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Syrian children in a Save the Children-supported school in the suburbs of Idleb, northern Syria
Credit: Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

Protecting Syria's Future Means Protecting Syria's Schools

September 2015

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"I love animals and especially turtles because they have a very strong shield on their back to protect themselves against everything, even the missiles, and when they hear an airplane they can just hide in their shield and they will be safe. I wish we could have a shield like them because then no one would die and we could go to school every day even if there was an airplane in the sky." - Kareem, 8 years old

Introduction

The Syria conflict has been characterized by the UN Secretary-General as the largest humanitarian and peace and security crisis in the world today.¹ The conflict has taken a heavy toll on children, who have suffered immensely amidst violence, destruction, and deprivation.

As another new school year is set to begin, almost three million children are out of school, including 2.3 million children who are still inside Syria.² School enrollment rates, which were close to 100% before the conflict began, have plummeted to less than 50% on average and are even lower where heavy fighting has taken place for a prolonged period.³ Among displaced children, enrollment is even lower at 17%.⁴ In Aleppo Governorate, where 40% of schools have been shelled at least once in non-government controlled eastern areas, primary school enrollment dropped from 97.5% in 2011 to less than 10% by March 2013,⁵ a situation that is damaging not only to these children's future prospects, but also to peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

Now in its fifth year, the Syria conflict is a crisis of protection that has been exacerbated by the vastly underfunded response to the needs of the estimated 5.6 million children affected.⁶ Education is one of the most underfunded sectors with the result that hundreds of thousands of children are missing out on school. Education not only supports children's wellbeing and development, but has wider impacts on society's stability and growth. Evidence has shown that education reduces the likelihood of conflict by increasing income opportunities and life choices for young people.⁷ The continued denial of the right to education in Syria threatens to exacerbate the cycle of conflict in the country, and across the region, as young people face the prospect of futures without employment and the ever increasing possibility of recruitment by armed groups.

If continued access to quality education is to be achieved, funding must be accompanied by increased pressure on parties to the conflict to cease attacks on and end the military use of schools.⁸ The

¹ Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), UN Doc. S/2015/651, 20 August 2015. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/651

² UNICEF, *Under Siege: The Devastating Impact on Children of Three Years of Conflict in Syria*, April 2014, p. 15.

³ Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA), December 2013, p.33.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ REACH, *Eastern Aleppo Food Security And Livelihoods Household Assessment Report*, June 2015. http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/reach_syr_aleppo_food_security_and_livelihoods_assessment_july2015_0.pdf

⁶ Humanitarian Country Team, *2015 Strategic Response Plan*, Syrian Arab Republic, December 2014, p. 3.

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015_SRP_Syria_EN_AdvanceCopy_171214.pdf

⁷ Østby and Urdal, 2010, *Education and Civil Conflict: A Review of the Quantitative, Empirical Literature*, Background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011.

⁸ On 7 March 2014, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2143, expressing "deep concern at the military use of schools in contravention of applicable international law, recognizing that such use may render schools legitimate targets of attack, thus endangering children's and teachers' safety as well as children's education." As such, the

combined effect of attacks on school facilities, students and teachers, as well as the use of schools as bases, staging posts, detention centers and for other military purposes has been crippling, resulting in deaths and injuries, school closures and damage and destruction of school buildings and educational materials. Attacks on and military use of schools also negatively impact the psychosocial wellbeing of children and teaching staff and contribute to high drop-out rates as parents fear sending their children to school because of the risks to their safety in or on the way to school.

This briefing provides an overview of the scale of attacks on and military use of schools in northern Syria and their associated impacts on children, drawing on first-hand information gathered through our programs in-country. Based on Save the Children's experience of supporting education programs in Syria, the briefing also provides recommendations for the international community and for donors to ensure that schools in Syria are safe places for children to study and develop and that the continuation of quality education is supported.⁹ Over the last year, Save the Children conducted interviews with children impacted by attacks on schools in Syria in which children spoke about the terror that they experienced – their words are included throughout this briefing.¹⁰

Recommendations

During times of conflict, desperate parents attempt to bring their children to safer countries. In insecure settings, maintaining safe access to education is therefore of vital importance for children. When schools are safe from attack and other threats, they can provide an important sense of normalcy that is crucial to a child's development and wellbeing. Schools can also help provide important safety information and services. Above all, keeping students safe in schools is vital for children's protection and development and should be prioritized by the international community. To this end, Save the Children calls for the following recommendations:

Act to end attacks on education in Syria

- The UN and Member States should demand that all parties to the conflict cease all abuses against children in contravention of international humanitarian and human rights law and immediately stop the use of explosive weapons in populated areas to ensure that civilians and vital infrastructure, including schools, are protected.
- The UN and Member States should denounce attacks on schools by all parties to the conflict and speak out against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, acknowledging that civilians, and in particular children, must be protected from death, injury and other devastating consequences of their use.

Security Council urged "all parties to armed conflict to respect the civilian character of schools in accordance with international humanitarian law," and encouraged "Member States to consider concrete measures to deter the use of schools by armed forces and armed non-State groups." On 18 June 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2225, expressing "deep concern that the military use of schools in contravention of applicable international law may render schools legitimate targets of attack, thus endangering the safety of children and in this regard encourages Member States to take concrete measures to deter such use of schools by armed forces and armed groups."

⁹ While there are multiple factors contributing to children's lack of access to education, this briefing paper focuses on attacks on and military use of schools by parties to the conflict and does not address the wider vulnerabilities that keep children out of school.

