WITHOUT SCHOOL

Save the Children

The impact of attacks on education in North West Syria on children

WITHOUT SCHOOL

Every child has the right to a future. Save the Children works around the world to give children a healthy start in life, and the chance to learn and to be safe. We do whatever it takes to get children the things they need – every day and in times of crisis.

The impact of attacks on education in North West Syria on children

"I used to go to a school at the southern end of my town, but it was destroyed during the ongoing conflict. I moved to another school that was in a basement, but it also was attacked, damaged and is no longer a place where we can learn. I have been displaced again, and now I go to a new school. I never told anyone I was afraid, but our teacher told us it is okay to be afraid. Now I can tell you I am afraid that my school will be hit again."

Rose, 13 years old girl in North West Syria.

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In order to protect children and the families who agreed to be interviewed by Save the Children, names in this report have been changed and exact locations omitted. All testimonies are based on children's experiences while living in Syria.

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Cover photo: Jawad, 8, and Yazan, 15, working in a cemetery as grave diggers (Photo: Save the Children)

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 06

BACKGROUND 10

WHAT IS AN ATTACK? 11

INCIDENTS OF ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN NORTH WEST SYRIA 12
- Destruction of schools 12
- Killing of children 13
- Explosive remnants 15
- Military use of schools 15
- Attacks on education personnel 15
- Interference in education by armed groups 15
- Other attcks on education 16

VISUALISING THE DESTRUCTION 16

IMPACT OF DONORS' RISK MITIGATION MEASURES 17

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF SAFETY IN SYRIAN SCHOOLS 18
- Constant threats of violence 18
- Mental health needs 18
- Diminished school infrastructure and teaching staff 20
- School dropouts 20

ACHIEVING DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO DISPLACEMENT 21

RECOMMENDATIONS 22

ANNEX ONE: METHODOLGY 24

ANNEX TWO: Provisions and regulations to protect education 27

ANNEX THREE: Safe Schools Declaration 30

ANNEX FOUR: Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict 32

ENDNOTES 34

A child writing on the black board in what used to be his school that has been damaged by fighting in Idlib North West Syria.
Photo by : Hurras Network

INTRODUCTION

While schools are supposed to be safe spaces where children, in all their diversity, can meaningfully engage, learn and socialise, in Syria, they have turned into places where children are killed and maimed.

Between February 2019 and February 2020 alone, Save the Children and partners can confirm 92 incidents where a school or education facility was attacked. These, and other attacks, have killed more than 251 children in 2019 alone, and injured hundreds of others.

This has meant that children in Syria have had to live under the constant threat of violence. They have had to travel from one town to another just to receive basic education, and they have been exposed to harassment, armed men en route and ongoing conflict like shelling and bombardment.

Meanwhile, the children's concept of 'safety' in Syria has been altered beyond recognition, as a result of entire childhoods spent in the shadow of war. The normalisation of unimaginable violence has become an everyday reality for children who have no understanding of how the majority of children around the world experience their daily journey to and from, as well as their day at school. As a result, despite the fact that 2 in 3 children interviewed reported being exposed to harassment, checkpoints, armed men and/or shelling; 99 per cent of children interviewed still believed that both their schools and the routes to them were 'safe'. There is a stark disconnect between the children's reality and their perceptions due to an alarming normalisation of everyday violence.

Not only that, but warring parties in Syria seem to signify conflict escalation in new areas through attacking schools, which — in addition to the devastating impact on education, education personnel and the students — has created a perception in communities that if a school has been subject to an attack, a further escalation in violence is likely forthcoming.

In response, parents have requested that education actors refrain from establishing or reopening schools in certain areas, as they fear that would attract violence; instead, parents have requested that education be provided in alternative locations, including via homeschooling, schools with low-profiles, use of basements and caves and other structures, and/or mobile schools.

On the other hand, aid organisations have had to toe a very fine line between balancing risks (and donor risk mitigation measures) and needs of children. Parties to the conflict play the blame game and international organisations hide behind laws and regulations.

The result is that these — and several other events — have conspired against children in North West Syria, leaving around one million of them at risk of losing the only activity that could restore some sense of normalcy to their lives: education.

To that end, we believe each one of the actors involved should:

Girls playing in front of their school that has been damaged by fighting in Idlib North West Syria. Photo by: Hurras Network

PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

- Meet their obligations to ensure the protection of civilians, cease all attacks on schools and other civilian infrastructure, and refrain from using explosive weapons with wide area affects.
- Respect International Humanitarian Law and protect schools, hospitals and other vital civilian infrastructure from attack. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impact of explosive weapons, and warring parties should make a particular effort to protect them.
- Ensure schools, including abandoned school buildings and surrounding areas, are never used as military points or for any military purposes. All schools currently being used for military purposes should be returned to education authorities immediately.
- Education provision should be properly certified, enabling children and young people to study with confidence that their achievements will enable them to progress throughout the education system, at home or abroad.

DONOR COMMUNITY

- Prioritise the recovery of the education sector, enabling girls and boys to safely access quality and equitable learning opportunities at all education levels. Schools must be safe, accessible and adequately resourced to ensure children have access to appropriate and flexible support, particularly where they have missed years of school.
- Ensure funding for multi-year, sustainable programming for education, mental health and psychosocial support for children in the long term. The full extent of the impact of the conflict on children, and subsequently the future of Syria, may not be known until several years after violence has ended.
- Invest in ongoing teacher and education personnel training, mentorship and wellbeing, which is important for student achievement and improves students learning, including Psychological First Aid and Social Emotional Learning.
- Efforts to address legitimate security concerns of states should be in compliance

with IHL and the humanitarian imperative, and also take into account potential impact on humanitarian programming. Requests by donors for selective targeting, negative earmarking and vetting reduce the ability of humanitarian actors to respond on the basis of needs and can foster perceptions of partiality and reduce trust.

UNITED NATIONS

- While the MRM4Syria,[1] and other mechanisms monitor available information and reports on attacks on education in Syria, there is a need for a system that proactively generates comprehensive information on attacks on schools and education in Syria. The information should be geographically comprehensive, proactive and widely available to allow for space for action that could prevent attacks on education.
- Prioritise support to education activities to a level that would be adequate to ensuring children in NWS are able to return to safe, quality education quickly. The recent decline in humanitarian funding for education comes at a time when funds are needed more than ever.

AID AGENCIES

- Take into account the special needs and mental health and psychosocial support of children, through adaptive and contextualized programming, with a particular focus on mainstreaming in humanitarian programming.
- Design and implement inclusive education that would provide a learning space where children, in all their diversity, can meaningfully engage, learn and socialise, and where possible, ensure meaningful participation of children in the design and evaluation to reflect their different needs, capacities and preferences.
- Invest in conflict-sensitive education, taking into account language of instruction, curricula used, certification and location of schools to ensure meaningful access, and address discrimination between different vulnerability profiles (between host communities, internally displaced persons, and returnee children, among others).

A SCHOOL UNDER THE TREES

One of the teachers in Idlib, is teaching a number of children from his area after they had been out of school for months.

As the new academic year started, he decided to teach these children under the trees two months later. The teacher expressed his concern about not being able to continue teaching when it starts to rain. This outdoor school is located in Sinjar's displacement camp, southern Sarmada in Idlib's northern countryside. In the displacement camp, there are 400 students, 70 of which are attending school, while the others are not due to the lack of space.

There is a large and intensive displacement wave in the villages and towns of the eastern countryside of Ma`rat Al-Nu'man after the shelling and recent fighting in the area.

