

When will it stop? Six years of violence against Syria's children

The Syria crisis has created a generation of children who know nothing but war. More than 50 percent of Syria's population has been forced to flee their homes. Millions of children are trapped inside Syria, innocent victims of a war beyond their control.

Almost 5 million Syrians are now living as refugees in neighbouring countries, many in unimaginable poverty and dire living conditions. And at least half of those displaced are children.



Narjes, age 10, Lebanon

94 percent of Syrian families surveyed by World Vision reported behavioural changes in their children, including crying, screaming, withdrawal, aggression and an inclination to join armed groups.

What does World Vision do?

World Vision works inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries that are hosting the majority of the Syrian refugee population to provide:

- food assistance and basic needs;
- primary healthcare in health facilities and mobile clinics;
- medical and nutritional aid for women and children;
- water and sanitation services;
- school rehabilitation and support for access to and quality of education;
- child protection including community outreach, training and mobilisation;
- psychosocial care and safe spaces to play and learn for children;
- cash assistance to support education, boost household incomes and discourage child labour; and
- vocational and life skills training for adults and young people.



Jordan

Death, war, bombings, injuries, loss of loved ones, psychological trauma and distress, forced recruitment into armed groups, child labour, child marriage, sexual violence and exploitation – **these horrors have become normal for Syria's children.**

What can Australia do?

1) Prioritise diplomatic engagement to end the conflict

The war must stop. Without a peaceful resolution, humanitarian agencies cannot reach all Syrians in need. Current humanitarian protection interventions will only be able to achieve short-term reprieves for children until the fighting stops and long-term rehabilitation can start.

2) Increase resettlement assistance for refugees

Less than three percent of Syrian refugees have been resettled overall. Given the scale of global needs and Australia's relative wealth and ability to assist, the Australian Government should build on its commitment to accept 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees by committing to increase its overall refugee intake to 20,000 in this financial year (2016/17), 30,000 in two years' time (2018/19) and 42,000 in five years' time (2020/21).*

Australia has always been a country of immigrants, welcoming newcomers and giving all people a fair go. Australian citizens should extend this spirit of compassion and welcome to all refugees, including the 12,000 Syrian and Iraqis that the Australia government committed to resettle. With an increasingly hostile public debate, Australians should voice their support for fair refugee policies to

their members of parliament and in community groups.

3) Proactively engage in diplomatic discussions to ensure vital humanitarian access

In Syria, 4.9 million people are living in besieged and hard to reach areas. Even in areas where access is sometimes granted, frequent changes in the controlling authority can have serious impacts on program continuity and safety for humanitarian workers and civilians.

The Australian Government should work proactively with the international community and with members of the UN Security Council to call for rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access in accordance with international humanitarian law.

4) Focus investment on boosting educational programs for Syrian children to ensure no child goes without an education

Almost 2.5 million children inside Syria and in the region are missing out on education. Refugee host governments have made enormous commitments to improve enrolment of Syrian children in school, but need ongoing support from donors and NGOs to provide access to quality education for all children. In addition to the Australian Government's commitments to support the

Jordanian and Lebanese governments through the Syria Resilience Fund, the Australian Government should work with Australian NGOs to address funding gaps in education; including expanding learning spaces and investing in remedial education, catch-up classes, non-formal education and psychosocial support.

* These figures are based on analysis by Oxfam Australia.



Lebanon

In the words of Syria's children

"We had dinner and were getting ready for bed when we heard a "Boooooom" and we [starting] looking for each other. I was shouting "Dad"... No one was answering. We stayed like that until people came in with flash lights and found us. They were dead. Five of them were dead, my mom and my brother in law and our neighbour and two of her boys."

– Udai, 11-year-old boy

"My biggest fear is to not be able to go back to Syria one day. I love Syria."

– Mohammad, 10-year-old boy

"I'm scared of fighter jets and shelling."

– Naiema, five-year-old girl

"I dream of an end of this war, so I can go home and back to school."

– Jwahir, nine-year-old boy

"I dream of living in peace."

– Subhi, 11-year-old boy