¹⁰ The interviews were undertaken with the informed consent of all the children interviewed. All names have been changed to protect the identity of these children.

- Pressure should be intensified on parties to the conflict to immediately and fully implement the provisions of UN Security Resolutions 2139, 2165, and 2191 (2014) in order to demilitarize schools and other civilian facilities and to promptly allow rapid, safe, and unhindered access for impartial humanitarian actors to provide assistance to those most in need.
- The UN Security Council should take immediate steps to ensure that individuals responsible for war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian and human rights law are held accountable.
- The UN-led monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in Syria should be strengthened to ensure more systematic data collection on attacks on schools in accordance with the Guidance Note on UN Security Council Resolution 1998 (2011) issued in 2014 by the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.
- Parties listed in the Annexes to the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict for attacks on schools and /or for other grave violations of children's rights should be pressured to continue to engage with the UN to develop and implement time-bound actions to prevent and end such violations.
- The UN Security Council should establish a protection monitoring body comprised of UN technical experts to gather information inside Syria about attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including attacks on schools, and take further diplomatic measures against parties to the conflict in the case of non-compliance.
- The UN and the international community should continue to push for an immediate end to the hostilities to ensure all children inside Syria are protected and their right to education can be fulfilled.

Act to prevent the use of schools by armed forces and armed groups

- The UN and Member States should publicly denounce the use of schools for military purposes. Member States with influence over the Syrian armed forces and armed groups responsible for using schools for military purposes should pressure these armed actors to immediately cease this practice where it unnecessarily places civilians at risk or deprives children of their right to education in accordance with UNSCR 2143 (2014), 2225 (2015) and the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*.
- The UN and Member States should advocate for the Syrian Government to express a clear political commitment to protect educational facilities from attack and military use by endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration.
- Parties to the conflict should be encouraged to immediately vacate the schools they are using, ensure that schools are safe for students to return, and issue orders to commanders not to use school buildings or school property.

Support the continuation of education in Syria

- Donors should prioritize and fully fund education programming. Because of the psychosocial impact of the conflict on Syrian children and the many risk factors children face as a result of the situation they are living in, the integration of child protection and education programming

inside Syria must be given priority and scaled up wherever possible. Short-term humanitarian funding must be complemented and gradually replaced by longer-term funding to ensure continuity of children's access to quality education.

- The Syrian government should be pressured to promptly repair - or fund the repair of - educational facilities damaged or destroyed as a result of the armed conflict or, if this is not feasible, provide suitable, alternative, fully-equipped facilities.
- Donors should invest in alternative options for children to pursue their education if schools remain closed or are unsafe. Funding should prioritize increasing the number of trained teachers and supporting teachers to deliver alternative education services including, where necessary, distance and/or home-based learning.
- Donors should support training of teachers in conflict-sensitive approaches to education, including the provision of psychosocial support to students and how to keep children safe while in school.
- Donors should support the provision of psychosocial support, mentoring and professional development, appropriate remuneration and other measures that contribute to the well-being and retention of teachers.

I. Attacks on schools

"About two years ago we were at school playing in the schoolyard when we saw an airplane above the school. It was dropping missiles on the village. We heard very big explosions and everyone started screaming. We were very scared. Some of the parents came to school to take their children, but not everyone could get out so we ran into the classroom and took cover under the desks to protect our heads in case they bombed our school. I was really afraid and I wanted to go back home but we live far from the school, so I had to wait with the others until the airstrike was finished and then my father came to pick me up." - Kareem, 8 years old

The number of documented cases of attacks on schools is higher in Syria than anywhere else in the world.¹¹ Between 2011 and the end of 2014, the UN Secretary-General reported 8,428 attacks on schools in 25 countries, of which 52% were reported to have taken place in Syria.¹²

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas has had a particularly devastating impact on Syria's education system. In addition to the lives lost and structural damage to schools, the fear of use of explosive weapons also stops children from attending school due to the threat of bombardment at school or on the route between school and home. Unsafe routes to schools are reported to be one of the main reasons why children are out of school.¹³

¹¹ The UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict defines attacks on schools as, "indiscriminate and direct attacks against schools that are civilian objects, resulting in their compromised functioning, partial damage or total destruction, as well as against related protected persons. Such incidents include physical attacks, looting, pillaging and wanton destruction. In the case of related protected persons, such incidents include killing, injuring, abduction and use as human shields." *Guidance Note on Security Council Resolution 1998*, available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/AttacksonSchoolsHospitals.pdf>

¹² Save the Children analysis of data in the UN Secretary-General Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict for the following years: 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015.

¹³ UNOCHA, *Assessment of the Needs and Humanitarian Situation within Syria - Thematic Situation Analysis Report*, 2015.

Since the conflict began in 2011, an estimated 3,465 schools have been destroyed or damaged in attacks.¹⁴ Attacks on schools include aerial bombardment, shelling and the use of Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIED). Save the Children, as a founding member of the International Network on Explosive Weapons, has continued to highlight the impact this practice has had on education facilities and other vital civilian infrastructure. In 2014 alone, attacks on schools killed 160 children.¹⁵ One of the most egregious examples occurred in Aleppo in April 2014 where an attack on a primary school left 33 children dead and 40 injured.¹⁶ In January 2015, NGOs reported attacks on schools that resulted in the deaths of nine children¹⁷ and in a single incident in March 2015 a school in Armanaz village, Idleb Governorate was damaged, killing six students, one teacher and injuring many others.¹⁸



School supported by Save the Children in the suburbs of Idleb, northern Syria, following an aerial attack.
Credit: Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

“Once I had an exam, and we were writing in the class when suddenly a bomb was dropped close to the school. The windows broke, and a piece of glass fell on my hand and cut it open... I ran outside with the rest of the children, and I saw children in the yard covered with dust and blood. Many children were injured that day and five of them died. I still can’t forget the scene of the yard with the children lying on the ground drowned with their blood. I see them in my dreams when I sleep, and I wake up crying.” - Lina, 14 years old

¹⁴ SNAP, *Regional Analysis Syria Part I: Syria*, 4 April 2014.