The bombing led to the influx of thousands of people from these villages, as the villages became almost empty. Photo by: Save the Children

BACKGROUND

Over a period of several months in 2019, Save the Children, in coordination with several local partners, conducted a set of surveys that included focus group discussions, role-play activities and in-depth interviews with 365 children (193 females, 172 males), aged 10-18 located in Idlib, Aleppo, Ar Raqqa and Al Hasakeh governorates in Syria. The results allowed us to pinpoint several issues that children in Syria identify as important priorities for both the betterment of their lives and a better future for Syria.

This paper offers an in-depth focus on one key issue raised by children: the impact of attacks on education occurring in North West Syria (NWS). Future studies will look at other areas and other themes.

Conflict throughout Syria have now put an estimated 2.1 million children out of school,[2] due to widespread damage and destruction to schools, and continued attacks on education personnel. Even where schools have not been forced to close as a result of fighting, parents are now understandably, at times, fearful of sending their children to school.

2.1 MILLION
CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL ACROSS SYRIA

WHAT IS AN ATTACK?

The most widely agreed understanding of attacks on education defines an attack as:
"[A]ny intentional threat or use of force – carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, religious or criminal reasons – against students, teachers, and education institutions".

Schools should be safe places where children can learn, play and increase their chances for a prosperous future. Instead, many places of learning have become the targets of violent attacks.

Attacks on education may include:

- Targeted violent attacks on schools by state military forces or non-state armed groups
- Violent attacks on students, teachers, and other education personnel
- Rape, forced marriage, or other forms of sexual violence carried out in schools or along school routes
- Recruitment of children at schools or along school routes
- Military use of schools, and deaths and injuries to students and other education personnel.

The short- and long-term impacts of these attacks can be devastating. The immediate effects can include death, injury, and the destruction of educational facilities, together with disrupted access to education. In the long term, attacks can lead to diminished education quality, loss of teachers and academics, weakened educational systems, and create a culture of impunity.

In nearly every conflict-affected country, girls may be particularly affected by attacks on education due to the many social and cultural barriers faced by girls which include sometimes restricting their movement and taking them out of school.[3] Where schools are used for military purposes, the presence of armed men often discourages families from sending their daughters to school for risk or fear of sexual violence.

Even where children can access schools or schools are functioning, the chances of receiving a good-quality education can be diminished as a result of disrupted attendance, poor learning environments, unsafe or no school buildings, a lack of adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, explosive remnants contamination along school access routes, and reduced distribution of learning materials. In an already precarious context these constitute additional barriers that can lead children to drop out of education permanently.

Attacks on education violate a child's right to education, enshrined in key international human rights treaties. Attacks on education may also violate international humanitarian and criminal law and constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity during war or peacetime. See Annex Two for more details.

INCIDENTS OF ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN NORTH WEST SYRIA

Attacks on education in times of conflict is a common threat facing children throughout the world.[4] Syria is no exception; in fact, it is one of the worst places in the world to be a child.[5] 2018 witnessed the highest number of attacks on schools and medical facilities recorded in Syria since the beginning of the conflict in 2011.[6]

That year, the United Nations verified 113 attacks on schools, a 69 per cent increase compared with 2017. There were also 24 UN-verified incidents of schools used as ammunition storage, military bases and as detention facilities. This was the situation prior to the intense spike in violence in NWS, which began in April 2019 and has further escalated over the past four months. This escalation has had a devastating impact on children's lives, including on their ability to access safe, quality education. This section explores the different dimensions of the impact of the conflict on children's right to education.

DESTRUCTION OF SCHOOLS

Parents interviewed in NWS reported an emerging pattern in the conflict: warring parties signify conflict escalation in new areas through attacking schools, which — in addition to the devastating impact on education, education personnel and the students — has created a perception in communities that if a school has been subject to an attack, a further escalation in violence is likely forthcoming. As such, attacks on schools — as well as attacks on hospitals or markets — trigger mass displacement.

In response, parents have requested that education actors refrain from establishing or reopening schools in certain areas, as they fear that would attract violence; instead, parents have requested that education be provided in alternative locations, including via homeschooling, schools with low-profiles, use of basements and caves and other structures, and/or mobile schools. Attacks on education facilities have rendered more than 644 out of approximately 1,062 schools in NWS out of service. Between February 2019 and February 2020 alone, Save the Children and partners can confirm 92 incidents where a school or education facility was attacked.

The Education Cluster estimate that there are currently one million school-age children in NWS. Based on our estimation, there are only 418 functional formal schools left, with an average of 10 classrooms in each school. For these schools to facilitate education provision for every child of school age in NWS, every functioning formal classroom in the area would need to accommodate up to 240 children. Instead, the reality is that many of the children growing up in the war-torn area find themselves displaced and without any education provision or attempting to cobble together an education in an overburdened and under-resourced informal system. A needs assessment undertaken by a Save the Children partner organization in January of this year concluded that only two of the 23 informal camps assessed had schools. Discussions with parents verified that children were out of school as the nearest one was too far away, with distance and the cost of transportation rendering it impossible for children to attend.[7]

The dilemma of evacuation drills

The intensity and variety of military activities on the ground in NWS means there are little to no safe areas for children and their families. Education actors in NWS find it impossible to identify mitigation measures to protect the children against some types of attacks. Education actors have developed evacuation drill procedures, where the safest area in the school is identified in advance, and children are taught how best to respond to potential scenarios, in the event the school is attacked including when the children are inside the classroom, during recess and around the school (on arrival and/or departure).

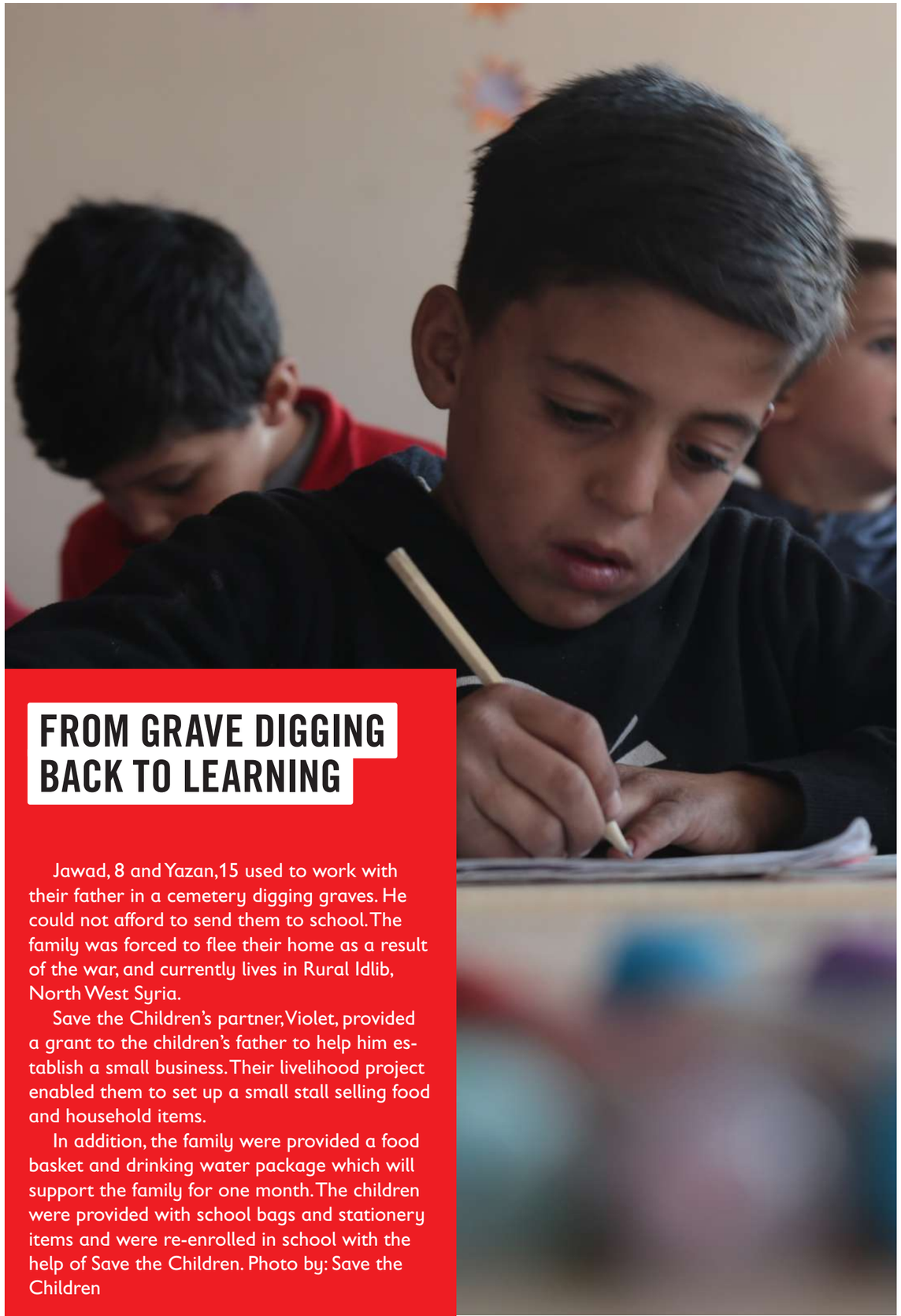
Such drills, while welcome in theory, also pose a risk as predicting which part of a school could be attacked is difficult and could result in a higher number of deaths among the children if an attack occurs in the 'safe area'.

