



REPORT

STAND WITH
ME

**CHILDREN'S RIGHTS,
WRONGED**



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Acknowledgements

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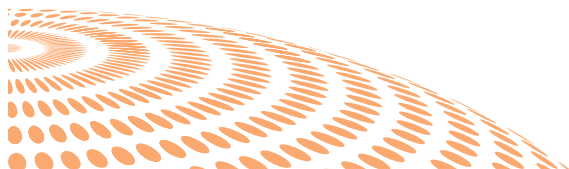
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Some names in this report have been changed.

Photograph on cover: Syrian children now living in Jordan struggle to access schools in a system struggling to cope with the burden of so many children. Jon Warren/World Vision.



LIFE FOR SYRIA'S CHILDREN

Peace to you,

I am talking on behalf of Syrian children, calling on you – the people of the other world. Have you ever thought of Syria? Have you ever thought of the children of Syria? My country, Syria?

I hope that Syrians will be in good will. Jordanians here, they have hosted us in their homes, and if we were in their shoes we would be hosting them as well, paying for their rents and never forgetting about them.

We fear you are forgetting us.

Haya, 10.

A Syrian refugee living in Jordan, writing to the international community.

As the Syrian conflict nears its fourth year, the situation for children affected by the crisis is becoming unbearable. Thousands of children have been killed, and millions more have been displaced. More than 4.3 million of these children remain in Syria, while more than 1.2 million¹ have fled into neighbouring countries, including Lebanon and Jordan.

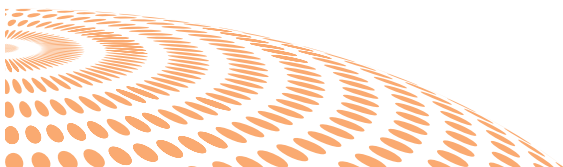
Often these children are fleeing conflict only to find themselves faced with devastating instability, poverty and desperation. Many live without protection. Many work instead of attending school. Many are left vulnerable to the worst forms of abuse. For many young children, this situation is quickly becoming a new normal, one in breach of all of their most basic rights.

The statistics are shocking, but nothing illustrates the depth of the impact on children more than the stories told by them personally.

Four-year-old Saad doesn't know that child labour is a breach of his rights. But he knows that he hurts "here and here" when he makes concrete blocks every day. Young Amjad doesn't see that the marriage of his 14-year-old sister as an abuse of her rights; he understands it was financial help to his family, "as we had one less child to burden".

Governments, both within Syria and internationally, have failed to protect Syria's children. World Vision recently spoke to more than 250 children and parents across Syria, Jordan and Lebanon about their lives and their biggest concerns, years into one of the worst humanitarian crises in history. We share their comments in these pages.

¹ UNICEF, January 2014. <http://childrenofsyria.info/>



Action to protect Syria's children is long overdue. The international community – those with an interest in or responsibility for alleviating Syria's conflict – must respond now before we lose an entire generation of children.

World Vision is calling for:

1. All parties to the conflict to cease hostilities and come together to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the conflict, with support from the international community.
2. All parties to do everything within their power to respect and ensure the protection of children and their rights by immediately ceasing all violence, exploitation and abuse against children.
3. Donors to meet the US\$ 1 billion call to fund education and child protection programming for children affected by the crisis, under the No Lost Generation Strategy.²

ISRAA'S STORY

“With war, there is no more,” Israa says.

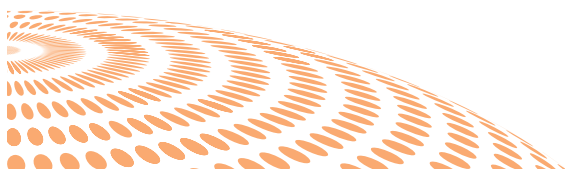
Israa was an honour student, the top in her senior high school class in Syria. On the day of Israa's final exam, warring groups destroyed her school, shattering her life and her dreams of earning a high school diploma.



