WHEN DISASTER STRIKES
CRISIS IN SYRIA

A cross-curricular educational resource designed to support the elementary and secondary guides *When Disaster Strikes, Understanding Humanitarian Emergencies*

To download these guides, go to: [www.globalclassroom.unicef.ca/en/resources/emergencies.htm](http://www.globalclassroom.unicef.ca/en/resources/emergencies.htm)
WHEN DISASTER STRIKES: CRISIS IN SYRIA
A Humanitarian Emergency Response

OVERVIEW

Conflict and political turmoil in Syria continue to get worse. A combination of growing violence, poor access to services and break-down of day-to-day life has put more than two million people at risk and in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Children are not responsible for wars but they suffer greatly from them. In Syria, children are being injured and killed. Many have lost loved ones. Schools have closed. Health centers have shut down or become too dangerous for families to reach.

Violence has also forced tens of thousands of Syrian children to flee their homes and seek shelter in neighbouring countries. Over 150,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. This doesn’t include the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Syrians still inside the country. These numbers are growing fast and it is estimated that around half of all displaced Syrians are children and adolescents.

UNICEF is working with its partners to deliver urgently needed assistance to hundreds of thousands of children and families. Families that have taken shelter in schools, mosques and other public buildings in Damascus and beyond are receiving hygiene kits, mattresses, blankets, as well as food and other items for their children. These interventions help both displaced children still inside Syria’s borders as well as children that have fled to other countries because of the violence.

In the area of education, UNICEF is working to integrate children into public schools, ensuring they are granted free access. They are also providing vulnerable children with school bags, uniforms and other important supplies. In Lebanon, for example, UNICEF is supporting Summer Day Camps and other educational activities. These programs help children receive language skills training and better prepare them to re-enter the formal education system. The routine of school also helps. It provides children with a sense of safety and normality during the chaos and confusion of this emergency.

UNICEF is responding to the urgent protection needs of children too by setting up child-friendly spaces in refugee camps. These programs provide children with a safe place to play, to get a basic education and receive important life-skills training. Child-friendly spaces also provide counselling and other services to help children cope with psychological traumas many have faced from witnessing violence and displacement.

Food assistance and life-saving health interventions like vaccines are other critical interventions that UNICEF continues to deliver to thousands of Syrian families. UNICEF is also providing critical supplies of water, sanitation, and hygiene services. In Jordan, for example, UNICEF has provided essential water and sanitation services to thousands of displaced Syrians.

The Syrian crisis is a complex situation and one that could last a long time. By December 2012, UNICEF estimates that they will need to respond to more than triple the number of children initially targeted for assistance. UNICEF is extremely grateful for contributions received from donors who make their work in the region possible.

“[T]he needs among children and families displaced by the violence of recent days are enormous, whether in food, water and sanitation or other basic supplies. We are doing our utmost to respond, using whatever means we have at our disposal.”
– Youssouf Abdel-Jelil, UNICEF Syria Representative

“As the eyes of the world focus on the mounting violence in Syria, we must not overlook the fact that while children are not responsible for this tragedy, they’re paying a terrible price. Children are losing their lives, losing their homes, losing their parents and losing their schooling.”
– Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director

FURTHER RESOURCES

• Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) – Syria in Crisis
• UNICEF Canada – Syria Crisis
unicef.ca/en/article/syria-crisis
• UNICEF Canada BLOG – Stories from the field unicef.ca/en/blog

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globalclassroom.unicef.ca
A STORY FROM SYRIA: SUMMER CAMPS HELP CHILDREN GET BACK TO SCHOOL
Adapted from Summer Camps Help Syrian Refugee Children Recover, Regain Missed Education by David Youngmeyer

AMMAN, Jordan, 5 July 2012 – Meet Basma*. Basma and her 7-year-old sister are taking part in a summer camp near Amman, the capital city of Jordan. They are among around 180 children at their summer program, most of them refugees from the violence happening in Syria.

“She is very nice and fun, and I’ve made new friends here,” said Basma, who has a busy schedule of English, Arabic, math, science and physical education.

Around 3,500 Syrian refugee children and 500 Jordanian children are attending summer camps at 40 schools throughout Jordan so they can catch up on lost classes and participate in recreational activities.

Basma, along with her parents and sister fled their home in Syria back in February. “We wanted to get away from the violence. My cousin was shot. I was very scared and was crying for the people who got hurt,” she said.

She said that sometimes she was not able to attend school because it was closed, while other times it didn’t feel safe to go out. “I felt that I was going to die when I saw men with guns.”

The family managed to pack a few things and made the long drive to the border with Jordan. Basma says that she was able to continue her schooling about two weeks after arriving in Jordan. She says that she is sad to have left family and friends behind, but feels much safer and happier in Jordan.