KILLING OF CHILDREN

An alarming number of children in NWS have been killed directly by the ongoing conflict — ground fighting, sniper fire and air raids — and unexploded ordinances, and indirectly, due to failure by armed actors to take all necessary measures to protect children from conflict.[8] Some children have been killed as a result of the desperate living conditions caused by the ongoing conflict. Children have been killed in and on their way to schools, markets and hospitals, at exponential rates.

In 2018, Save the Children and its partners documented at least 32 children killed in the fighting in NWS, while in 2019, the number rose to 251, as the conflict intensified. In the first two months of 2020 alone, at least 30 children were killed in an escalation in conflict that also saw more than 550,000 of them displaced. At least 7 children died as a result of harsh weather conditions, after having been forced to sleep in tents, schools, mosques or out in the open in some instances coupled with receiving inadequate levels of aid[9] either because of a lack of humanitarian access or simply because of the sheer number of needs that has reached catastrophic levels.

Children gathered in the school yard to celebrate returning to school following suspension after school being hit by an airstrike in Idlib, North West Syria. Photo by: Hurras Network



FROM GRAVE DIGGING BACK TO LEARNING

Jawad, 8 and Yazan,15 used to work with their father in a cemetery digging graves. He could not afford to send them to school. The family was forced to flee their home as a result of the war, and currently lives in Rural Idlib, North West Syria.

Save the Children's partner, Violet, provided a grant to the children's father to help him establish a small business. Their livelihood project enabled them to set up a small stall selling food and household items.

In addition, the family were provided a food basket and drinking water package which will support the family for one month. The children were provided with school bags and stationery items and were re-enrolled in school with the help of Save the Children. Photo by: Save the Children

MILITARY USE OF SCHOOLS

While there has yet to be any recorded incidents of military use of in-use schools in NWS, unconfirmed reports of military use of abandoned schools are common. [10] The commonly applied Code of Conduct in schools in NWS prevents teachers from coming into schools while wearing camouflaged attire, carrying a weapon or any military-related outward signs. The vast majority of agencies, including all of Save the Children partner organisations, are mandated to report to donors and to the Education Cluster of any military outfits, military vehicles, checkpoints in proximity to schools, and clashes immediately.

According to key informant interviews, the most frequently reported military use of schools in NWS is military occupation of schools that have been abandoned by education actors, in most cases due to active conflict. This has often occurred when a town or village has emptied, and children and their families are displaced, causing education actors to flee the area as well. [11]

Abandoned schools should not be used, as it prevents education personnel from reestablishing education and puts the schools at risk of destruction, and students and educators at risk of explosive remnants of conflict upon return/ re-establishment of the school.

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION PERSONNEL

The earliest reported incident that can be confirmed by Save the Children and partners of attacks on education personnel by Armed Non-State Actors (ANSAs) in NWS took place in 2018, when a group of armed men entered a school in Idlib to arrest an administrative staff member. Additionally, according to key informant interviews, in 2017, a group of armed men entered the Education Directorate's building in Aleppo to arrest the education director and another staff member.

Save the Children and partners have confirmed the killing of at least 10 teachers during active conflict and one after having been kidnapped between February 2019 and February 2020. The full number of teachers attacked or killed is likely to be higher, given the constraints on our information gathering.

Education personnel have also been displaced, with their families, at times more than once. Between December 2019 and February 2020, at least 15,000 education personnel have been forced to leave their homes in NWS in search of safety, according to numbers verified by Hurras Network.

INTERFERENCE IN EDUCATION

While armed groups continue to attempt to impose controls on education in NWS, including attempts to impose standards such as separating boys from girls into different classes, and imposing uniforms for both teachers and students, successful efforts by education actors and communities have restricted armed groups ability to impose changes.

Families and communities have been very resistant to interference by armed groups in the education process and have strongly pushed back against it, sometimes by physically fighting armed men away from a school building. Education actors have temporarily discontinued support to schools in response to attempts by armed actors to interfere in education activities. The suspension of funding to those schools, or the threats of suspension, served as deterrents to different armed groups from interfering in education.

EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS

Several incidents of unexploded ordinances were recorded in NWS in 2019 by Save the Children partners, resulting in the deaths of at least 23 children, while dozens of children were maimed.

While several organisations work to raise awareness amongst affected communities about the presence and dangers of explosive remnants of war; the continued displacement of children and their families, leads them to live in or go to schools in unfamiliar areas increasing the risk of exposure to explosives.

VISUALISING THE DESTRUCTION

Save the Children and World Vision partnered with the Signal Program at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative to look at how destruction of populated areas and displacement of civilians in Idlib has led to a rapid worsening of humanitarian and living conditions for millions of people.[13]

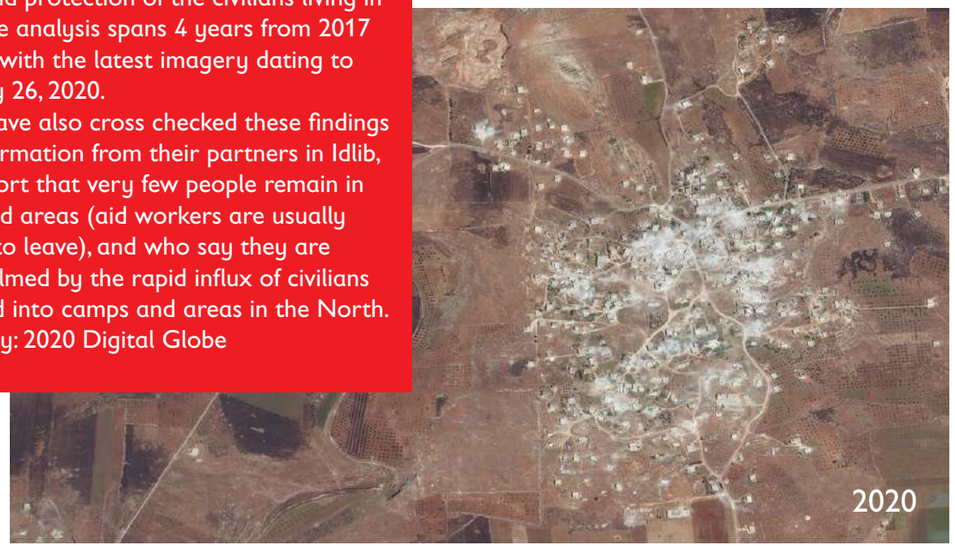
A series of satellite images, analysed by the Signal Program at Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, show that several areas in the South and East of Idlib governorate have been intensely damaged by ongoing conflict. In the areas examined, the researchers estimate that nearly one-third of buildings, some of which are schools have been significantly damaged or destroyed. With most of these areas' inhabitants having fled before or during conflict escalation, the destruction of schools, hospitals, homes and vital civilian infrastructure will make it nearly impossible for families to return in the near future.