Jon Warren/World Vision

“I was in school when the bombs hit,” the 17-year-old says. “The windows were blown out, glass everywhere and some hit my friends in the face and hands. Glass hit my face. I ran out, ran home to be with my family, my father. There were hurt people everywhere on the street. I saw bodies on the streets. I saw a lot of blood.”

² The No Lost Generation Strategy is a joint initiative of UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, World Vision and other key partners. Through the US\$1 billion strategy, the organisations are focusing donor and public support on critical education and protection programmes for children.



The former student now spends her time inside cramped quarters with at least 10 others in the most impoverished street in Zarqa, Jordan.

She flashes a big, toothy smile when asked about her life before war. Israa dreamed of becoming a lawyer. She wanted to help women and children, protect them from injustice.

Israa longs for the day when she can run through the cobbled streets in her home town to hug her father, her teachers and her friends who stayed behind.

“I want to return to Syria, my Syria, a free Syria.”

FALLING INCOMES, RISING RISKS

As Syrian families desperately search for ways to make money, children’s lives and well-being are in constant danger. Many families’ savings have run out, leaving them struggling to find new sources of income. These include child labour, recruitment into armed groups, and exploitation such as forced marriage and prostitution. Many families told World Vision that these coping mechanisms are not seen as culturally appropriate or acceptable – but they feel that families are driven to them out of sheer desperation.

More than 100,000 children (one in ten) who have fled Syria have had to replace playing and going to school with work, often in jobs which are unregulated and unsafe.

Across Jordan and Lebanon, refugee children are working in restaurants, auto-repair shops, farms, fields or making or stacking concrete bricks. In some areas of Jordan, nearly half³ of Syrian families depend on a child for their primary source of income. World Vision research in Lebanon suggests that child labour is increasingly common in agriculture and service industries as families struggle with high rent and a lack of jobs for parents.

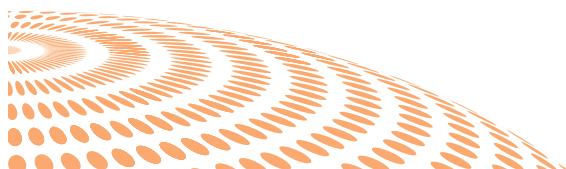


Lauren Fisher/World Vision

“I am 4 years old. I make concrete blocks. I hurt here and here,” Saad says as he points to his knees and shoulders.

He works with his family, who are paid US\$8 for every 100 concrete blocks they make.

³ UN Women. *Inter-Agency Assessment, Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage*. July 2013.



Women whose husbands have died or are still in Syria see no choice but to ask their children to work. “My son is 15,” says Yara. “He left school to work. He makes two Jordanian *dinar* (US\$2.80) per day selling sweets. But I have a 12-year-old too, and he will have to work soon also because I don’t have enough money to feed them.”

Children are being asked to work for long hours at very low pay. Families tell World Vision that they ask their children to work because they are less likely to be checked for licences by employers and authorities. They say that children often find it easier to get work than their parents because they can be paid less by their employers.

OUJELAN'S STORY

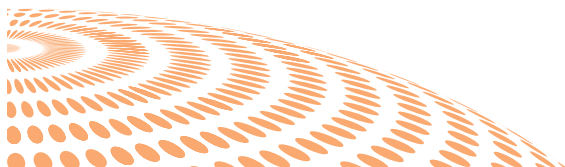
At 13 years old, Oujelan works a 12-hour day. His jeans and sturdy boots are caked in mud, his hands hardened and dirty. They’re the hands of man, yet they clutch a stack of brightly coloured certificates, covered with stars and teenage mutant ninja turtles. Red pen marks exclaim “Excellent!” and “Number one in the class!” They are his certificates from his school in Syria, before the war.

“Every week I look at these and they remind me of my school, of my friends and how I played at school,” he says.

The last one is dated more than two years ago – before his family had to flee Syria and the violence. Oujelan used to dream of becoming an Arabic teacher. Now he has little time for dreams. He falls asleep shortly after coming home from his job picking grapes.



“I’m very tired from working. I’m always on my feet,” he says.



Oujelan's mother tears up as she looks at the certificates, her face a mixture of pride and sadness. The family has no money to send him to school. They can't afford to lose the income he brings home each day.