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/Response%20Plan%20%282014-2015%29_English.pdf

¹⁵ Human Rights Council (2015), ‘Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic’, UN, Twenty-seventh session, Agenda item 4, A/HRC/28/69, 5 February 2015, p.6.

¹⁶ Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2015.

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/409

¹⁷ Anonymous, *NGO Access Report*, 14 January 2015. See also, Save the Children et al, *Failing Syria*, March 2015.

¹⁸ Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), UN Doc. S/2015/265, 17 April 2015. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2015/264

Over the last two years, Save the Children has tracked incidents of attacks on and military use of the 53 schools supported through Save the Children programs in Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama Governorates. During this time, we have reported 51 separate incidents, including 32 airstrikes affecting our schools, as well as cases of arson, forced entry of armed men into school buildings, shootings and threats against teachers and students.¹⁹ Research by Save the Children indicates that since the start of 2015, there have been at least 32 separate attacks on schools in Syria. This includes 20 incidents in areas where Save the Children or its education partners have access, which have been recorded as part of Save the Children's work to gather and verify information related to attacks on schools.²⁰ Given the security and access challenges in documenting these cases, it is likely that many more incidents go unreported and the true number of cases may be much higher.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas

In addition to killing and injuring children, the use of explosive weapons, particularly in populated areas, results in children being denied access to healthcare and the opportunity to go to school. It can also prevent life-saving humanitarian aid from reaching children, causing them to be displaced from their homes, exposing them to the risk of separation from their families and communities, and increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Syria has had a devastating impact on children. The information contained in this report is a chilling reminder of the lives that have been lost when schools have been hit by explosive weapons. In addition to the structural damage to schools, the fear of explosive weapons also stops children from attending school, because of the threat of bombardment at school or on the route between school and home.

It is for this reason that Save the Children, as part of the International Networks on Explosive Weapons, calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria and parties to conflict globally – to not use explosive weapons in populated areas. Save the Children supports the call by the UN Secretary-General for Member States to develop a political commitment to address this fundamental humanitarian issue and therefore continues to participate in international efforts by states, UN agencies, and civil society that aim to reduce civilian suffering from this practice.²¹

“About one month ago we were at school and in Arabic class and the teacher was teaching us a new song when a big explosion happened. It was very loud, and for a moment no one made a sound and everyone remained silent, but then everyone started screaming and crying.” - Fatima, 8 years old

¹⁹ Save the Children, directly and through partners, supports 53 schools in Aleppo, Hama and Idlib Governorates and will expand its work to support additional schools in these locations as well as 15 schools in Hasakeh Governorate before the end of the year. To date 34,500 children have benefitted from our education activities. The work we do includes paying teacher stipends; delivering teacher training; providing textbooks, teaching and recreational materials; rehabilitating classrooms; ensuring access to sanitation facilities; and working with the community to develop plans to keep children safe in the event of attacks and resume education as soon as possible. Presently our work is focused on delivering pre-school and primary level education, but we are expanding our activities to include additional support for secondary school-aged children.

²⁰ Research includes information drawn from Save the Children field reports, reports from other NGOs, UN reports and publicly available information. Save the Children has not been able to verify all reports and is unable to verify the perpetrators of each attack. Given the volatile security situation and lack of access to many parts of Syria, it is likely that the true number of attacks is much higher than reported. The attacks mentioned in this report cover the period 1 January – 10 August 2015.

²¹ For more information see Save the Children, *Explosive Weapons and Grave Violations Against Children Position Paper*, 2013. https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Explosive_Weapons_and_Grave_Violations_Against_Children.pdf and www.inew.org

Attacks on Save the Children Supported Schools

Schools supported by Save the Children have been affected by the conflict in many different ways with incidents including airstrikes, arson, shootings and threats against students and children recorded. Since the beginning of 2015, nine schools supported by Save the Children and its partners in Idleb and Aleppo have been damaged as a result of airstrikes. For example, on 2 April 2015, a barrel bomb was dropped close to a Save the Children-supported primary school in Aleppo city during school hours. The school, which is run by a Save the Children partner and which provides education to 700 children, was damaged in the attack but all children in school at the time were safely evacuated to the basement and then to their homes. Following this incident, classes were suspended for three days. In June 2015, three schools in Idleb and Aleppo Governorates supported by Save the Children were also hit by aerial bombardment. These incidents happened in the evening when the school was closed. No students or teachers were injured in the attacks, but the school buildings sustained significant damage, interrupting education for hundreds of children.