The analyzed sites represent a portion of the camps and towns and do not show the full extent of all areas. The sites were selected based first and foremost on the safety and protection of the civilians living in them. The analysis spans 4 years from 2017 to 2020, with the latest imagery dating to February 26, 2020.

We have also cross checked these findings with information from their partners in Idlib, who report that very few people remain in destroyed areas (aid workers are usually the last to leave), and who say they are overwhelmed by the rapid influx of civilians displaced into camps and areas in the North.
Photos by: 2020 Digital Globe

OTHER ATTCKS ON EDUCATION

While Save the Children and its partners have not collected evidence on incidents of sexual violence by armed actors in or en route to schools, nor on child recruitment in or en route to schools, several instances of these have been recorded by the UN in their thematic report on child rights violations across Syria.[12]



IMPACT OF DONORS RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

In addition to the humanitarian funding cycle,[14] funding for education activities in NWS has largely been implemented via a multi-donor platform through both humanitarian and stabilisation funding channels.

Donors' primary concern was ensuring no diversion of aid, particularly to proscribed groups. To this end, donors have negatively earmarked funds in some education programmes in NWS – that is to say, they have removed funding for education for particular areas - among other risk-mitigation strategies.[15]

According to interviews with key informants, area assessments undertaken by education providers in search of donor funding must include information about the actors or group controlling the area, as well as the vetting of personnel. However, assessments do not always require information on the number of children in need of education or the overall needs of education for displaced or host populations. The classification system has seemingly failed to prioritise the needs of children. Additionally, donors have adopted a very-low threshold for the definition of "influencing and interference in education".

For example, a meeting between a person from the Education Directorate and a person on the UN proscribed groups list could be considered interference in education and as such could warrant discontinuation of funding.[16]

As a result, a binary classification of areas now exists, red and green, one which was funded the other was not.

These risk mitigation measures have led to a reduction in schools funded by international donors. In 2019, education actors struggled to find funding for programmes that provided education to children above 10 years old, or above 4th grade. Moreover, activities such as printing of schoolbooks continue to be difficult to fund, making them a scarce resource across NWS.

The IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team made it clear that while humanitarian organisations acknowledge the legitimate security concerns of states, they are of the opinion that efforts to address these should be in compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the humanitarian imperative, and also take into account potential impact on partners.[17]

Results from the key informant interviews, and from parents and teachers focus group discussions suggest that the reduction in funding, particularly the reduction in funding of formal education and formal exams, is leading families to deprioritise education for their children as an activity with no future, as they have diminishing confidence in its quality, the benefit to their children and its value in the face of the risks their children face.

By automatically negatively earmarking an area, the needs of the population in need go unaddressed, which may cause community tensions and/or further exacerbate conflict dynamics. In addition, negative earmarking can cause unfair perceptions of affiliation, which can further stigmatize communities.

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF SAFETY IN SCHOOLS

While monitoring mechanisms to document attacks on schools do exist, the wider impact of these attacks on children themselves – as told by them – often go undocumented. Save the Children interviewed 413 children from NWS through a series of 12 focus group discussions and surveys to understand how they perceive and experience the attacks on their schools. See Annex One for the methodology.

CONSTANT THREATS OF VIOLENCE

Children's lives in NWS are generally unsafe. They identify the risk of conflict as a normalised part of their lives having experienced it for much of their childhood.

Of the 413 children interviewed, 34 per cent have travel between villages in order to reach their school (one in four of whom were girls). Those children reported that one of the main challenges they faced in getting to school safely was the presence of checkpoints or armed men on the road to school.

More than 70 per cent of the girls, and one in three boys, said the dangers on the road included violent conflict, shelling or unexploded ordinance. More than 32 per cent (of whom 62 per cent were girls) had difficulty walking the long distances to school, especially during the winter due to the adverse weather and road conditions, and 34.5 per cent (21.8 per cent of whom were females) said there is a general lack of safe and accessible transportation to and from schools.

MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

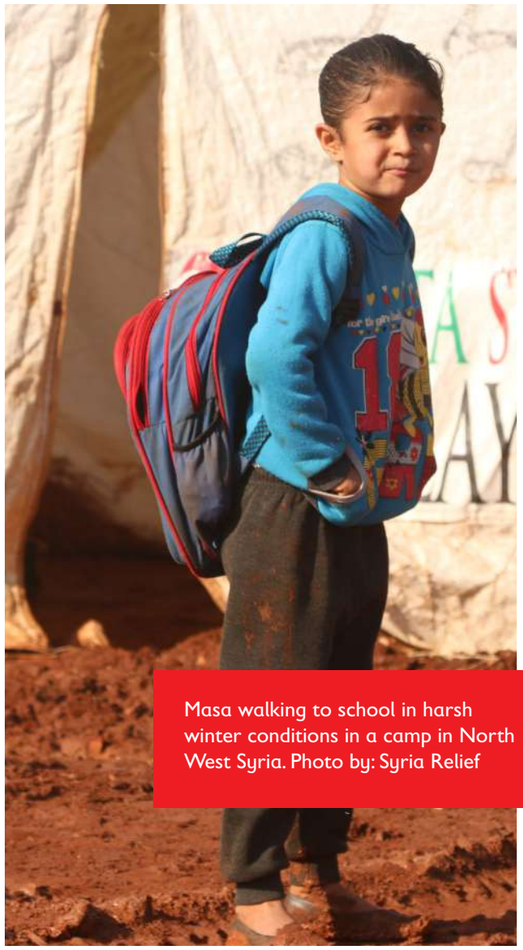
More than half of children in Syria have grown up knowing nothing but war. Exposure to violence at schools and at home due to the ongoing conflict means children have experienced displacement, witnessed the death and injury of loved ones, and experienced fear and loss and uncertainty many times over, impacting their overall psychological wellbeing. Teachers and parents interviewed said that this has affected children's concentration levels in the classroom or at home, and, consequently, has hindered their ability to learn. In addition, children noted that their displacement from one region to another, the change of school and the consequent loss of contact with old friends had left a psychological impact on them and created difficulties in their ability to integrate into new schools.

Children's concept of 'safety' in Syria has been altered beyond recognition, as a result of entire childhoods spent in the shadow of war. The normalisation of unimaginable violence has become an everyday reality for children who have no understanding of how the majority of children around the world experience their daily journey to and from, as well as their day at school. As a result, despite the fact that 2 in 3 children interviewed reported being exposed to harassment, checkpoints, armed men and/or shelling; 99 per cent of children interviewed still believed that both their schools and the routes to them were 'safe'. There is a stark disconnect between the children's reality and their perceptions due to an alarming normalization of everyday violence.

While parental and teacher support likely contributes to children's positive perception of school safety, this perception, according to mental health and psychosocial support experts, is not aligned with the large-scale exposure to violence among children interviewed in the study. It is possible that children interviewed suppressed or denied the impact of their traumatic experiences and stress as a coping mechanism. Unable to yet process their experiences, children's mental health is likely to be at risk in the long term. If children reach a point in their lives where their situation is stable, they will need appropriate support to be able to start processing what has happened to them. Without this appropriate support, they could suffer from longer-term mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress.