"When he wakes up at 5am to leave for work, I wake up too," she says. "I cry as he leaves. He gets angry, but it's his right. He should be in school."

She says that now, when the subject of school comes up, Oujelan asks, "But what about work? Shouldn't I be helping my father?"

For now, time hasn't fully stolen his dreams for a future.

"If I get an education, I can get a real job. I'll be an employee instead of a worker. I want to go back and have a future. I would change everything. I would go to school. I would build a house."

"If I ran a school I would put everyone there. I would teach them reading and writing. I would tell them 'Don't fight with each other. Don't run away from school.'"

SUBJECTED TO EXPLOITATION

Children are not only having to work to provide financially for their families. Many are being forced into forms of exploitation, ranging from being used to illegally transport goods to being trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation or put on the frontlines of conflict.⁴ The reasons behind children falling into these activities vary, but in all of these circumstances, there is little recourse for children as justice institutions do not have the capacity to respond.⁵

Many children have been used to smuggle goods, such as fuel, in and out of refugee camps and across the border to and from Syria.⁶

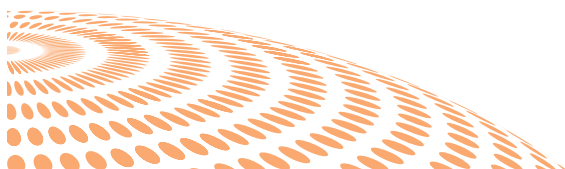
Children are being exposed to sexual and gender-based exploitation. Early marriage may be increasing among Syrian children in Jordan, with the preliminary results of surveys showing an increase from 15 per cent in 2011 to 18 per cent in 2012.⁷ Families in Lebanon suggest that early marriage may be becoming more common because their desire to protect daughters drives them to believe that they will be safer in marriage than in the poor families they came from. As Amjad reflected on his 14-year-old sister's marriage last year: "That helped our family, as we had one less child to burden."

⁴ World Vision International. *Stand With Me: Ending the War on Syria's Children: World Vision briefing paper*. December 2013.

⁵ UNICEF. *No Lost Generation Strategy*. October 2013.

⁶ World Vision unpublished research. Syria 2013.

⁷ UNICEF Early Marriage Study (preliminary findings). 2013.



For particularly vulnerable children, for example those separated from their families or those with vastly depleted family support structures, the forms of exploitation can be devastating. Vulnerable children are at risk of being forced into prostitution or recruitment into armed groups in Syria to fight or work, even from across borders.⁸ Such children can be manipulated with a sense of pride to protect their communities, which can lead to exploitation by armed groups.⁹

These kinds of risks are complicated, and each requires a special response if children are to be protected.

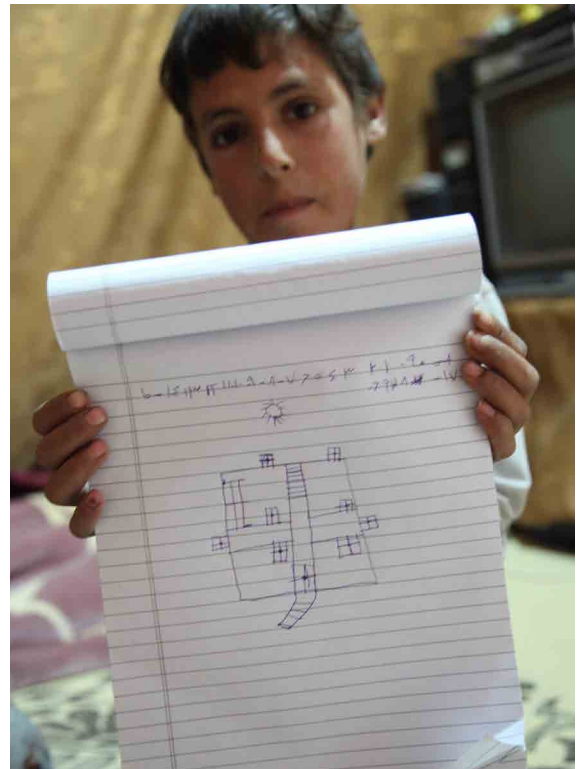
NO EDUCATION, NO PROTECTION

Education is key to protecting Syrian children and helping them recover. School helps keep children off the streets and away from risky work activities or crime. It combats isolation and encourages a sense of normality. Importantly, it safeguards children's futures. It is Syria's children who will be tasked with moving their nation forward, toward peace and stability.

