

# Schools under Attack in Syria

## A monitoring report on the impact of attacks on Syrian schools by the Southern Turkey Education Cluster (Syria response)

### The Syria crisis in numbers:

**3.5 million** IDP children

**5.6 million** children in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria

**2.1 to 2.4 million** children out of school inside Syria

**1 million** of children at risk of dropping out

**1 quarter of Syrian schools** have been damaged, destroyed, or used as shelters or for other purpose than education

The crisis in Syria has had a profound impact on children's lives. Indiscriminate attacks place children in extreme danger on a daily basis, with many witnessing atrocities. Huge numbers have been displaced, with 3.5 million IDP children and over 2 million refugees in neighbouring countries<sup>i</sup>. Many have lost family members and friends. In country, the number of children now in need of humanitarian assistance and protection keeps increasing, with 5.6 million affected<sup>ii</sup>. Access to humanitarian assistance for children in hard-to-reach areas continues to remain a significant challenge. The UN estimates that up to 2 million children are denied access to life-saving services due to deteriorating security, shifting frontlines, capacity limitations and administrative hurdles<sup>iii</sup>.

Education was hit hard by the war in Syria. Before the crisis, Syria had a strong education system with almost universal primary school enrolment and 70% of children attending secondary school<sup>iv</sup>. However the worsening crisis is placing an entire generation of children at risk of being lost to a cycle of violence. Estimates indicate that 2.1 to 2.4 million children are currently out of school in Syria, approximately half of the 4.3 million children (5-17 years old) eligible for primary and secondary education in the current school year, and another million of those in school are at risk of dropping out<sup>v</sup>. In 2014, Syria had the second worst enrolment rate in the world<sup>vi</sup>. The lack of safe and protective learning spaces, coupled with a shortage of teachers, textbooks, as well as adequate water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, have all become obstacles to children's access to an education.



Students in a class at a school supported by Save the Children in Syria

### Why is education important in conflict situation?

- Education is life-saving and life-sustaining, providing a sense of normalcy to children's lives, psychosocial support, strengthening survival skills and coping mechanisms.
- Education is a priority for affected children, parents and communities.
- Education protects children and adolescents against exploitation and harm.
- Education is critical for cognitive and developmental needs of children and adolescents.
- Education builds resilience and sustains communities, creating greater stability and helping early recovery.
- Education is an aid intervention that children will be able to carry with them for the rest of their lives
- Education is a fundamental right
- Education gives hope.

## Attacks on education in Syria

Students and teachers in countries affected by conflicts face violence every day. Schools should be safe havens where communities can work toward a better future. Instead, in many places, schools and universities have become targets of attacks or are damaged by ongoing fighting.

### What is an attack on education?

Attacks on education are any intentional threat or use of force—carried out for political, military, ideological, sectarian, ethnic, religious, or criminal reasons—against students, educators, and education institutions.

The occupation or military use of school buildings by armed forces can lead to attacks on education, displace students and teachers, denying students access to education.

*Definition by the [Global Coalition to Protection Education from Attack \(GCPEA\)](#)*

Syria is one of the most heavily affected

countries by attacks on education. Attacks on education can take many forms, from attacks on students, teachers or schools buildings, to targeted killings abductions or threats. In Syria, schools are bombed, damaged, looted and destroyed on a regular basis, many places of learning are now deserted as children and teachers flee to safety. Since the conflict began, more than 4,200 schools have been damaged, destroyed, militarized or are currently used as shelters by IDPs according to data gathered by UNICEF<sup>vii</sup>. Between January and December 2014 alone, UNICEF has recorded 80 attacks on schools<sup>viii</sup>. At least 160 children were killed and 343 injured in attacks on schools in 2014 and these numbers are expected to be higher<sup>ix</sup>. Schools have become some of the most dangerous places in Syria, along with markets and hospitals. Not only they are deliberately targeted, but the use of explosive weapons in populated areas results in children being denied



access to education opportunities.

