

Grades K–12

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**

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES: CRISIS IN SYRIA

A Humanitarian Emergency Response

OVERVIEW

Conflict and political turmoil in Syria continue to get worse. A combination of violence, poor access to services and break-down of day-to-day life has put more than 13 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 over two million Syrian children to flee their homes and seek shelter in neighbouring countries. Over four million Syrian refugees have fled, including to Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and Europe. This is on top of the millions of Syrians who are still inside the country who have been forced to leave their homes and are internally displaced. These numbers are growing fast and it is estimated that around half of all displaced Syrians are children and adolescents.

“[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

UNICEF is working with its partners to deliver urgently needed assistance to millions of children and their families. 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 support children through the Back to Learning Campaign. More than 2.7 million Syrian children are out of school, and some children have lost up to five years of their education. We are providing vulnerable children with essential education supplies, including school bags and textbooks. We are rehabilitating damaged schools and building new classrooms. The routine of going to school helps provide children with a sense of safety and normality during the chaos and confusion of this emergency.

Many Syrian children are in survival mode; they have seen terrible things and forget normal social and emotional responses. UNICEF is responding to the urgent **protection** needs of children, such as through setting up child-friendly spaces in refugee camps and transit centers. These spaces provide children with a safe place to rest, play, and receive important services. Trained staff can provide counselling and emotional support to help children cope with psychological traumas that many have faced from witnessing violence and displacement.

Malnutrition was a challenge in Syria even before the conflict started. Furthermore collapsed health services have left children highly vulnerable to potentially fatal diseases such as measles, pneumonia and polio. **Food** assistance and life-saving **health** interventions like vaccines are other critical interventions that UNICEF continues to deliver to millions of Syrian families.

UNICEF is also providing critical supplies of **water, sanitation, and hygiene services**. In areas of heavy conflict, indiscriminate bombing and shelling have left water and sanitation infrastructure inoperable. The movement of millions of people to avoid conflict areas is placing increased pressure on existing water and sanitation systems. In Jordan, for example, UNICEF has provided essential water and sanitation services to hundreds of thousands of displaced Syrians.

The Syrian crisis is a complex situation that has already been going on for nearly five years, and could continue for many more. UNICEF plans to scale up our work to ensure that as many children can be reached as possible. UNICEF is extremely grateful for contributions received from donors who make our work in the region possible.

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“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

- UNICEF Canada BLOG – Stories from the field unicef.ca/en/blog
- Stories of Syrian children and young people – childrenofsyria.info

A STORY FROM SYRIA: SUMMER CLUBS IN ALEPPO HELP CHILDREN CATCH UP ON EDUCATION

Adapted from original by Razan Rashidi with input from UNICEF Aleppo hub

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Aleppo, 9 September 2015 – Mohammed, 11, dropped out of school two years ago as the conflict erupted in his neighborhood, Al-Salheen, in the eastern part of Aleppo. The area is now a frontline of one of the most brutal war zones in Syria. “Mohammed has post-trauma speech problems,” Fatima, Mohammad’s teacher told us.

“His speech problem used to be worse, especially when talking to teachers. Mohammed is doing much better now especially when communicating with his peers”, she added. Since the beginning of this summer holiday, Mohammed has been attending one of the many UNICEF-supported summer school clubs in Aleppo.

“Finally, I can come to school and learn and also play”, Mohammed said.

UNICEF supports 95 school clubs in Aleppo city and its rural surroundings. Those provide remedial education and recreational activities to more than 50,000 children.

“To address the high dropout rates in areas like Aleppo, UNICEF organizes remedial sessions where children can catch up with their peers on core subjects and return to schools in the new academic year”, said Ahmedou Ould Sidi Ould Bahah, UNICEF Chief of Field Office in Aleppo.

Teachers who are involved in the process confirm that they see a difference. “School clubs help a lot in filling the educational gaps of children and provide them with the opportunity to remedy what they missed during times of conflict. Mohammed, for example, missed two years of schooling but now he is getting the chance to catch up with his peers and return to his original grade in the coming school year,” said one teacher.

“UNICEF also provided stationery and school bags to children attending the school clubs with the support of many donors like EU-DEVCO and US Fund”, Bahah commented.

Joudi and Rayan built a strong friendship this summer. The two girls are supposed to be in grade eight, but now they attend the sixth grade classes because they both missed two years of education.

“My parents were afraid to let me go out to school as our area was dangerous”, said Rayan. Eventually, Rayan and her family had to flee their neighborhood and moved to a safer location where she joined a summer school club and met new friends.

“The club gets us out of the mood of war we live in. It is all about studying and playing here,” Joudi added.

Regardless of the hot weather, the playground of the Saker Quraish School is busy with children running and racing. “Recreational activities enhance children’s creativity and build their resilience capacities,” Fatima said.

In addition to sports, school clubs also provide different recreational activities such as drawing and music. “I like drawing and music; we sing with the teacher” said Shahed, an 8-year-old attending Subhi Dayeh School which is hosting 350 children in the school club this summer.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Imagine you are Mohammed or another of the children in the summer club. 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 Mohammed and others like him 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?

ACTIVITIES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

1. Read the story, *Children on the move through Europe dream of a 'normal' life* at <http://www.unicef.ca/en/blog/children-on-the-move-through-europe-dream-of-a-%E2%80%98normal%E2%80%99-life>. 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 Toby Fricker's *Healing through art in Azraq camp* at <http://www.unicef.ca/en/blog/healing-through-art-in-azraq-camp>. 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 Toby Fricker's *Healing through art in Azraq camp* at <http://www.unicef.ca/en/blog/healing-through-art-in-azraq-camp>. 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 *Water cuts for war-weary civilians in Syria's largest city of Aleppo* at <http://childrenofsyria.info/2015/07/23/voices-from-the-front-line-water-cuts-for-war-weary-civilians-in-syrias-largest-city-of-aleppo/>. 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 to treat children suffering from malnutrition
- \$100 provides two families with water sanitation kits
- \$250 provides a "school-in-a-box" benefiting 40 children

Check out: <http://www.unicef.ca/en/get-involved/fundraise> for more details.