These results reflect similar findings across different contexts in the region, where children 'in protracted displacement face a variety of hardships such as isolation, insecurity, psychological distress, extended disruption of education, heightened protection risks, exploitative working conditions, desperation and hopelessness. '[18]

Living through conflict can have a devastating impact on children's wellbeing and compromise their social, emotional and cognitive development. This is especially true for children who continue to face challenges that increase their risks every day, ranging from lack of access to basic services such as education, including those who are targeted in schools and are forced to engage in exploitative forms of child labour such as recruitment in armed groups, survival sex and child marriage to repeated displacements, poverty, loss of or separation from family members and friends, violence, and deteriorated living conditions. Research has shown that non-traumatic war-related daily stressors such as the breakdown of support networks or increased poverty, can influence mental well-being in the same way as direct trauma.[19]



Masa walking to school in harsh winter conditions in a camp in North West Syria. Photo by: Syria Relief

Conflict-related challenges including increased poverty also impacts the wellbeing of parents and caregivers, who themselves are struggling to cope, compromising their ability to adequately care for their children often leading to increased family tension and violence as well as resorting to risky coping strategies.

Save the Children has written several reports (2016 to 2019) assessing the mental health and psychosocial needs of children across Syria.[20] The reports reveal that 89% of children's behaviour has become more fearful and nervous as the conflict continues; around 80% said children and adolescents have become more aggressive, 49% said children regularly or always have feelings of grief or extreme sadness and 78% have these feelings at least some of the time and all children said that loss of education had a huge psychological impact on their lives.[21] The effects ranged from sleep deprivation and withdrawn behaviour to self-harm and suicide attempts. Some had lost the ability to speak.

DIMINISHED INFRASTRUCTURE AND TEACHING STAFF

There has been a decrease in the number of operational schools as a direct result of the violent conflict in several areas, with at least 644 (out of approximately 1,062 in NWS) schools either partially or completely damaged. This has led to the reduction of the number of useable classrooms in certain areas and, subsequently, led to functional schools having to accommodate an increasing number of students in each classroom, causing widespread overcrowding.

There is also a shortage of specialized teachers, teaching professionals or graduates of universities and institutes with specializations related to the subjects they teach. Some 23 per cent of teachers in NWS hold a secondary school certificate or less, 49 per cent are current university or some community college students and 28 per cent have a university or community college degree that is not related to the teaching profession.[22] This has diminished the chances of students obtaining rigorous and sustainable educational opportunities, which may later increase the probability of dropouts and weaken future employment prospects.

There is also a shortage of teaching materials available, with all the children interviewed reporting that they are missing at least one textbook, stationery and teaching aid in schools, especially since students, due to poverty, became dependent on schools to secure stationery and school bags.

SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Despite the diminished school infrastructure and personnel quality, it was clear from the children, parents and teachers that the reasons for children's dropout were not necessarily related to their perception of the safety of schools, as much as causes such as poverty, child labour, child marriage, shortage of educational materials and displacement. These results are consistent with the results of other reports on schools in Syria. The current school drop-out rate in NWS is staggering. The drop-out rate for the academic years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 stands at approximately 39% (22,988) students.[23]

All schools included in the study sample have students with special needs. Parents and teachers also reported that they know of children with special needs who were not enrolled in schools. The primary reasons for this exclusion revolved around the extent of the school's preparedness to accommodate additional needs such as learning disabilities, physical disabilities such as visual impairment, and mental/psychological disorders in addition to children not attending education because they felt rejected, or were bullied, by their peers.

ACHIEVING DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO DISPLACEMENT

Attacks on schools have immediate and long-term harmful impacts on both people seeking durable solutions to their displacement in NWS as well as on the institutions that are meant to enable this.

For individual children and their families, attacks on schools can catalyse new displacement as people move away from areas where they are not able to safely access basic services such as education. Similarly, both internally displaced persons' and refugees' decision making on where to pursue durable solutions is impacted by incidents of attacks on schools. Based on available intentions surveys of displaced communities across NWS, the safety and security situation in areas of origin is both a key factor triggering displacement and impacting displaced persons' intentions to return.[24] In other words, until attacks on schools and other civilian targets stop, those displaced persons who may wish to return or locally integrate in impacted areas are unlikely to do so.

From an institutional perspective, damage to educational infrastructure delays return to normalcy long after direct attacks have ceased. This is also likely to impact displaced persons' priorities regarding returns or pursuing local integration. Based on Save the Children's analysis on Syrian refugee youth and adolescent's priorities for return, functioning education is one of the key factors impacting decision making on whether and when to go back to Syria, and if education facilities are not functional and able to respond to the demand for services.[25]

In addition, attacks on education — both in the form of direct strikes as well as through the use of schools and routes to and from school for recruitment into armed forces and groups — can have serious and longstanding negative impacts on school attendance through caregivers perceiving sending their children to school as risky. Returning from areas where the curriculum has been altered to match religious or political ideologies may also have an impact on community acceptance and social cohesion, although this information only exists anecdotally.[26]

In all of these areas, there is a need for conflict-sensitive education to help ensure meaningful access to education for all populations of children, whether they are returnees, IDPs, or host community and regardless of the child's ethnicity, religious background, and/or perceived political affiliation.

Aya at a Save the Children supported school in a camp in Idlib, North West Syria. Photo by: Syria Relief

RECOMMENDATIONS

PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

- Meet their obligations to ensure the protection of civilians, **cease all attacks on schools** and other civilian infrastructure, and **refrain from using explosive weapons** with wide area affects.
- Respect **International Humanitarian Law and protect schools**, hospitals and other vital civilian infrastructure from attack. **Children are particularly vulnerable to the impact of explosive weapons,** and warring parties should make a particular effort to protect them.
- Ensure schools, **including abandoned school buildings** and surrounding areas, are never used as military points or for any military purposes. All schools currently being used for military purposes **should be returned to education authorities** immediately.
- Education provision should be properly certified, enabling children and young people to study with confidence that their achievements will enable them to progress throughout the education system, at home or abroad.

DONOR COMMUNITY

- Prioritise the recovery of the education sector, enabling girls and boys to safely access quality and equitable learning opportunities at all education levels. Schools must be safe, accessible and adequately resourced to ensure children have access to appropriate and flexible support, particularly where they have missed years of schoolEnsure funding for multi-year, sustainable programming for education, mental health and psychosocial support for children in the long term. The full extent of the impact of the conflict on children, and subsequently the future of Syria, may not be known until several years after violence has ended.
- Invest in ongoing teacher and education personnel training, mentorship and wellbeing, which is important for student achievement and improves students learning, including Psychological First Aid and Social Emotional Learning.
- Efforts to address legitimate security concerns of states should be in compliance with IHL and the humanitarian imperative, and also take into account potential impact on humanitarian programming. Requests by donors for selective targeting, negative earmarking and vetting reduce the ability of humanitarian actors to respond on the basis of needs and can foster perceptions of partiality and reduce trust.

UNITED NATIONS

- While the MRM4Syria, and other mechanisms monitor available information and reports on attacks on education in Syria, there is a need for a system that proactively generates comprehensive information on attacks on schools and education in Syria. The information should be geographically comprehensive, proactive and widely available to allow for space for action that could prevent attacks on education.
- Prioritise support to education activities to a level that would be adequate to ensuring children in NWS are able to return to safe, quality education quickly. The recent decline in humanitarian funding for education comes at a time when funds are needed more than ever.