### *Yet schools are protected from attacks by International Human Rights and Humanitarian Law*

- Attacks on education undermine, prevent, or deter realisation of the fundamental right to education, a right enshrined in key international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention related to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War prohibits the targeting of civilian objects, emphasising the importance of schools and hospitals to the civilian population, in particular children.
- Adopted on 9 July 2010 the UN General Assembly resolution on the right to education in emergency situations established an important implementation framework for all States, humanitarian actors and UN agencies. The UN Security Council endorsed the importance of protecting education from attacks through the resolution 1998 adopted in June 2011.
- After a two-year consultation process, the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* were released in December 2014. In Oslo on 29 May 2015, a group of 37 States endorsed the *Safe Schools Declaration* expressing their political support and commitment for the protection of education in armed conflict, including through the implementation of the Guidelines. Additional States have since then endorsed the Declaration.
- Established by the UN Security Council 1612 resolution in 2005, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) documents the six grave violations against children in armed conflict. The purpose of the MRM is to provide timely and reliable information on these grave violations. The UN Secretary-General (UN SG) lists in his annual reports on children and armed conflict the names of armed forces or armed groups that commit grave violations against children and urged parties involved in armed conflict to develop and implement time-bound action plans to halt these grave violations. The UN Security Council Resolution 1998 in 2011 expanded the violations which ‘trigger’ the MRM to include attacks on schools and hospitals, calling on the UN SG to list specific parties which engage in attacks on schools and hospitals in his annual reports. In June 2012, the Syrian Government Forces were listed in the UN SG’s annual report which triggered the MRM for violations committed by all parties to the conflict in Syria.

## What impact do have attacks on schools on children and on education?

A single attack on school can keep hundreds of children out of the classroom. Direct attacks, shelling, shootings within school grounds, armed clashes in the vicinity, all such incidents are becoming commonplace in Syria, forcing closures and displacement, and suspending children's right to an education. While the physical destruction of school buildings and equipment clearly restricts children's access to education, the human cost of such attacks is greater. Even when schools remain open, in the context of such violence many children are too terrified to attend. They may be afraid of walking to school, fearing of being hurt, killed or kidnapped. Parents may also be afraid of sending their children to school. Some children may have to stay at home because loved ones have been injured.

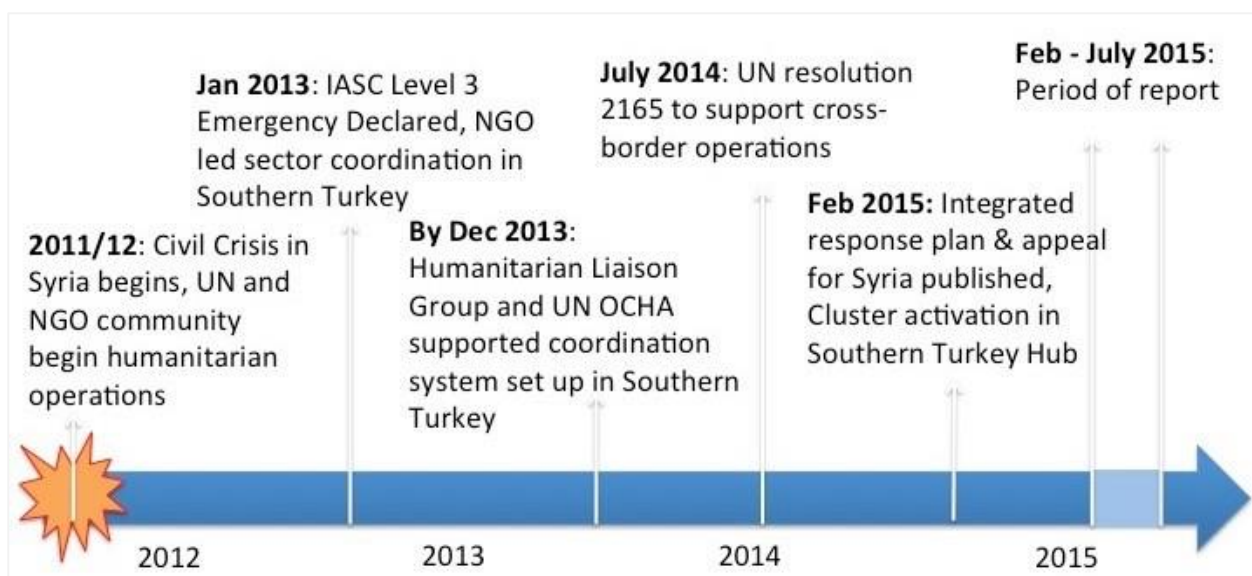
The psychological impact of conflict on boys and girls significantly affects their ability to learn, and is much harder to overcome. Enabling children to continue their education means ensuring that schools are safe spaces where children are protected physically, emotionally and psychologically. *"Access to education is a right that should be sustained for all children, no matter where they live or how difficult the circumstances in which they live. Schools are the only means of stability, structure and routine that the Syrian children need more than ever in times of this horrific conflict,"* said Hanna Singer, UNICEF representative in Syria<sup>x</sup>.