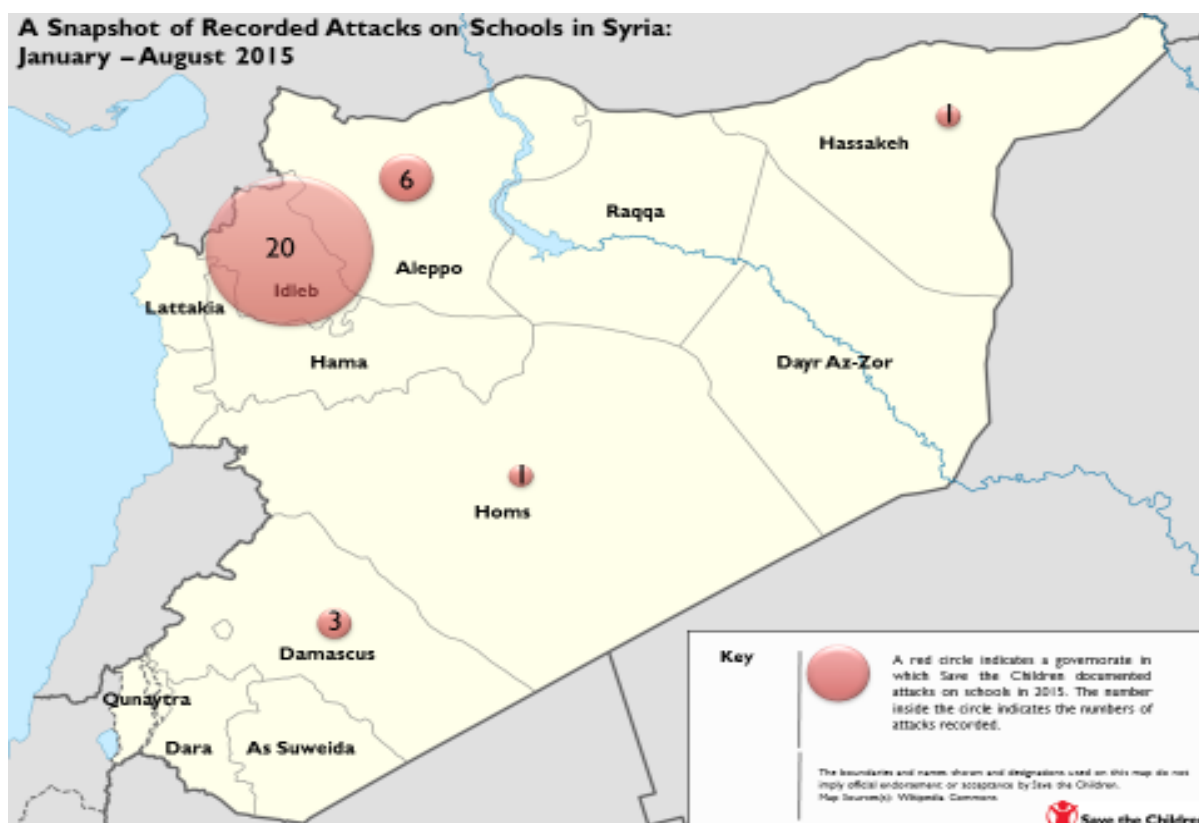
*School supported by Save the Children in the suburbs of Idleb, northern Syria, following an aerial attack.
Credit: Ahmad Baroudil/Save the Children*

Attacks of a similar nature occurred in 2014, when schools supported by Save the Children in Idleb Governorate were directly and indirectly impacted by airstrikes 21 times, causing extensive damage as well as injuries to students and teachers. Three schools were so severely damaged that they had to be rebuilt, while another was struck on multiple occasions including a direct hit when a missile landed in the playground following an airstrike. This school was so badly damaged it can no longer be used.

Schools in Syria are regularly forced to suspend activities because of a deterioration in the security situation and the need to keep children safe. In May 2015, in Aleppo an increase in the number of airstrikes forced the local authorities to close all the schools in the city for the safety of the children, preventing thousands of children from sitting their end of year exams. Despite the enormous

challenges, it is still possible to deliver education in Syria, as demonstrated by Save the Children's ongoing support to 53 schools in northern Syria. Our experience shows that with appropriate community engagement, robust security analysis, teacher training, investments that allow adaptations to school infrastructure, and a flexible approach to delivering learning and appropriate levels of psychosocial support, children can continue to access education. Save the Children-supported schools have also closed at times to ensure the safety of students and teachers. For example, in February 2015, three schools in Huritan, Aleppo run by Save the Children's education partner were forced to close temporarily for five days as a result of the escalation in conflict in the area.

When a school is damaged in an attack, Save the Children helps communities evaluate whether a school is unsafe for use and helps to locate funding to rehabilitate an alternative building, or make repairs to ensure the school remains safe for children. In rare instances, the decision has been taken with the community to move a school to another location in the interest of security or to suspend activities in a school and instead to support children through home-based learning. In Aleppo, where there have been high numbers of airstrikes, schools have moved classrooms underground to basements or have altered the times of classes and exams to times of day when there have historically been fewer airstrikes to keep children safe. Save the Children and its partners also invest in making adaptations to school buildings such as using plastic instead of glass in windows or preparing basements as safe rooms, to mitigate the risk to children.



Disclaimer: The information shown in this map comes from NGO reports, UN reports and publicly available information. Save the Children has not been able to verify all reports. It is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of all incidents but instead is a snapshot of the situation relating to attacks on schools in Syria.