AID AGENCIES

- Take into account the special needs and mental health and psychosocial support of children, through adaptive and contextualized programming, with a particular focus on mainstreaming in humanitarian programming.
- Design and implement inclusive education that would provide a learning space where children, in all their diversity, can meaningfully engage, learn and socialise, and where possible, ensure meaningful participation of children in the design and evaluation to reflect their different needs, capacities and preferences.
- Invest in conflict-sensitive education, taking into account language of instruction, curricula used, certification and location of schools to ensure meaningful access, and address discrimination between different vulnerability profiles (between host communities, internally displaced persons, and returnee children, among others).

OUT OF WORK AND INTO SCHOOL

Imran, 7, lost his father as a result of shelling that hit his city in Idlib, North West Syria, two years ago. They were displaced more than once until they settled in a camp in the area.

In order to help his mother and six siblings, Imran worked as a blacksmith. When Save the Children's partner organisation, Syria Relief, found him, they convinced his mother to send him to school. Imran was enrolled into school and started learning basic skills. He was happy among his classmates, so his mother was satisfied with the results.

Syria Relief also guaranteed a seat for Imran in the following school year of 2019, so he can resume his education.
Photo by: Syria Relief

ANNEX ONE: METHODOLOGY

Save the Children collected and represented data on children's points of view regarding what are the characteristics of a safe school and what impact does a safe/not-safe school have on them. The method aimed to address the shortage of data on the topic, with the data collection process focused on the following concepts:

1. Children's perception and experiences, including those related direct exposure to an unsafe environment
2. The psychological, social and educational effects of the safe schools' concept
3. Children's perception and experiences pertaining to the issue of safe schools and whether they deem their schools safe
4. The perception and experiences of parents and teachers in relation to the effect of the children's views on safe schools, and further inspection of whether these points of view affect their children's education.

Study Variables

The variables of the study are classified as follows:

1. The dependent variable, which is children's education and welfare, including (according to international definitions): all systematic activities designed purposefully to meet the needs of the learning process. It also includes an organised and sustainable communication to achieve education. The dependent variable is divided into the following sub-variables:

A. Access to education
B. Quality of education and related measurements
C. Circumstances under which education is provided

2. The independent variable: This variable is represented in the "safety of schools", and divided into the following sub-variables: shelling and burning of schools; killing, detention, abduction and threatening of students and teachers; and the use of educational facilities by parties to the conflict as bases, barracks or detention centers.

Study questions

This study addressed the following main question: What is the children's point of view regarding school safety? **What is the effect of such view on them?**
Sub-questions are derived from the aforementioned:

1. Do children experience violence, abuse or harassment at the school or on their way to it?
2. Have their schools been attacked or affected by violence related to education?
3. Have any of the participants been detained or arrested from the school or on their way to or from the school?
4. Has the school been used as a military base?
5. Has anyone been forced to skip school fearing related actual or possible threats?
6. Do the children think that perpetrators of acts of violence will be held accountable?
7. Do the children think that any person (authorities or others) has the ability or the intention to protect them from violence?
8. Has anyone's education and welfare been affected by violence/attacks on their schools?
9. What are the perceptions of parents and teachers on the impact of conflicts on children and their education?

Study Approach

This study followed the Descriptive Analytical Approach: which is based on studying the phenomenon as it is in reality, therefore describing it accurately and presenting both qualitative and quantitative data to support descriptions.

Study Population and Sample

1. Study Population: School children supported by the Syria Response Office in NWS; located in different areas in the region. With special focus on children who are located in areas that have been attacked or have a military presence or are within proximity to violent locations. In addition to children who have suffered from physical threats in the past weeks and months and/or have seen a disruption in the education process due to the violence.

2. Study Sample: A purposive sample was used, which is a non-random type of samples. The schools were selected by a team from Save the Children as a sample of the population that includes 20 schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

1. Data collection tool: Four questionnaires were designed based on the study variables, and each variable was measured by means of an adequate number of questions and in a manner that achieves the objectives of the research, in addition to 5 unstructured interviews with key informants. The four questionnaires were:

A. A questionnaire targeting the focus groups of children
B. A questionnaire targeting the focus groups of parents
C. A questionnaire targeting the focus groups of teachers
D. A questionnaire designed for one-on-one interviews with children

2. Data collection method

The data were collected by a team of 20 researchers, one designated for each school, after training them on the mechanisms of managing focus groups, filling questionnaires and abidance by the ethics protocols adopted by Save the Children when conducting such studies. The researchers received a -hour training over five days, including a trial day to check on their preparedness. The data was collected from the schools over a one-week duration, and the focus groups were as follows:

A. Children: The children's questionnaires were filled by conducting focus group discussions involving a total of 413 children from the 20 schools comprising the sample, of whom 40 per cent were females, or 165 students. The focus groups were divided into two categories: The first consisted of children from grades 1 through 5 at a rate of 2/3 children per class. Second: Children from grades 6 through 9, at a rate of 2/3 children per class.

B. Parents: Parent questionnaires were filled during a focus group discussion in which a total of 53 parents took part. Five sessions were held, each with an average of 10 persons. The ages of parents of participants in focus groups ranged from 22-60 years.

C. Teachers: The teachers' forms were filled by conducting focus group discussions in which a total of 51 teachers took part. Five sessions were conducted, each attended by an average of 11 male and female teachers within the age category 25-45 years, with the average female participation rate at 30 per cent. The teaching experience was divided into two categories: less than one year at 25.5 per cent, and one to six years, who constituted 74.5 per cent.

D. One-on-one interviews with children: 10 individual interviews were conducted with students who have gone through a shelling experience targeting their homes or schools, the interviews revolved around their detailed perception of school safety.

3.Data Processing:

The data collected by the researchers were electronically extracted using the KOBO Collect software. Data cleansing, verification, filtering and correction were then carried out by the data analysis unit before they were entered for final processing and extraction of results, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) tool.

4.Ethical Protocols:

During the data collection process, the following ethical protocols were observed:

- Administrative, technical and material protection of the anonymity of the persons involved in the evaluation.
- Physical protection of persons performing field work.
- Protection of data and securing the procedures designed to protect personal information.
- Parents' consent regarding collection or incorporation of data related to their children.
- Appropriate selection of children's age groups, including the development of data collection tools for that purpose.

Displaced Syrian children keeping warm in a camp in Idlib, North West Syria. Photo by: Partner Organisation

ANNEX TWO: PROVISIONS AND REGULATIONS TO PROTECT EDUCATION

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) establishes that civilians and civilian objects must enjoy protection against dangers arising from military operations.[27] Hence, the rule of distinction requires that: "[i]n order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives." A deliberate attack against a school, therefore, violates the rule of distinction and constituting a grave breach of IHL.[28] However, a school loses its protective status when it is used for military purposes, for example, to host artillery, soldiers, or is transformed into a command post, that school can become a targetable military objective.

CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Attacks on schools and hospitals during conflict is one of the six grave violations identified and condemned by the UN Security Council. The six grave violations form the basis of the Council's architecture to monitor, report and respond to abuses suffered by children in times of war. Attacks on schools and hospitals is a trigger to list parties to armed conflict in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict through the Act to Protect, a UN Security Council Resolution 1998, adopted in 2011 that allowed the UN to identify and list, in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

The Rome Statute—the international treaty which established the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002—of the ICC specifies the crimes over which the court has jurisdiction, and explicitly prohibits attacks against education buildings, both in international and non-international conflicts.[29]

The text submitted for consideration by the 160 state delegations contained two options for the war crime of 'intentionally directing attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not being used at the time for military purposes' with one option deleting the protection of education buildings.