## Southern Turkey Education Cluster

Since the onset of the emergency in Syria over four years ago, humanitarian operations have been led from several hubs: country operations within Syria, cross-border assistance from Southern Turkey and Jordan. In September 2014 the Whole of Syria approach was implemented as a result of the UN Security Council Resolution 2165 bringing together these separate operations into one single framework, a common response plan and a supporting coordination structure to increase the overall effectiveness of the response. A Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Strategic Response Plan (SRP) for 2015 were completed under the Whole of Syria.

Officially activated in February 2015, but active as sector working group since early 2013, the Southern Turkey Education Cluster is co-led by Save the Children and UNICEF. The Cluster has 29 partner organisations, INGOs and Syrian NGOs.

Timeline Southern Turkey Education Cluster



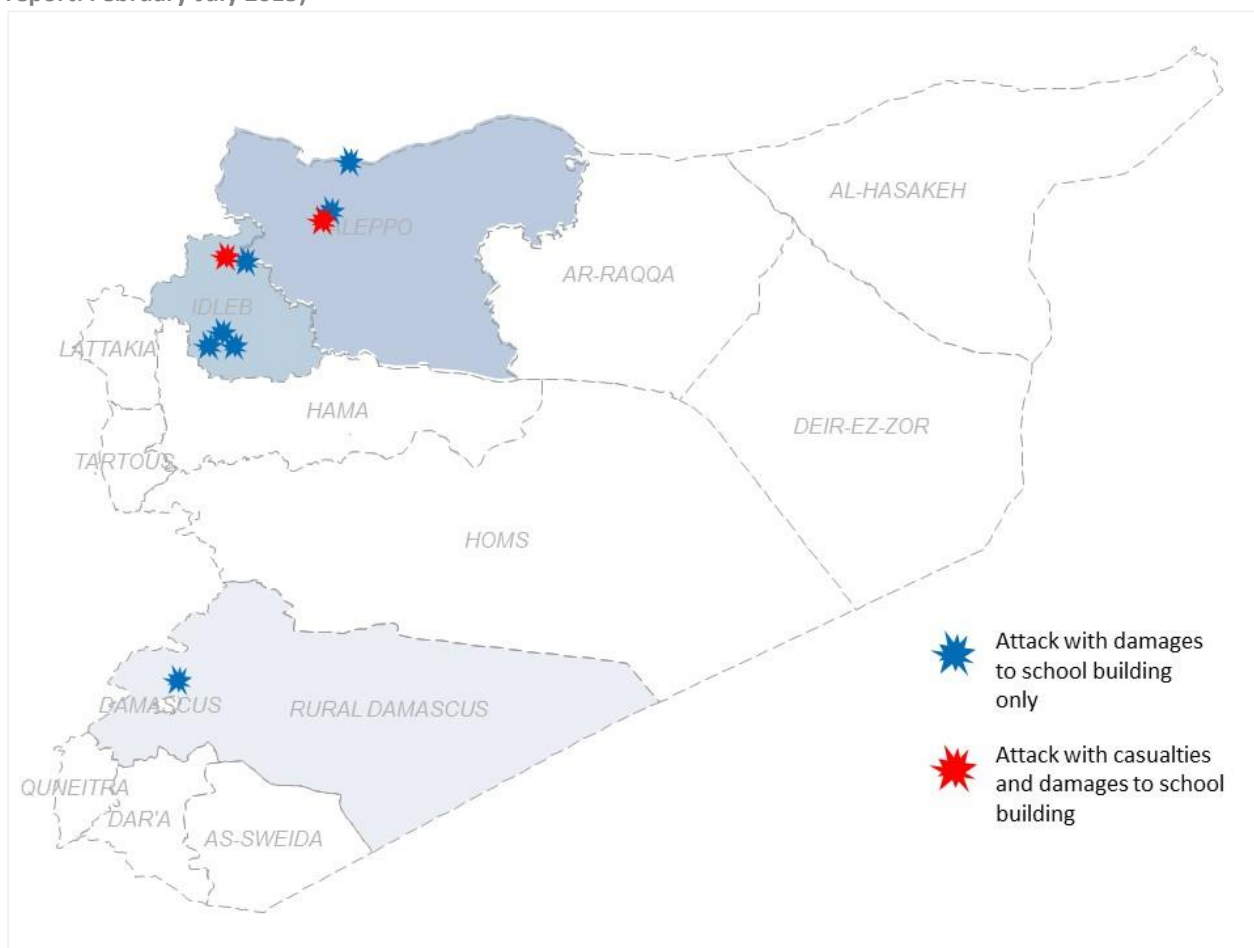
## Taking Action

The protection of civilians and the denial of children's right to education is a major concern for the Southern Turkey Education Cluster's partners. Effective monitoring, assessment and reporting are crucial for ensuring that governments, UN agencies and NGOs take appropriate prevention and response measures.

### *Data limitations*

Since February 2015, partner organisations have been reporting to the cluster staff attacks on the schools they are supporting or located in the areas where they are implementing activities. So far they have submitted 11 reports referencing 8 different attacks. The data presented in this report therefore only shows a snapshot of the situation in Syria, it does not provide an exhaustive list of attacks on schools for the first half of 2015. The data provided by the cluster partners was verified through various sources online. The Southern Turkey Education Cluster is in the process of setting a more stringent verification system and follow-up.

**Map: Attacks on schools reported by the Southern Turkey Education Cluster partners (period covered by this report: February-July 2015)**



### *Disclosure*

The table hereafter includes all information collected by the Southern Turkey Education Cluster's partners on attacks on schools. To protect key informants, the name of the cluster partner's organisations is not revealed. Exact location of the school is also not included in this report to avoid retaliation on the school or on the partner organisations supporting these schools

**Table: Attacks on schools reported by Education Cluster partners in 2015 (period covered by this report: February - July 2015)**

Date	School location (city, governorate)	Impact on education (damages, casualties, school interruption)
