

Field Report

Education, Protection, and Special Needs of Children in Syria

2025



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cocukları
children of earth

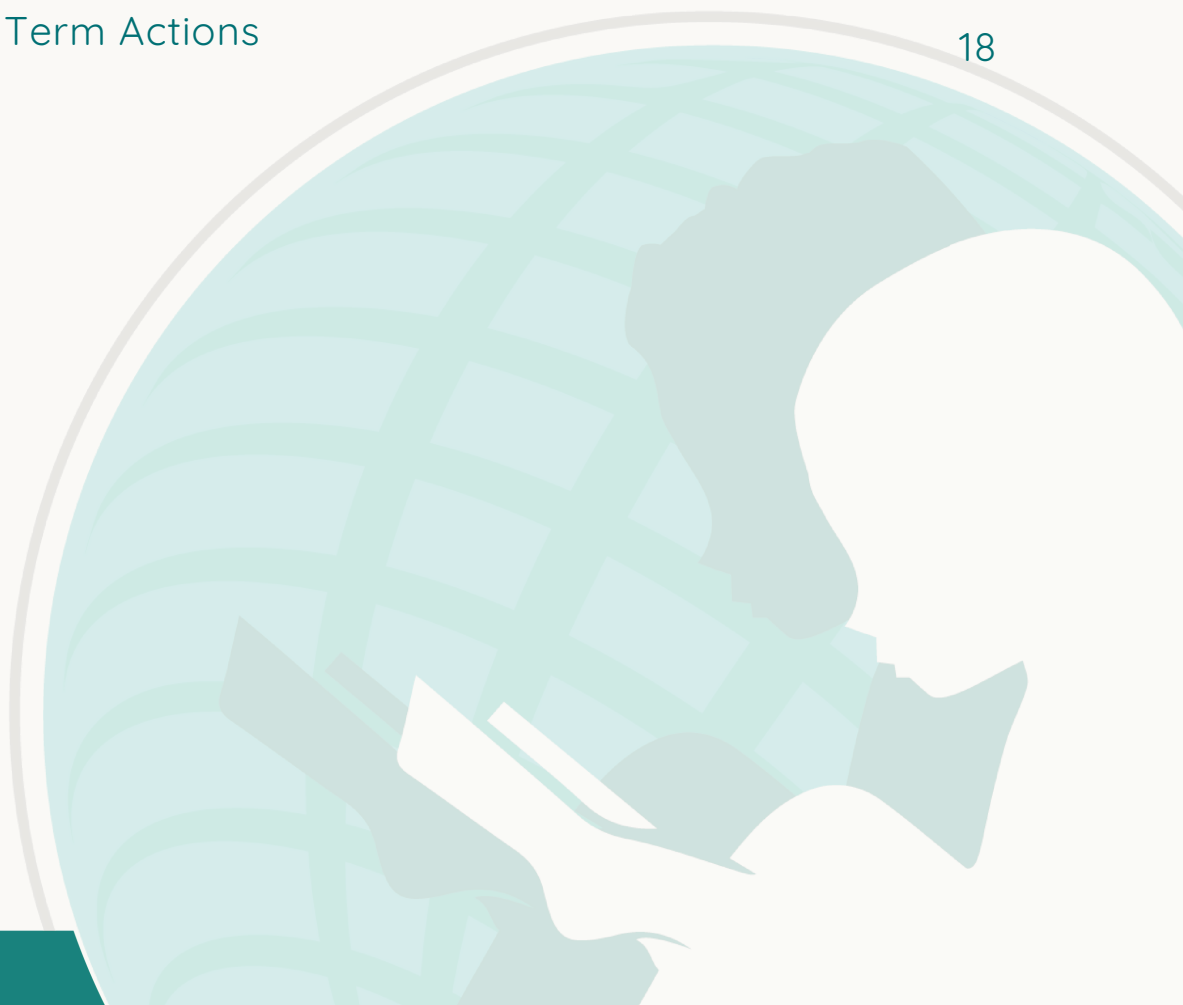


TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.INTRODUCTION	1
2.POPULATION MOBILITY AND RETURN TENDANCIES IN SYRIA	2
3.EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN	3
• 3.1 Educational Infrastructure	3
• 3.2 Student Situation	4
• 3.3 Regional and Educational Disparities	5
• 3.4 Early Childhood and Support Programs	6
• 3.5 Special Education Needs	7
4.CHILD PROTECTION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT	8
• 4.1 Need for Psychological Support and Societal Perception	9
• 4.2 Child Labour and Exploitation	9
• 4.3 Homeless Children Living in Streets	10
• 4.4 Substance Abuse and Addiction	11
• 4.5 Lack of Socialization Spaces	12
• 4.6 Psychosocial Support for Mothers	12