During the debate, Syria was one of 21 delegations that publicly supported the inclusion of buildings dedicated to education.[30] The addition was eventually adopted by the conference.[31]

SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

The Safe Schools Declaration is an inter-governmental political commitment that provides countries the opportunity to express support for protecting education from attack during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of education during war; and the implementation of concrete measures to deter the military use of schools.

Launched in Oslo in May 2015, the declaration highlights the broad impact of armed conflict on education and outlines a set of commitments to strengthen the protection of education and ensure its continuity during armed conflict.[32] The first of these commitments is the implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. These Guidelines, developed between 2012 and 2014, propose a set of actions that parties to the conflict can take to reduce the military use of schools and universities, and to minimize the negative impact such use may have on students' safety and education. More than 100 governments have signed the Safe Schools Declaration to date. See Annex Four.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to education has been reaffirmed in numerous treaties at international and regional level. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, states in Article 26: 'Everyone has the right to education'. The right to education has been reaffirmed in various international treaties including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in particular articles 28 and 29 which focus on a child's right to an education and on the quality and content of education. The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All described education as consisting of essential learning tools such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving combined with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by human beings to survive, develop potential, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning, and Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognise the right of everyone to education, among others.[33]

Hala at a Save the Children supported education facility in a camp in Idlib, North West Syria. Photo by: Syria Relief

ANNEX THREE:
SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION

The impact of armed conflict on education presents urgent humanitarian, development and wider social challenges. Worldwide, schools and universities have been bombed, shelled and burned, and children, students, teachers and academics have been killed, maimed, abducted or arbitrarily detained. Educational facilities have been used by parties to armd conflict as, inter alia, bases, barracks or detention centres. Such actions expose students and education personnel to harm, deny large numbers of children and students their right to education and so deprive communities of the foundations on which to build their future. In many countries, armed conflict continues to destroy not just school infrastructure, but the hopes and ambitions of a whole generation of children.

Attacks on education include violence against educational facilities, students and education personnel. Attacks, and threats of attack, can cause severe and long-lasting harm to individuals and societies. Access to education may be undermined; the functioning of educational facilities may be blocked, or education personnel and students may stay away, fearing for their safety. Attacks on schools and universities have been used to promote intolerance and exclusion – to further gender discrimination, for example by preventing the education of girls, to perpetuate conflict between certain communities, to restrict cultural diversity, and to deny academic freedom or the right of association. Where educational facilities are used for military purposes it can increase the risk of the recruitment and use of children by armed actors or may leave children and youth vulnerable to sexual abuse or exploitation. In particular, it may increase the likelihood that education institutions are attacked.

By contrast, education can help to protect children and youth from death, injury and exploitation; it can alleviate the psychological impact of armed conflict by offering routine and stability and can provide links to other vital services. Education that is 'conflict sensitive' avoids contributing to conflict and pursues a contribution to peace. Education is fundamental to development and to the full enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. We will do our utmost to see that places of education are places of safety.

We welcome initiatives by individual States to promote and protect the right to education and to facilitate the continuation of education in situations of armed conflict. Continuation of education can provide life-saving health information as well as advice on specific risks in societies facing armed conflict.

We commend the work of the United Nations Security Council on children and armed conflict and acknowledge the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism for grave violations against children in armed conflict. We emphasize the importance of Security Council resolution 1998 (2011), and 2143 (2014) which, inter alia, urges all parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education and encourages Member States to consider concrete measures to deter the use of schools by armed forces and armed non-State groups in contravention of applicable international law.

We welcome the development of the Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict. The Guidelines are non-legally binding, voluntary guidelines that do not affect existing international law. They draw on existing good practice and aim to provide guidance that will further reduce the impact of armed conflict on education. We welcome efforts to disseminate these guidelines and to promote their implementation among armed forces, armed groups and other relevant actors.

We stress the importance, in all circumstances, of full respect for applicable international law, including the need to comply with the relevant obligations to end impunity.

Recognizing the right to education and the role of education in promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations; determined progressively to strengthen in practice the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and of children and youth in particular; committed to working together towards safe schools for all; we endorse the Guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict, and will:

- Use the Guidelines, and bring them into domestic policy and operational frameworks as far as possible and appropriate;
- Make every effort at a national level to collect reliable relevant data on attacks on educational facilities, on the victims of attacks, and on military use of schools and universities during armed conflict, including through existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms; to facilitate such data collection; and to provide assistance to victims, in a non-discriminatory manner;
- Investigate allegations of violations of applicable national and international law and, where appropriate, duly prosecute perpetrators;
- Develop, adopt and promote 'conflict-sensitive' approaches to education in international humanitarian and development programmes, and at a national level where relevant;
- Seek to ensure the continuation of education during armed conflict, support the reestablishment of educational facilities and, where in a position to do so, provide and facilitate international cooperation and assistance to programmes working to prevent or respond to attacks on education, including for the implementation of this declaration;
- Support the efforts of the UN Security Council on children and armed conflict, and of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and other relevant UN organs, entities and agencies; and
- Meet on a regular basis, inviting relevant international organisation and civil society, so as to review the implementation of this declaration and the use of the guidelines.

ANNEX FOUR:
GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTING SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES FROM MILITARY USE DURING ARMED CONFLICT

Parties to armed conflict are urged not to use schools and universities for any purpose in support of their military effort. While itis acknowledged that certain uses would not be contrary to the law of armed conflict, all parties should endeavour to avoid impinging on students' safety and education, using the following as a guide to responsible practice:

Guideline 1: Functioning schools and universities should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in anyway in support of the military effort.

(a) This principle extends to schools and universities that are temporarily closed outside normal class hours, during weekends and holidays, and during vacation periods.

(b) Parties to armed conflict should neither use force nor offer incentives to education administrators to evacuate schools and universities in order that they can be made available for use in support of the military effort.

Guideline 2: Schools and universities that have been abandoned or evacuated because of the dangers presented by armed conflict should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict for any purpose in support of their military effort, except in extenuating circumstances when they are presented with no viable alternative, and only for as long as no choice is possible between such use of the school or university and another feasible method for obtaining a similar military advantage. Other buildings should be regarded as better options and used in preference to school and university buildings, even if they are not so conveniently placed or configured, except when such buildings are specially protected under International Humanitarian Law (e.g. hospitals), and keeping in mind that parties to armed conflict must always take all feasible precautions to protect all civilian objects from attack.

(a) Any such use of abandoned or evacuated schools and universities should be for the minimum time necessary.

(b) Abandoned or evacuated schools and universities that are used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in support of the military effort should remain available to allow educational authorities to re-open them as soon as practicable after fighting forces have withdrawn from them, provided this would not risk endangering the security of students and staff.

(c) Any traces or indication of militarisation or fortification should be completely removed following the withdrawal of fighting forces, with every effort made to put right as soon as possible any damage caused to the infrastructure of the institution. In particular, all weapons, munitions and unexploded ordnance or remnants of war should be cleared from the site.

Guideline 3: Schools and universities must never be destroyed as a measure intended to deprive the opposing parties to the armed conflict of the ability to use them in the future. Schools and universities—be they in session, closed for the day or for holidays, evacuated or abandoned—are ordinarily civilian objects.

Guideline 4: While the use of a school or university by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict in support of their military effort may, depending on the circumstances, have the effect of turning it into a military objective subject to attack, parties to armed conflict should consider all feasible alternative measures before attacking them, including, unless circumstances do not permit, warning the enemy in advance that an attack will be forthcoming unless it ceases its use.

(a) Prior to any attack on a school that has become a military objective, the parties to armed conflict should take into consideration the fact that children are entitled to special respect and protection. An dditional important consideration is the potential long-term negative effect on a community's access to education posed by damage to or the destruction of a school.