Eight-year-old Saleem* attends the same summer camp, as does his 6-year-old brother. Saleem left Syria three or four months ago with his mother and two younger brothers after their house was destroyed. Luckily, they were visiting their grandmother at the time their house was destroyed, but felt it was time to leave for somewhere safer.

“There was shooting and it was not safe,” said Saleem, whose schooling was disrupted for weeks.

Carrying a few bags, they crossed the border on foot, arriving at the main transit facility for displaced people in Ramtha, northern Jordan. After about a week, a relative in Jordan helped them find an apartment in Amman, close to extended family.

UNICEF Representative in Jordan Dominique Hyde says that it is extremely important that refugee children be given the chance to catch up on lost learning. “This not only allows children to be integrated more easily into Jordan’s school system,” she said, “but also establishes a sense of normalcy in their lives that is key to helping them recover.”

*Names changed to protect children’s identities

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine you are Basma or another one of the children in the Jordanian summer camp. How do you feel? How have you been affected by the crisis? What hopes and dreams do you have for the future?

2. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to education. How has the crisis in Syria affected access to this and other children’s rights (such as the right to play, protection from harm, clean water and sanitation, etc.)? If war broke out in Canada, how would it disrupt your life?

3. How is UNICEF helping Basma’s family and others like hers in the short term? What kinds of things could UNICEF, the people of Syria and the global community do to improve conditions in the long term?
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ACTIVITIES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

1. Read the story, *Leaving it All Behind* at unicef.ca/en/blog/leaving-it-all-behind. Encourage students to think about what it would be like to be a refugee. Invite them to bring to class one item from their home that they would take with them if they were suddenly forced to flee to another country. Have students share their reasons with the class and discuss how they would feel about leaving so much behind.

2. Research the crisis in Syria online and in newspapers. Create a poster board with personal stories and photos about how the conflict is affecting children.

3. Read Bayan Yammout’s *A Personal Reflection on the Crisis in Syria* at unicef.ca/en/blog/a-personal-reflection-on-the-crisis-in-syria. Have students imagine they are survivors of the Syrian conflict 10 years in the future and write their own reflections of what life was like during the crisis and how it has affected them.

ACTIVITIES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

1. Read Bayan Yammout’s *A Personal Reflection on the Crisis in Syria* at unicef.ca/en/blog/a-personal-reflection-on-the-crisis-in-syria. Invite a refugee from your own community (or someone who works at an immigrant or refugee services organization) to speak to the class about his or her personal experience.

2. Read the story *Aid Workers in Jordan Race to Meet the Needs of Syrian Refugee Families* at unicef.ca/en/blog/aid-workers-in-jordan-race-to-meet-the-needs-of-syrian-refugee-families. Divide the class into three groups. Assign each group one of three categories: basic needs (e.g. food, water, clothes), infrastructure needs (e.g. roads, a clinic, sanitation systems) and non-material needs (e.g. education, counselling, hope). On flipchart paper, have each group discuss and list the various things they think a camp would need to support refugees. Share with the class.

3. Discuss the ripple effects of the Syrian conflict by drawing a large circle (or “pond”) on the whiteboard. In the center of the circle, have students brainstorm and write the different impacts the conflict in Syria may have at the personal level (e.g. falling behind in your education, being forced to flee the country). Next, brainstorm ways the disaster might directly and indirectly affect the community (e.g. schools and hospitals shut down, widespread violence, roads and buildings are destroyed, etc.). Add these items around the first set of impacts, moving out from the center. Finally, around the outside of the “pond”, mark the impacts which represent effects at the national or international level (e.g. government instability, humanitarian interventions, global politics, etc.).

TIPS FOR TALKING TO STUDENTS ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The crisis in Syria is a complex and controversial issue. As such, there may be differing and conflicting viewpoints within your classroom. Here are a few tips to help you discuss this topic with your students:

1. Establish ground rules that reinforce that all views will be listened to and respected.

2. Help students recognize the importance of examining complex problems for which there are no easy answers.

3. Help students to find credible, balanced information so they can more fully understand the issue.

4. Be prepared for strong reactions. Encourage students to express their emotions in an appropriate way.

5. After examining multiple perspectives on an issue, encourage students to determine what local, constructive action they can take in response to the issue. This approach will engender a sense of empowerment, rather than discouragement and despair.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IN YOUR SCHOOL?

When humanitarian emergencies happen in other countries, we can take action in our own country, community and school to help people who have been affected by the crisis. Brainstorm a list of creative fundraising activities you can do as a class or a school to assist people in Syria. For example, you could organize a concert, host a movie night or invite a speaker to your school. Here’s an idea of what donated funds can do:

- $50 provides 20 litres of therapeutic milk.
- $100 provides a family with 7 water sanitation kits.
- $250 provides 35,714 Water Purification Tablets for a family.