“When something like this happens, we don’t go to school for weeks because my parents say it is not safe to be away from them when there is a bombardment, but at home I spend my time doing nothing because my friends live far away from me and I have no one to play with.” - Kareem, 8 years old

Attack on Education: Idleb City Case Study

At the end of March 2015, opposition forces took control of Idleb city, precipitating a dramatic rise in the number of aerial attacks across Idleb Governorate. These attacks destroyed civilian infrastructure including schools, hospitals and marketplaces. In addition, a number of alleged chlorine attacks were reported in the area causing a high number of injuries.²² Tens of thousands of people were internally displaced from the city as the fighting continued, adding to the 7.6 million people within Syria who were already internally displaced, with newly displaced people settling in host communities to the north of Idleb city. This put enormous pressure on limited basic services and communities already struggling to cope with the effects of four years of conflict.

These attacks had a devastating impact on the education system. In the immediate aftermath of the battle for Idleb, at least 54 schools and 8 kindergartens in Idleb city and the wider Governorate closed, and many that were severely damaged in the fighting will remain shut when the new academic year begins in September 2015.

According to reports from Save the Children staff and its partners, at least 11 schools²³ in Idleb city were damaged or destroyed as a result of the upsurge in attacks. For example, on 4 April 2015, Hateen School in the north of Idleb city was partially destroyed when a bomb fell in the middle of the playground. Reports from local sources indicated that 13 people were killed in the attack and 36 people, including six children, were injured. At least half of the school building was reported to have been destroyed.²⁴ Less than two weeks later on 13 April, Jamila Bohaidar School in southern Idleb city was also severely damaged when it was struck by a barrel bomb, which destroyed an estimated 70% of the school building. Four people were killed in this attack, and 20 people, including three children, were reportedly injured.²⁵

Save the Children staff on the ground conducted a rapid education assessment in Idleb Governorate noting that approximately one-third of schools assessed in the area outside of Idleb city had been damaged or destroyed in the conflict, with furniture having been looted to provide wood for fuel. In addition, there were unconfirmed reports of schools being used by armed forces and groups.

According to Save the Children’s assessment in Idleb Governorate in April 2015 approximately 75% of newly displaced children were not attending school, meaning that an estimated 212,500 children had their education disrupted. Even when schools were available, many parents reported that they perceive schools to be unsafe which, combined with the psychological distress caused by the heightened conflict and economic pressures which result in children having to work to support their families, has contributed to high school drop-out rates.

²² OCHA, *Idleb Update*, 1 May 2015.

²³ The schools damaged or destroyed in Idleb city during this time were not Save the Children supported schools. In the aftermath of the battle for Idleb city, however, Save the Children has been working with local authorities and partner organizations to assess the damage and need for rehabilitation, and is seeking to raise funds to provide support to a number of these schools.

²⁴ Save the Children field report.

²⁵ Save the Children field report.

Following the takeover of Idlib city by the armed opposition, the government withdrew its financial support for the schools it had been running in the previously government-held areas of the governorate. The withdrawal of the government meant that many schools that had been supported from Damascus were left without any means to pay their teachers, leaving them reliant on the support of NGOs and local communities. The schools that are functioning, including those supported by Save the Children, have been desperately trying to accommodate the extra thousands of children who are trying to register with them. However, without additional funding to rehabilitate damaged classrooms and provide for additional teachers and teaching materials, schools in the area are struggling to absorb such large numbers of additional students.

“I love school so much, and I was very good at it, especially at English. I used to study even when we didn’t have electricity. I used to light a candle and study. I suffered a lot of course, but I knew that I had to study to fulfil my dreams and become who I want to be in the future.” - Lina, 14 years old

2. Military Use of Schools

“We ran downstairs and we heard the explosion. We knew it had hit the school again because the explosion was very close. It was the second time the school had been hit in a month. I believe that I will never be able to go school again after this. I feel very bad because if I cannot finish school then I will not be able to go to university to become a doctor.” - Maha, 10 years old

Between 2005 and early 2015, the military use of schools was documented in 26 countries, with Syria being the most affected.²⁶ As of 2013, approximately 1,000 schools had been used by government forces as temporary bases, military staging grounds or detention or torture centers.²⁷ The Government’s placing of weaponry in schools in Jaramana is reportedly currently under investigation.²⁸ In addition, opposition forces have used schools and, more recently, Islamic State (also known as ISIS) is reported to have used schools as military bases, places of detention and for indoctrination and training²⁹ and in Fajroh village (Hama), ISIS reportedly established its headquarters in a school.³⁰

The UN estimated in December 2014 that one-quarter of schools in Syria had been damaged, destroyed, put to use as collective centers³¹ or used for other non-educational purposes,³² including by armed forces and groups. With a continuation of attacks in 2015, this number is now likely much higher. The use of schools for military purposes remains an ongoing problem. For example, it was

²⁶ GCPEA, *Lessons in War 2015: Military Use of Schools and Universities during Armed Conflict*, 2015, p 6.

²⁷ The Syrian Network for Human Rights, *A Report on the Destruction of Schools Its Consequences*, 2013.

http://sn4hr.org/public_html/wp-content/pdf/english/A%20report%20on%20the%20destruction%20of%20schools%20and%20its%20consequences.pdf (accessed July 13, 2015).

²⁸ *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, 13 August 2015, A/HR/C/30/48, p. 11.

²⁹ GCPEA, *Lessons in War 2015: Military Use of Schools and Universities during Armed Conflict*, 2015.

³⁰ Ibid, footnote number 20.