Table of Contents

5. HEALTH AND SPECIAL NEEDS	13
• 5.1 Education and Rehabilitation for Children with Disabilities	14
• 5.2 Situation of Health Centers	15
• 5.3 Limitation of Mobility and Access	15
• 5.4 Rebuilding	16
6. NECESSARY STEPS TO BE TAKEN	17
• 6.1. Short Term Action	17
• 6.2. Medium Term Actions	17
• 6.3. Long Term Actions	18



1. INTRODUCTION



The prolonged crisis in Syria has had a profound impact on children's lives, severely limiting their access to basic rights such as education, protection, healthcare, and psychosocial development. Millions of children face a multitude of risks including destroyed schools, the loss of family members, forced child labor, and lack of medical services. Not only their present but also their future is under threat.

Therefore, rebuilding the education system, strengthening child protection mechanisms, and ensuring comprehensive services for children with special needs are of critical importance. Now more than ever, there is an urgent need for long-term, multi-stakeholder solutions that can revive hope for Syria's children.

2. POPULATION MOVEMENTS AND RETURN TENDANCIES IN SYRIA

Recent data show that between the beginning of 2024 and May 8, 2025, a total of 842,571 Syrians returned to the country.

- 46% returned via Lebanon,
- 34% via Turkey,
- and 12% via Jordan (UNHCR, 2025).

Following the regime change on December 8, 2024, the number of returns increased significantly, with 481,731 people returning during this period.

- 42% of these returns occurred via Turkey (UNHCR, 2025).

Meanwhile, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) exceeded 6.5 million.

In April alone, there were 28,052 new displacements and 163,940 internal return movements recorded (IOM, 2025).

The main governorates receiving returnees include:

- Aleppo (23%), Rural Damascus, Raqqa, Idlib, Homs, and Damascus, each receiving approximately 10–11% of the total returns (UNHCR, 2025).

3. EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN

One of the most devastating consequences of the war in Syria has been on the education sector. Destroyed school buildings, a severe shortage of qualified teachers, and widespread economic hardship have left millions of children without access to education. This section outlines the various factors affecting education in Syria, ranging from infrastructure damage and teacher quality to child labor and learning difficulties.

3.1 Educational Infrastructure

Syria's education infrastructure has suffered significant damage:

- Out of approximately 11,255 schools that are still operational,
- 8,482 schools have been directly targeted and rendered completely unusable.
- An additional 4,132 schools are 50% damaged and require urgent repairs.
- Around 4,300 schools have either collapsed entirely or are at risk of collapse.

This critical shortage of safe and functional schools severely limits millions of children's access to their right to education.

STATUS OF EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN SYRIA	
Status	Number of Schools
Still Usable	11255
Completely unusable (directly targeted)	8482
50% damaged (requires repair)	4132
Totally destroyed / at risk of collapse	4300

3.2 Student Situation

There are approximately 4,761,000 school-aged children across Syria.

However, around 2,500,000 children—which is roughly 52%—are still out of the formal education system.

This not only deprives children of a fundamental right but also exposes them to increased risks such as exploitation, child labor, early marriage, and recruitment by armed groups.

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION IN SYRIA



As of 2021, intensified conflict, increased widespread displacement, and economic challenges have significantly disrupted access to quality education.

30% OF CHILDREN OUT OF SCHOOL FORCED TO WORK

Girls, specifically, lack access to educational opportunities and child protection and rehabilitation services are lacking.

Although, girls, in particular, are particularly lack access to educational opportunities, and child protection and rehabilitation services.



3.3 Regional and Economic Disparities

The state of the education system in Syria varies significantly across regions. Areas under regime control often experience lower educational quality. One contributing factor is the low average teacher salary, approximately \$250, which discourages qualified professionals from entering or remaining in the teaching profession. In rural Aleppo, for instance, about half of the teachers possess only a high school diploma, highlighting the challenges in maintaining educational standards.

Additionally, the prevalence of early marriages in certain regions leads to girls leaving school prematurely, disrupting their education and hindering overall educational continuity.



3.4 Early Childhood and Support Programs

Early childhood education (ECE) remains a critical gap in Syria's educational landscape. During the regime period, kindergartens were poorly managed, necessitating significant improvements in this sector.

Children returning from Turkey often require tailored programs to facilitate their integration into the Syrian education system. Many of these children exhibit weak literacy skills, particularly in Arabic, underscoring the need for academic support programs to bolster their learning.



3.5 Special Education Needs

Children with learning difficulties and special needs face substantial barriers due to limited resources. The ongoing crisis has severely constrained the availability of appropriate educational materials, specialized support programs, and individualized learning plans. The scarcity of accessible schools for children with disabilities, a shortage of special education teachers, and inadequate psychosocial support services further impede their educational inclusion.