Yet a whole generation of children is missing out on education. In Syria 7.9 million people have fallen into poverty since the onset of the crisis.¹⁰ The economic recession linked to the conflict has triggered massive increases in the prices of food and fuel. Education priorities are pushed further and further down the line of family necessities.

The education crisis for Syrian children has now reached a critical point, with many children having been out of school for nearly three years. The more time children spend out of school, the less likely they are to ever return. This is not about trying to fill short-term gaps. Urgent action is required to ensure that thousands of Syrian children don't lose out on a future.

Fathers in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria say money is one of the main factors affecting education for their children. In Lebanon, Hani says, "I wasn't able to send my children [to school]. At first I wasn't obliged to pay



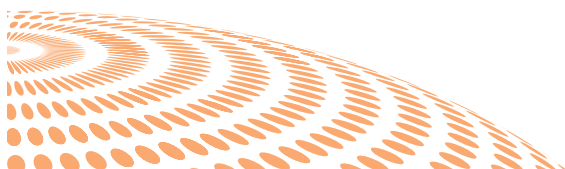
Ralph Baydoun/World Vision

"The last time I went to school was when I was in the fifth grade. When I was about to enter the sixth grade armed men came and kicked us out. They transformed our school into a military base. I liked reading and writing. But now I am already forgetting. I left all of my books [behind]," says Jomaa, 10, now living in Lebanon.

⁸ UNICEF. "Desk Review: Child Protection Priority Issues and Responses inside Syria". June 2013.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Syrian Center for Policy Research. Syria: War on Development: socioeconomic monitoring report of Syria. Second quarterly report (April–June 2013). October 2013.



for the admission, but now I can't pay that, so they don't go". Lamia, a mother in the same area, says, "If you have more than one child, which we all do, then the fees are too much."

Inside Syria, the alarmingly frequent attacks on teachers and schools further undermine children's education. Many families are being prevented from accessing sufficient support to protect and educate their children.¹¹ As insecurity grows, the basic physical and human resources needed to educate Syria's children are rapidly diminishing.

OBIDA'S STORY

"They shot my teacher.

"When we were leaving Syria, there was so much bombing all around. My school was bombed. A lot of my friends died."

No matter what the question, 10-year-old Obida's answers always seem to come back to conflict and school. He describes the tanks, he talks about the bombs and how his uncle was killed in the conflict – the same uncle who used to help Obida with his school lessons.

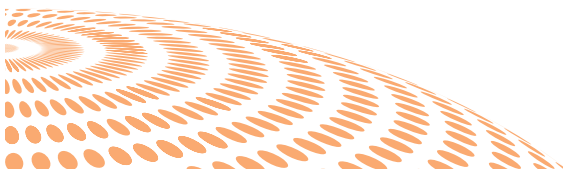
"I am not comfortable. I am not happy here," he says.

It has been more than two years since Obida was in formal school. In Syria his school was destroyed. Currently, he is still not enrolled in public school. His parents can't pay for the transportation.

So Obida attends a remedial class several times a week. Because he has missed so much time, he sits awkwardly in the same classroom as his little brother, looking clearly much older and bigger than the other children. He struggles to do the basic alphabet and numbers lessons designed for 7- and 8-year-olds.

His family says he was once first in his class. Even having missed so much school, his intelligence is immediately clear when he speaks. His teachers in the remedial school saw that promise and now tutor him five days a week.

¹¹ UN OCHA. "Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview". October 2013. Unpublished.



“I believe the centre gives a big chance, a big push forward for my sons and their education so they can remember what they learned and also catch up on what they missed. Thank God that they can go to this class – it’s better than nothing. My husband and I didn’t have a chance to study. We cannot read or write. But Obida was first in his class in Syria because his uncles helped him with his studies. [His uncles were recently killed in the Syrian conflict]. Now hopefully he can catch up.”