(b) The use of a school or university by the fighting forces of one party to a conflict in support of the military effort should not serve as justification for an opposing party that captures it to continue to use it in support of the military effort. As soon as feasible, any evidence or indication of militarisation or fortification should be removed, and the facility returned to civilian authorities for the purpose of its educational function.

Guideline 5: The fighting forces of parties to armed conflict should not be employed to provide security for schools and universities, except when alternative means of providing essential security are not available. If possible, appropriately trained civilian personnel should be used to provide security for schools and universities. If necessary, consideration should also be given to evacuating children, students and staff to a safer location.

(a) If fighting forces are engaged in security tasks related to schools and universities, their presence within the grounds or buildings should be avoided if at all possible, in order to avoid compromising the establishment's civilian status and disrupting the learning environment.

Guideline 6: All parties to armed conflict should, as far as possible and as appropriate, incorporate these Guidelines into, for example, their doctrine, military manuals, rules of engagement, operational orders, and other means of dissemination, to encourage appropriate practice throughout the chain of command. Parties to armed conflict should determine the most appropriate method of doing this.

ENDNOTES

1. The MRM was established by the Security Council in 2005 by Security Council Resolution 1612, to document Grave Violations against children in armed conflict. The purpose of the MRM is to provide for the systematic collection of "timely, objective, accurate and reliable information" on Grave Violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. The Six Grave violations are: 1) Killing or maiming of children, 2) Recruiting or using children, 3) Attacks against schools or hospitals, 4) Rape or other grave sexual violence against children, 5) Abduction of children and 6) Denial of humanitarian access. At the global level, the MRM is overseen by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in close cooperation with UNICEF and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. At country level, the MRM is overseen by Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting, which are co-chaired by the representative of UNICEF and the highest UN representative in the country. By collecting timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on violations and abuses committed against children by parties to armed conflict, the MRM provides the UN Security Council with an evidence base to hold perpetrators accountable. It also helps actors on the ground advocate for and plan adequate protection and response measures and programmes. Parties to conflict who are listed for grave violations should sign action plans – these are agreed with the UN with a view to complete a series of time-bound, concrete activities to halt and prevent violations and to take remedial action. Successful completion of an action plan leads to de-listing. For more information, see http://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/.
2. Syria Response (South Turkey) Education Cluster (2019) 'Schools under Attack in Syria', https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FINAL-Education-Under-Attack_STurkey-Briefing-Paper_2015-09-03.pdf.
3. Save the Children (2013) 'Attacks On education: The impact of conflict and grave violations on children's futures', https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ATTACKS_ON_EDUCATION_FINAL.PDF.
4. According to the Global Coalition to Protection Education from Attacks (GCPEA)'s Education under Attack 2018 report, students of all ages, teachers and education institutions were the target of intentional attacks from 2013-2018. In at least 28 countries globally, there is a pattern of attacks on education by state security forces and non-state armed groups.
5. Save the Children International (2020) 'Stop the War on Children 2020: Gender matters', https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/16784/pdf/ch1413553.pdf.
6. United Nations (2019) 'Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict' (A/73/907–S/2019/509) issued on 20 June 2019, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2019/509&Lang=E.
7. Ataa Relief and Development (2020) 'Education Needs Assessment', https://www.ataarelief.org/dev24/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Education-Needs-assessment.pdf.
8. See International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary International Humanitarian Law, 2005, Volume I: Rules [hereinafter "ICRC Rule"], Rule 135 noting that "Children affected by armed conflict are entitled to special respect and protection." See also International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICCPR), art. 6 (1).
9. See ICRC Rule 55 noting that "The parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control".
10. The commonly applied ways of working among NGOs in NWS mandate the reporting of any instance of military use, or proximity to schools.
11. Guideline number two of Safe Schools Declaration guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict states that schools and universities that have been abandoned or evacuated because of the dangers presented by armed conflict should not be used by the fighting forces of parties to armed conflict for any purpose in support of their military effort,
12. United Nations Human Rights Council (2020) '"They have erased the dreams of my children": children's rights in the Syrian Arab Republic' https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=25465&LangID=E.
13. Harvard Humanitarian Initiative 'Displacement & Destruction: Analysis of Idlib, Syria 2017-2020' http://hhi.harvard.edu/publications/displacement-destruction-analysis-idlib-syria-2017-2020.
14. Global humanitarian funding cycles include response plans such as the Humanitarian Response Plans, bilateral funding (state directly to NGOs or UN agencies) and allocation systems such as the Humanitarian Response Plans, Country-Based Pool Funds and the Central Emergency Response Funds which are designed to complement other humanitarian funding sources.
15. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2016) 'Donor conditions and their implications for humanitarian response' https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/20160416_donor_conditions_study_final.pdf. Negative earmarking refers to the practice of removing a particular area, or an activity, from a funded programme. If an education activity is implemented in areas X, Y and Z, negatively earmarking X is saying education programme cannot be implemented in area X. This is the opposite of earmarking, which is designating funding to a specific area or activity.
16. See endnote 15. 'While humanitarian organizations acknowledge the legitimate security concerns of states, they are of the opinion that efforts to address these should be in compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the humanitarian imperative, and also take into account potential impact on partners. Counter-terrorism measures can be in tension with humanitarian principles and present humanitarian actors with dilemmas. Challenging counter-terrorism conditions described by organizations include requests by donors to exclude certain implementing organizations or beneficiary groups from projects; lengthy reviews by the recipient' legal department; and requirements to apply partner and in some cases beneficiary vetting/screening processes against the UN Security Council Sanctions List and/or national government lists of proscribed actors, which can lead recipient organizations to become more conservative in the choice of partners. For example, selective targeting and vetting/screening processes reduce the ability of humanitarian actors to respond on the basis of needs and can foster perceptions of partiality and reduce trust, which may in turn put staff at risk and limit access."
17. See endnote 15.
18. Save the Children (2017) 'An Unbearable Reality' https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/iraq_an_unbearable_reality_june_2017_1.pdf.
19. Miller KE, Rasmussen A. War experiences, daily stressors and mental health five years on: elaborations and future directions. Intervention. 2014;12:33–42. doi: 10.1097/WTF.0000000000000066.
20. Save the Children (2017) 'Invisible Wounds' https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/emergency-humanitarian-response/invisible-wounds.pdf.
21. Ibid.
22. Assistance Coordination Unit (2018) 'Schools in Syria' https://www.acu-sy.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Final_Schools2018_IMU_080818.pdf.
23. See endnote 22.
24. See for example Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (2019): Mobility and Needs Assessment – May Overview; and UNHCR (2019): Fifth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria, available at: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/68443.
25. Focus group discussions carried out with Syrian refugee youth and adolescents in six host community locations in Jordan during February 2019 in collaboration with UNHCR.
26. Based on findings from Save the Children's recent report Achieving Durable Solutions for Returnee Children: What Do We Know? returnees in some parts of Syria and Iraq are facing discrimination in their communities due to alleged ties to non-state actors such as ISIS.
27. Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, 8 June 1977, arts. 51 and 52.
28. Geneva Convention IV, 1949, art. 147; Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, art. 85
29. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, A/CONF.183/9 (July 17, 1998), arts. 8(2)(b)(ix) and 8(2)(c)(iv).
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WITHOUT SCHOOL

The impact of attacks on education in North West Syria on children

The Syria Crisis is now in its tenth year, and there are over 11.7 million people who are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including 5 million children. More than half the country's population has been forced from their homes, with many displaced multiple times. Save the Children has been at the forefront of the Syria crisis since 2012.

Save the Children and partner programming is focused in North West and North East Syria, with plans to expand our geographical footprint. It combines emergency and life-saving interventions with early recovery activities that support the restoration of basic services.

Since the start of the conflict, we have reached over three million people including two million children.

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