renewed in 2022.<sup>2</sup>
- 82% of those in need in NWS are at risk of not having access to essential health services including ongoing COVID-19 prevention and treatment if the cross border access is halted or hindered. The immediate and long term consequences will be risk to catch the virus, unequipped hospitals for critical care, no medicines and much more.

### Impact on child rights and education:

- 4.8 million Syrian children were born since the war started ten years ago and know nothing but war.
- Syrian children's life expectancy has decreased by 13 years since the war began, 55,000 of those killed since the war began are children.
- More than 75% of Syrian children in northwest Syria display post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and are in need of critical mental health and psychosocial support.<sup>3</sup>
- Over 3.5 million children are out of school in the whole of Syria – nearly 40 per cent are girls.<sup>4</sup>
- The COVID-19 pandemic has caused three in ten children (29.23%) to drop out of school.
- Economic circumstances in the pandemic mean many children are unable to continue their education through home learning as they do not have access to any/enough connected electronic devices.
- The widespread use of cluster munitions and the rising poverty levels have created a context where Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs) have become a major issue.
- Two children who attend our schools have been killed by UXOs in 2021 alone, several have been maimed. In all cases it has been children who were scavenging, in order to find items to sell, picked up a metal object which they did not realize to be a UXO.
- Since verified reporting began in 2014, the UN has documented 671 attacks on education, including 61 in 2020.<sup>5</sup>
- Of the 306 schools Syria Relief operates in Northern Syria, 8 have been the target of airstrike or shelling since 2019, most recent being June 10th 2021.

### Child marriage and child labor:

- World Vision research conducted in 2020 found that 100 percent of girls and 94 percent of boys surveyed thought the practice of early and forced marriage of girls had increased since the start of the conflict; 71 per cent felt conflict and insecurity were the primary drivers of this practice.<sup>6</sup>
- Half of the school-aged children are not in school. That is higher than regional averages in North East Syria. A possible contributing factor is older children pulled from school to work, as households struggle to afford increasingly high priced goods and services. Non-food items are reportedly inaccessible in 88% of the communities in Northwest of Syria.<sup>7</sup>
- Multiple reports, including by World Vision, confirm the high increase of child marriage and child labor as the main protection risks for children.
- 63% of the communities in Northwest Syria report this and all the children that World Vision spoke to less than a year ago.

### Impact on children's access to healthcare:

- Attacks on health infrastructure and personnel have been among the most severe and targeted in modern conflict, devastating the prospects for child survival and development.
- Physicians for Human Rights have mapped 600 attacks against 350 separate medical facilities between March 2011 and June 2021, finding 90 percent were perpetrated by the Syrian government and allied forces.<sup>8</sup>
- The UN has verified to date 569 attacks from 2011 to 2020.<sup>9</sup>
- Every four days in 2019 a health facility was attacked in Syria.<sup>10</sup>
- Since April 2019, 40 attacks occurred only in western Aleppo, Idlib and Hama - areas that host millions of children and displaced families, many of whom are reliant on humanitarian aid.<sup>11</sup>

### Children living with disabilities:

Research conducted by Syria Relief in 2018, in a survey of 789 children with disabilities across the four provinces that we then operated in (Idlib, Aleppo, Homs and Rural Damascus) found that:

- 89% of all children surveyed indicated a need for medical rehabilitation services. 69% indicated that these services were not available in their area.
- 80% of all children surveyed indicated a need for accessible health care services. 62% indicated that these services were not available in their area.
- 77% of all children surveyed indicated a need for assistive devices. 78% indicated that assistive devices were not available in their area.
- 65% of all children surveyed indicated a need for educational services. 82% did not have access to these services in their area.
- 61% of all children surveyed indicated a need for counselling services. 87% did not have access to these services in their area.
- 56% of all children surveyed indicated a need for mental stimulation. 76% of children with intellectual and/or psychological difficulties indicated a need for mental stimulation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Syrian Arab Republic must:

- Implement the recommendations it supported during the last UPR in 2016 that are still to be progressed.
- Commit to put an end to the indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure that limits children's access to basic services such as health facilities, hospitals, schools, or any other educational facility by urgently developing and adopting domestic laws and military policies outlawing attacks on schools and their use by the military forces during times of conflict.
- Implement all relevant UN Security Council resolutions, particularly those related to needs-based humanitarian assistance, and facilitate the arrival of unrestricted humanitarian aid and assistance, in particular to the areas most affected by the conflict in Northern Syria.
- Endorse the Safe School Declarations to guarantee unhindered access to education, schools, and universities for all Syrian children, including returnees.
- Allow for the timely provision of humanitarian and medical aid to all affected regions, under the supervision of an independent commission with international oversight.
- Take immediate steps in ensuring the administrative requirements to apply for documentation are kept to a minimum, and time limits on registering vital events that took place during the conflict should be reasonable.
- Introduce alternative and simple identity determination procedures (including for example those with a low evidentiary threshold), in recognition of the challenges faced by displaced Syrians in accessing civil documentation in the place of displacement.
- Allocate adequate resources and adopt effective measures to ensure that victims of sexual and gender-based violence, have access to comprehensive medical treatment, mental health care, and psychosocial support, including girls and boys who have been forced into early marriage as a result of the ongoing conflict.
- Implement the recommendations of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/25/65 157) that all combatant parties respect civilians' rights to basic necessities like medical care, ensure protection of civilians, and never submit anyone to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual violence

### The Syrian Arab Republic must:

- End the ongoing armed conflict and find a political solution to the conflict under the UN leadership, and resort to democratic means to determine the wishes of the people across the country.
- Fully respect international humanitarian law (IHL), sparing and protecting civilian populations from the hazards of armed conflict and fully respect international human rights law, especially, the Convention of the Rights of the Child and its Protocol on children in armed conflict.

### The UN Special Envoy for Syria and OHCHR must:

- Intensify political engagement with the Government of Syria to allow for increased cooperation and access to its territory for the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, to document, monitor and report on the abuses of human rights and grave violations against girls and boys.
- Work with the Government of Syria to ensure the safe return of displaced Syrians who decide to return to their country of origin, by abiding to the International Human Rights Standards so they do not get arrested, detained, tortured, or pursue returnees by terrorism courts upon return as noted in the European Asylum Seeking Office (EASO) June 2021 report.<sup>12</sup>

### All humanitarian responders to the conflict must:

- Engage and consult systematically with adolescent girls and boys to ensure their voices are heard on risks they face, including child marriage and child labor.
- Ensure provision of quality, safe and inclusive education in emergency programmes to reduce risk of dropout and child marriage.
- Develop programmes focused on alternative and vocational education with a focus on adolescent girls and boys at risk of child marriage or who previously married before 18.
- Invest in long-term community-level efforts to change social norms and behaviors linked to negative coping mechanisms such as domestic violence, child marriage and child labor in order to build resilience through a gender transformative agenda.
- Exchange with religious and community leaders authorizing child marriages, in order to raise awareness and prevent this practice from occurring.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup>UN Security Council. "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict" (A/69/926 - S/2015/409), para 202; (A/70/836 - S/2016/360) para.157; (A/72/361 - S/2017/821) para. 180; (A/72/865 - S/2018/465) para. 190; (A/73/907 - S/2019/509) para.178; (A/74/845 - S/2020/525) para.177; (A/75/873-S/2021/437) para. 183; (A/75/873 - S/2021/437) para.183.

<sup>2</sup>based on Gender Based Violence Working Group in Northwest Syria data from June 2021

<sup>3</sup>Syria Relief report, March 2021, Destruction you can't see.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/geneva-palais-briefing-note-situation-children-syria-after-ten-years-conflict>

<sup>5</sup>UN Security Council. "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict" (A/69/926 - S/2015/409), para 202; (A/70/836 - S/2016/360) para.157; (A/72/361 - S/2017/821) para. 180; (A/72/865 - S/2018/465) para. 190; (A/73/907 - S/2019/509) para.178; (A/74/845 - S/2020/525) para.177; (A/75/873-S/2021/437) para. 183.

<sup>6</sup>ibid 4

<sup>7</sup>REACH Factsheet NWS February 2021

<sup>8</sup>Physicians for Human Rights, March 2020, Findings of Attacks on Health Care in Syria.

<sup>9</sup>UN Security Council. "Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict" (A/69/926 - S/2015/409), para 202; (A/70/836 - S/2016/360) para.157; (A/72/361 - S/2017/821) para. 180; (A/72/865 - S/2018/465) para. 190; (A/73/907 - S/2019/509) para.178; (A/74/845 - S/2020/525) para.177; (A/75/873-S/2021/437) para. 183; (A/75/873 - S/2021/437) para.183.

<sup>10</sup>In 4 years, 494 attacks on health killed 470 patients and health staff in Syria, World Health Organization, March 2020.

<sup>11</sup>ibid 18

<sup>12</sup>Report available online here: [https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2021\\_06\\_EASO\\_Syria\\_Situation\\_returnees\\_from\\_abroad.pdf](https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2021_06_EASO_Syria_Situation_returnees_from_abroad.pdf)

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