³¹ Collective centers lack a recognized definition, but the following definition applies in nearly all cases: Collective centers are pre-existing buildings and structures used for the collective and communal settlement of the displaced population in the event of conflict or natural disaster. <http://www.globalccmcluster.org/system/files/publications/doc18990-contentido.pdf>

³² Humanitarian Country Team, *2015 Strategic Response Plan*, Syrian Arab Republic, December 2014, p. 3. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/2015_SRP_Syria_EN_AdvanceCopy_171214.pdf

reported by UNICEF in April 2015 that six schools in the Ariha sub-district of Idlib Governorate were being used as temporary bases, shelters and barracks by government troops recently withdrawn from Idlib city.³³

When parties to conflict use schools for military purposes, it puts the lives of students and teachers at risk and hinders students' ability to learn. Not only does the use of a school for military purposes occupy space that would otherwise be devoted to education, it can also make the school a legitimate target for attack by opposing forces. The presence of soldiers on school grounds can also expose children to the threat of military recruitment, sexual violence and other grave violations of their rights.

Syrian families have informed Save the Children staff that when a school is used by armed forces or armed groups, it is recorded, reported and marked as a "military base," with the result that the school may be targeted in the future, even after the school has been vacated by fighting forces. Save the Children has observed that many of the schools that have been used by parties to conflict in our areas of operation in Syria have ultimately been attacked and destroyed. For example, in an assessment conducted by Save the Children in northern Syria in June 2015, one-quarter of the schools visited had been used for military purposes and subsequently attacked, resulting in varying degrees of damage.

The use of schools by the government armed forces, opposition groups and ISIS in Syria has resulted in damage to buildings, equipment and teaching materials. At a time when there are already inadequate opportunities to access quality education in Syria, such damage to schools further hampers students' educational prospects and their futures. Seeing a school occupied by an armed force or group can also make children fearful of returning to class even when the school has been vacated, and the cost of repairing the damage and ensuring the safety of the school leaves children without access to education.

Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict³⁴

In order to protect education facilities, students, and staff from the potentially devastating consequences of the military use of schools, the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#) have been developed for use by all parties to armed conflict, both States and non-state armed groups alike. Acknowledging that parties to conflict are invariably faced with difficult dilemmas, the Guidelines offer concrete guidance to help parties exercise restraint with respect to the military use of educational facilities in situations of armed conflict and to mitigate the impact the practice can have on students' safety and education when it does occur. The Guidelines are based on what is practically achievable and draw upon existing good practice found in national legislation, military doctrine, military trainings, jurisprudence, as well as government policies and guidance in a number of countries.

Countries can endorse the *Guidelines* and commit to use them by joining the [Safe Schools Declaration](#) and express a political commitment to protect education from attack. As of September 2015, forty-nine countries have joined the *Declaration*, thereby endorsing and committing to implement the *Guidelines*. While the Safe Schools Declaration is open only to states for endorsement, non-state armed groups can implement the *Guidelines* by amending their military doctrine or their practice to incorporate the *Guidelines*.

³³ Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), UN Doc. S/2015/468, 23 June 2015.

³⁴ For more information see: <http://protectingeducation.org/guidelines>

“When we got here we rented a house, and I started going to the village school. But after maybe four or five months it was bombed.... A few weeks later they re-opened the school, but my father didn’t allow me to go. He said it is not safe to go.... I want to be a lawyer like my father, but I have to study very hard to be like him, and if they keep bombing schools I won’t be able to study and I will remain at home doing nothing and in the end I will become a scavenger!” - Rami, 9 years old

Military Use of Schools: Hasakeh Case Study

The Orwa bin Alward Secondary School in Tal Hmis, Hasakeh Governorate was used by a number of armed groups for military purposes and subsequently attacked and badly damaged in an airstrike in 2014. The school, which ceased to function when it was taken over by the armed groups, once served between 400 and 600 pupils, and was reported to be one of the best in the area. Now the sides of the buildings are blown in, the floor is covered with rubble and broken glass, and the perimeter walls are pockmarked with bullet holes.

According to interviews conducted by Save the Children with local sources, 12 of the 13 schools in the Tal Hmis area have suffered a similar fate, having been used for military purposes and then attacked. As of August 2015, most families are still too afraid to return to this town or the surrounding villages in Hasakeh and are waiting for the restoration of basic services such as the water and power supplies as well as the reconstruction and rehabilitation of schools. Children from those families who have returned to this area after months of displacement face the prospect of not being able to attend school when the new school year starts in mid-September 2015.

Even in cases where schools that were used for military purposes have been reopened, the reminders of their militarization are evident for children to see: bullet holes and graffiti on the walls, sniper positions on the roofs, broken desks and shattered glass. This causes children to feel insecure in spaces that are meant to be safe, adding to the trauma children have experienced and increasing the likelihood of their not returning to or dropping out of school.



Photo of damaged school in Hasakeh. Credit: Save the Children

3. International support for continuing education programing for Syria's children

"I love my school, and I love the teachers. We enjoy the school very much because we are always doing nice things like painting, singing, and reading. I am very good at reading, and my Mum always says that when I grow up I will become a writer, and I will write many stories for children, but actually I want to be a singer when I grow up." - Huda, 8 years old

In the long-term, quality education can contribute towards promoting peace and prosperity and help young people develop the skills and qualifications they need to prepare for their futures and rebuild their communities. In Syria, however, children may never complete their education and therefore the prospect of a lost generation of Syrian children who face a future of limited opportunity is real, with serious implications for the future peace and stability of the country and the wider region. Children are at increased risk of human rights abuses by parties to the conflict, as education can help protect children from recruitment and sexual violence by armed groups and forces. Without access to education, children are also at greater risk of being drawn into the worst forms of child labor and early marriage.