16 February	Duma city (Rural Damascus)	It was Spring break so no children/teachers were injured in the bombardment, but the school was seriously damaged.
3 April	Taftanaz (Idleb)	A shell fired from a jet landed next to the school, seriously damaging the school's front side. No one was injured as the attack took place over the weekend.
12 April	Aleppo (Aleppo)	A shell hit one of the school wall causing severe damages to the building. Figures on the casualties varied according to sources, but at least 1 students, 4 teachers were killed, and at least 2 students and 5 teachers were injured.
1 June	Ma'arrat Misrin (Idleb)	Air raids affected the entire city, seriously damaging a school and injuring 7 students and 2 teachers.
1 June	Kafar Aweed (Idleb)	A barrel bomb exploded in a field 30 meters from the school, causing minor damages to the building. No one was injured as the attack took place in the evening. The 300 students were already on summer vacation but the work of teachers preparing for summer class was suspended for 3 days.
4 June	Al-Bara (Idleb)	A barrel bomb exploded just outside the school main entrance, seriously damaging 5 out of the 10 classrooms. No one was injured as there was no one at school at the time of the attack. Students were on vacation, but the work of teachers preparing for summer activities was suspended for a week.
15 June	Old city of Aleppo (Aleppo)	A barrel bomb hit the school, destroying two classrooms and causing minor damages to two other classrooms. No one was injured as the attack took place at night. Schooling was suspended for a week, a Child Friendly Space hosted in the building also suspended its activities, to allow the building to be cleaned.
25 June	Kobane (Aleppo)	ISIS militants occupied a school, previously used as hospital, using its high position to attack civilians.
10 July	Ma'arat al-Nu'man (Idleb)	No casualty as no one was present at the time of the aerial bombardment. No further information on damages to the building.



AFP/AMC/Zein Al-Rifa

### Education caught in the crossfire in Aleppo

On 12 April 2015, approximately 600 hundreds students, dozens of teachers and two administrative staff were at Sa'ad Al Ansari school in Northern Aleppo, when an air strike hit the wall of the school during the last lesson of the day. The shelling destroyed the school wall throwing debris in all direction, inside the school but also in the streets. The attack killed several teachers, students and civilians. Many were injured. The figures varied according to sources

Half of the students were rushed into the school basement for shelter, while the remaining students were split into three groups and led to pre-identified safe points.

Despite the damages to the building, the school's initial reaction was to go ahead with the teaching plan until the end of the semester.