WHAT CHILDREN NEED

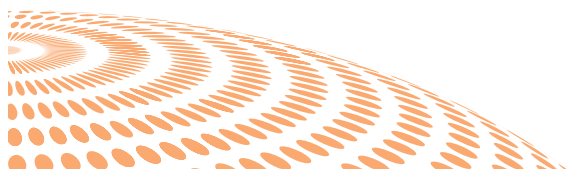
Children are the largest and most vulnerable group affected by the Syria crisis. Yet their needs are often unmet – and continue to be hidden among the many competing priorities. A generation of children is at risk of being lost. Lost to displacement, lost to poverty, lost to the worst forms of child labour and lost to other forms of exploitation. Without educated and safe children, it will take much longer and be much harder for Syria to recover.

A lasting end to the conflict

The most effective way to prevent Syria’s children from becoming a Lost Generation is for parties to the conflict, supported by their international allies, to rapidly reach a politically negotiated settlement. All parties need to agree to join the talks in Geneva in good faith to reach a settlement, end hostilities and create a plan towards peace.

World Vision recommends that:

- The UN Secretary-General and the UN/Arab League (LAS) Special Envoy to Syria, with the support of the international community – particularly the United States and Russia – continue to work with all parties to the conflict to convene and attend the Geneva II peace conference.
- All parties to the conflict commit to immediate measures such as negotiated cessation of hostilities to allow humanitarian aid to reach children and their families, including accountability measures where a ceasefire is not upheld.
- The UN Secretary-General and the UN/LAS Special Envoy map out a framework that includes the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements at national, provincial and local levels, as part of a sustained push for peace beyond the Geneva II peace conference.
- The protection of children be raised as an important point during negotiations, as per the recommendations of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. Concessions should be sought from all parties to negotiations in order to protect children.



Protection for children now

More must be done to end the targeting of children. Parties to the conflict bear the primary responsibility for ending policies and practices violating child rights. States and others with influence over parties to the conflict also bear responsibility, and should leverage their influence to ensure that children are protected.

World Vision recommends that:

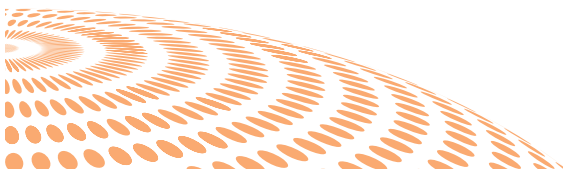
- All parties to the conflict respect and ensure the protection of children and uphold children's rights by immediately ceasing all violence, exploitation and abuse against children.
- States with influence over parties to the conflict review and remove support for parties to the conflict that commit violence, exploitation or abuse against children, including the recruitment and use of children in their military campaigns.

Funding for child-focused programming

More than 5.5 million children are in need of immediate assistance in Syria and the region. As the crisis wears on, millions more children in host communities are vulnerable and in need of assistance to ensure that their development is not derailed by the crisis. The future of an entire generation is at risk, and donors need to prioritise funding that targets the needs of children.

World Vision recommends that:

- All donors and international bodies make commitments first and foremost to projects that directly address child protection and promote child-focused humanitarian assistance. In line with the No Lost Generation Strategy, World Vision is calling for US\$1 billion in priority funding for education, child protection and psychosocial support for children affected by the crisis.
- All donors and international bodies ensure that the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action are integrated into every project selected for funding.



CONTACTS

World Vision International Executive Office

1 Roundwood Avenue,
Stockley Park
Uxbridge, Middlesex UB11 1FG
United Kingdom

World Vision Brussels & EU Representation ivzw

18, Square de Meeûs
1st floor, Box 2
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium

World Vision International Geneva and United Nations Liaison Office

7-9 Chemin de Balexert
Case Postale 545CH-1219
Châtelaine
Switzerland

World Vision International New York and United Nations Liaison Office

919 2nd Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10017
USA

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