*Students in a school supported by Save the Children in the suburbs of Idlib, northern Syria.
Credit: Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children*

Attacks have depleted the teaching force, as teachers and professors are intimidated, injured, killed, or forced to flee. For example, the conflict has resulted in the loss of 22% of teaching staff, many of whom have fled the country, while conservative estimates suggest 167 education personnel including 69 teachers are reported to have been killed.³⁵ This exacerbates the

³⁵ GCPEA, *Education Under Attack*, 2014.

http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/eua_2014_full_0.pdf

shortage of teachers in Syria, and widens the already significant gap between the number of trained teachers and the demand for education.³⁶



The conflict is also having psychological effects on children in the long-term, impeding children's ability to learn and develop. In a survey of 347 children undertaken by Save the Children between December 2013 and March 2014, a large proportion was identified as displaying signs of psychosocial distress. Nearly one in three children identified feelings of helplessness, 39% regularly had bad dreams and

42% said they regularly felt sad. In a June 2014 survey of teachers in eight Save the Children-supported schools, 38% of children were identified as displaying emotional and behavioral traits suggesting they were unable to cope with the stress of their environment; slightly more boys than girls were affected and teachers noted more than half of the children as being easily scared and 40% were frequently unhappy.³⁷ Save the Children has continued to highlight the psychological impact of the conflict in Syria on children, in particular by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.³⁸ Attacks on and military use of schools can also contribute to isolation and distress. Children interviewed by Save the Children also spoke of the psychological trauma they suffer when their schooling is interrupted as a result of attacks.

Given the trauma children are experiencing, the international community must adequately support children suffering from psychosocial distress in order to ensure they can stay in school and learn while in class. To this end, education programming that includes specialized activities designed to keep children safe and protected must be prioritized to address children's psychosocial well-being and improve their ability to learn. Teachers must be trained and supported to foster children's well-being. In addition, emphasis must be placed on training more people to become teachers. Communities may also support children's learning and continued well-being and should be engaged in identifying needs and shaping and delivering the response.

The consequences of not prioritizing education are dire. Save the Children estimates that the long-term impact on Syria's economy of 2.8 million children never returning to school could be as much as \$2.18 billion³⁹ and that the economic cost of replacing damaged, destroyed or occupied schools and

³⁶ See more at: <http://protectingeducation.org/news/protect-teachers-wartime-attacks-new-report-shows-educators-are-targeted-armed-conflict#sthash.VKsgLSEZ.dpuf>

³⁷ Save the Children, *Futures Under Threat*, September 2014.

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Futures_under_Threat1.pdf

³⁸ Save the Children, *Explosive Weapons and Grave Violations Against Children Position Paper*, 2013, pgs. 16-18.

https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Explosive_Weapons_and_Grave_Violations_Against_Children.pdf

³⁹ Save the Children, *The Cost of War: Calculating the impact of the collapse of Syria's education system on the country's future*, March 2015. http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The_Cost_of_War2.pdf

lost school equipment could be as high as \$3 billion⁴⁰ with serious implications for staffing and retraining.

Save the Children's experience clearly shows that despite the ongoing conflict, it is possible to support the continuation of education for Syria's children. However, education is only 21% funded under the Syria Response Plan⁴¹ and many more children could continue their education if more funding was available, and if schools were not destroyed and scarce available resources did not need to be diverted to repairing schools or making adaptations to ensure their safety.⁴² Funding education is vital as ensuring access to good-quality education will protect Syria's children and have a transformative effect on their futures, and the growth and stability of Syria and the region.

"It's not only that we want to have a good future, but we also enjoy the school very much as it's the only place where we can play with our friends and do nice activities like singing, painting and dancing. The teachers are very kind and funny; they always make us laugh and they teach us new things every day." - Aisha, 8 years old

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ UN OCHA, Financial Tracking Service, <https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=special-syriancrisis>, accessed 9 September 2015.

⁴² On average, education receives less than 2% of humanitarian aid. See: Save the Children, *More and Better: Global Action to Improve Funding, Support and Collaboration for Education in Emergencies*, May 2015. See <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/more-and-better>

Conclusion

Attacks on schools in Syria are now an everyday reality with research by Save the Children showing that half of all global attacks over the past four years have taken place in Syria, with at least 32 attacks occurring between January and August 2015 alone. These attacks threaten children's lives, compound their psychosocial trauma and increasingly prevent children from accessing education. More than four years of conflict in Syria has already reduced the percentage of children in school from almost 100% to around 50%. One of the major reasons for this rapid decline is the fact that attacks on schools have reduced children's ability to access a safe classroom, have depleted the number of teachers, and have created fear among parents who are now choosing to keep their children at home. A lack of access to education means that Syria's children are at risk of becoming a lost generation, with no opportunities to develop and gain skills. This is not only a disaster for millions of individual children, but also for the entire country which will rely on children to rebuild what has been destroyed when a peaceful resolution to the conflict is finally achieved.

Despite the enormous challenges, it is still possible to deliver education in Syria, as demonstrated by Save the Children's ongoing support to 53 schools in northern Syria. Our experience shows that with appropriate community engagement, robust security analysis, teacher training, investments that allow adaptations to school infrastructure, and a flexible approach to delivering learning and appropriate levels of psychosocial support, children can continue to access education. Education is what children want, keeps them safe, and gives children the best chance for a healthy and productive future. Funding that allows education to continue even under the most difficult circumstances is an investment in the future of Syria's children, and the future of Syria.