Aleppo has been a key battleground between government forces and armed opposition groups since 2012. The city has been reduced to ruins. Aerial bombardment, rocket and mortar fire take place very day. Both sides, government and rebel forces, have been accused by human rights organisations of using indiscriminate weapons and targeting civilians. Schools are often caught in the crossfire and have sought for safety by moving classrooms into basements or underground bunkers.

Following a series of deadly attacks on schools, on 3 May the Head of the Educational Department of Aleppo city has decided to close all schools and education institutions until the end of the academic year. Final exams have also been cancelled.

In the absence of a viable peace process, parties to the conflict have continued to seek territorial expansion over the first half of 2015, particularly in Idlib, Da'ra, Hama, Rural Damascus, Aleppo and Hasakeh governorates<sup>xi</sup>. The location of the attacks on schools reported here corresponds to the escalation of fighting between the regime and opposition groups in Idlib and Aleppo, and between the Islamic State and Kurdish fighters in Kobane. This is also reflected in the type of attacks on schools, mainly aerial bombardment or shelling, whether targeted or indiscriminate.

Schools are meant to be safe places where children can learn and develop. Ensuring all Syrian children continue to enjoy their right to education is essential to ensuring they are able to see beyond the horrors of the conflict. Moreover, securing continuity in education is crucial to enable children and young people to break the cycle of violence and build a brighter future. Education must be better protected from attack in Syria. The Southern Turkey Education Cluster partners will continue education activities to provide access to safe and quality education to affected children and adolescents, and monitoring and reporting attacks on education. The Southern Turkey Education Cluster **calls on all parties to:**

1. **ENABLE** safe access to school for all Syrian children
2. **RESPECT** schools as safe learning spaces
3. **STOP** the military use of schools

## Maha's Story in her own words

About two years ago Maha's neighbourhood was bombed, miraculously she and her family survived but that night they left their hometown and have never been able to go back. Once Maha's family had settled in a new village she started to go to school there but then one day it was bombed; luckily the attack happened half an hour after the children had left the school for the day and no one was killed. The school was repaired by Save the Children but it was then attacked twice again after that and is no longer safe to be used.



"I believe that I will never be able to go school again after this, I feel very bad as if I cannot finish school then I will not be able to go to university to become a doctor. At home we get very bored because we have nothing to do, and I can't see my friends because they don't live close by and it is too dangerous to move. If I stay at home I will never be what I want to be in the future, I will be nothing. I have always wanted to become a doctor like my aunt. But right now I only wish that the war would end. I miss my home very much and I miss my cousins and friends, I wish I could go back."

*Maha's name has been changed in order to protect her identity.*

<sup>i</sup> UNICEF, Syria Crisis June Humanitarian Situation Report, June 2015,

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Syria%20Subregional%20Humanitarian%20SitRep%20June%202015.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> UNICEF, Syria Crisis June Humanitarian Situation Report, June 2015,

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Syria%20Subregional%20Humanitarian%20SitRep%20June%202015.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> UNICEF, Syria Crisis June Humanitarian Situation Report, June 2015,

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Syria%20Subregional%20Humanitarian%20SitRep%20June%202015.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Assessment Working Group for Syria, 'Syria Integrated Needs Assessment (SINA)', December 2013,

[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SINA\\_EN\\_Final.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SINA_EN_Final.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Syria Issue 2 June 2015

[http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/system/files/documents/files/wos\\_bulletin\\_issue\\_2\\_ocha\\_final\\_150623.pdf](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/system/files/documents/files/wos_bulletin_issue_2_ocha_final_150623.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> UN Secretary-General report on the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 2139, June 2014

[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/427](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/427)

<sup>vii</sup> UNICEF; No Lost Generation One-Year Report, September 2014 <http://childrenofsyria.info/2014/09/24/no-lost-generation-initiative-one-year-on/>

<sup>viii</sup> UNICEF, Syria Crisis 4 Years On, March 2015, [http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Syria\\_Crisis\\_4\\_Years\\_On\\_Eng.pdf](http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Syria_Crisis_4_Years_On_Eng.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/01/06/world/europe/ap-eu-un-syria-children.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/01/06/world/europe/ap-eu-un-syria-children.html?_r=0)

<sup>x</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_78365.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_78365.html)

<sup>xi</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Syria Issue 1, May 2015, [http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/whole-of-syria\\_humanitarian\\_bulletin\\_issue\\_1.pdf](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/whole-of-syria_humanitarian_bulletin_issue_1.pdf)