But it should not have to be this way. It should not be the case that schools require safe rooms, bunkers and shatter-proof glass; that teachers have to conduct evacuation drills or provide psychosocial support to traumatized children; that children are forced to drop out of schools for days, weeks or months at a time, or are forced to study at home or in a basement. Children cannot wait for the conflict to end before there is adequate investment in their education, but they also will not have the opportunity to experience the safe, quality education that is their right unless all schools in Syria are protected and there is an immediate end to the ongoing conflict.

Annex: Attacks on and military use of schools in Syria since the start of 2015

The information in this table has been drawn from a number of sources including Save the Children field reports, reports from other NGOs, UN reports and publicly available information. Save the Children has not been able to verify all reports and is unable to verify the perpetrators of each attack.

Given the volatile security situation and lack of access to many parts of Syria, it is likely that the true number of attacks is much higher than reported. This table is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of all incidents but instead is a snapshot of the situation relating to attacks on schools in Syria. The information in this table covers the period 1 January – 10 August 2015.

Date	Location	District	Governorate	Type of incident	Source
10 August 2015	Maaret Misrin	Idleb	Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
9 August 2015	Zardana	Idleb	Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
July 2015 ⁴³	Maaret al Numan	Al Ma'ra	Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report Public report
July 2015 ⁴⁴	Kobani	Ain al Arab	Aleppo	Clashes around school	Public report
28 July 2015	Idleb city		Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
20 July 2015	Idleb city		Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
8 July 2015	Idleb city		Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
18 June 2015	Idleb city		Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
15 June 2015	Aleppo old city	Jebel Saman	Aleppo	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
13 June 2015	Idleb city		Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report

⁴³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yuk94_WrC8I&index=6&list=PLHDJIEczl0YNjG6KrM8vp0Rj68doryc0LWA

⁴⁴<http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/07/a-violent-clashes-erupt-a-round-a-school-in-serrin-and-ypg-fighters-look-for-an-is-group-hiding-among-civilians/>

Annex: Attacks on and military use of schools in Syria since the start of 2015

Date	Location	District	Governorate	Type of incident	Source
12 June 2015	Idlib city		Idlib	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
3 June 2015	Kafr Nubl	Al Ma'ra	Idlib	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
1 June 2015	Kafr Nubl	Al Ma'ra	Idlib	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
June 2015 ⁴⁵	Kobani	Ain al Arab	Aleppo	Military use of schools	Public report
June 2015 ⁴⁶	Hasakeh city	Al Hasakeh	Al Hasakeh	Military use of schools	Public report
June 2015 ⁴⁷	Al Nuzha neighborhood		Homs	VBIED	Public report
19 May 2015 ⁴⁸	Malki district, Damascus city	Damascus	Damascus	Shelling 23 students injured; one teacher killed	News report UN report
16 May 2015	Duma town	Damascus	Damascus	Aerial bombardment Five children killed; 10 injured	UN report
15 May 2015	Idlib city		Idlib	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
13 May 2015	Idlib city		Idlib	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
3 May 2015 ⁴⁹	Seif al-Dawla neighborhood, Aleppo city	Jebel Saman	Aleppo	Aerial bombardment. 7 people killed, including 4 children	News report

⁴⁵ <http://www.ukssd.de/report-about-kobani-city-on-june-25-2015/>

⁴⁶ <http://www.ukssd.de/report-on-the-events-in-hasaka-city-on-june-24th-until-07th-july-2015/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/06/20-wounded-by-an-explosion-near-a-school-in-homs/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/05/20/411997/Syria-Damascus-mortar-shell-elementary-school>

⁴⁹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11580818/Syrian-barrel-bomb-attack-near-school-kills-at-least-seven-including-four-children.html>

Annex: Attacks on and military use of schools in Syria since the start of 2015

Date	Location	District	Governorate	Type of incident	Source
25 April 2015	Ariha	Ariha	Idleb	Unknown	UN report
23 April 2015	South-west Idleb city	Idleb	Idleb	Aerial bombardment 7 people injured	NGO report
13 April 2015	Southern Idleb city	Idleb	Idleb	Aerial bombardment 3 children injured; 17 adults injured; 4 adults killed	NGO report
12 April 2015 ⁵⁰	Al-Ansari neighborhood, Aleppo city	Jebel Saman	Aleppo	Airstrike 9 people killed, including 5 children	News report NGO report
7 April 2015	Ariha	Ariha	Idleb	Unknown	UN report
4 April 2015	North Idleb city	Idleb	Idleb	Aerial bombardment 30 people injured, including 6 children; 13 adults killed	NGO report
3 April 2015	North-east Idleb city	Idleb	Idleb	Aerial bombardment 10 adults injured; 3 children killed; 6 adults killed	NGO report
2 April 2015	Aleppo city	Jebel Saman	Aleppo	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
March 2015	Taftanaz	Idleb	Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report
5 March 2015	Harem	Harim	Idleb	Aerial bombardment	NGO report News report
February 2015 ⁵¹	Duma city	Damascus	Damascus	Shelling	NGO report Public report

⁵⁰ <https://www.syriahr.com/en/2015/04/aerial-bombardment-on-a-school-kills-9-including-5-children/>

⁵¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KKuJjg995A&index=4&list=PLHDJIEczYNjG6KrM8vp0Rj68doryc0LWA>



Save the Children invests in childhood – every day, in times of crisis and for our future.

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By transforming children's lives now, we change the course of their future and ours.