Strengthening the education system to better prepare children for the future necessitates long-term solutions developed through national and international collaboration. Addressing the needs of children with disabilities is paramount, requiring comprehensive strategies to ensure their inclusion and support.

4. CHILD PROTECTION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

The war has rendered children vulnerable not only in education but also in safety, care, and mental health. This section delves into the challenges faced by orphans, street children, those requiring psychological support, and children subjected to social exclusion.

An estimated one million children have been orphaned due to the conflict. Existing orphanages are insufficient to meet the needs of this population, highlighting the urgency for establishing new facilities and expanding the capacity of current ones.



Total number
of orphaned
children is
appx. 1 M.

Despite the clear need for psychological support, this area remains underprioritized in Syria. Children affected by trauma, grief, aggression, and speech disorders require comprehensive mental health services. However, societal stigma surrounding therapy and psychosocial support hinders access to these essential services. Awareness campaigns are necessary to emphasize the importance of psychological well-being and to encourage community acceptance of support programs.

4.1 Need for Psychological Support and Societal Perception

Although it is known that children need psychological support, this issue is not given enough importance in Syria. In order to cope with psychological problems such as trauma, grief, aggression and stuttering caused by the war, comprehensive mental health services should be provided.

However, there is a negative perception of therapy and psychosocial support services in the society. Therefore, awareness raising activities should be carried out to emphasize the importance of psychological support and steps should be taken to ensure that society accepts these services.

4.2 Child Labour and Exploitation

One of the biggest risks in child protection is child labor and exploitation. Due to lack of access to education and economic hardship, many children are forced to work at an early age, leading to violations of children's rights and adversely affecting their physical, mental and emotional development.

In order to combat child labor, families should be provided with economic support, programs should be implemented to encourage children to attend school and strong protection mechanisms against exploitation should be established.

4.3 Homeless Children Living in Streets

The number of homeless and children living in the streets has also increased as a result of the war. These children are at great risk both physically and psychologically. Negative behaviors such as theft, aggression and delinquency are common among children living on the streets.



Protection mechanisms need to be strengthened to ensure that these children are directed to safe spaces and their basic needs are met. The establishment of community centers can facilitate children's access to psycho-social support and rehabilitation services. However, considering that it may be difficult for children to access these centers, localized solutions should be developed.

4.4 Substance Abuse and Addiction

One of the most critical social impacts of the ongoing conflict in Syria is substance abuse. It is observed that there is a significant increase in substance abuse especially among children. Field observations and reports reveal that the use of cigarettes and volatile substances is as low as 10 years old, and some children become addicted as early as 6 years old due to witnessing substance use in the family environment.

The easy availability of substances such as silicone-based adhesives and over-the-counter medicines exacerbates this problem. Accordingly, comprehensive awareness-raising and rehabilitation programs, including not only individual but also family-based approaches, need to be implemented urgently in the fight against addiction.



4.5 Lack of Socialization Spaces

The lack of spaces where children can socialize in Syria is also noteworthy. The lack of child-friendly spaces such as parks, playgrounds and kindergartens negatively affects the healthy development of children. Safe spaces should be created and activities should be offered to support children's psychosocial development.

4.6 Psychosocial Support for Mothers

Not only children but also mothers need psychosocial support. The effects of the war have caused severe trauma on parents as well, and support programs to improve family communication and parental skills need to be implemented.

Psychosocial empowerment programs should be implemented for mothers, and they should be guided to establish healthy relationships with their children and support their development.

5. HEALTH AND SPECIAL NEEDS

The physical and psychological traumas faced by children in war and crisis environments have led to serious inequalities in health and education, especially for persons with disabilities. The needs of children with disabilities and those living with chronic diseases have been largely ignored. Services for children with hearing and physical disabilities in particular are extremely limited. The prevalence of genetic diseases, inadequate infrastructure of health centers and lack of specialists further aggravate this picture.

The physical traumas and psychological effects of war have led to a significant increase in the number of children with disabilities. The increase in the number of children with hearing impairments is particularly striking. Similarly, the number of children with stuttering and other speech disorders has also increased significantly due to the war.

According to reports published by the United Nations in 2021, approximately 28% of the Syrian general population has at least one type of disability. This is almost double the global average (15%).

Sensory Integration Therapy helps to improve attention, coordination and self-regulation skills of children who have sensory problems as a result of traumas such as war and migration.

Occupational therapy supports individuals with disabilities to acquire independent living skills. It is especially critical for children with physical disabilities to participate in self-care, daily activities and social life.

5.1 Education and Rehabilitation for Children with Disabilities

There are serious gaps in health and education services for children with genetic diseases and disabilities. The absence or limited implementation of early diagnosis and intervention programs negatively affects the developmental processes of children with disabilities.

Health and education services need to be strengthened to ensure that these children have a healthier development and maximize their potential through early intervention.

5.2 Situation of Health Centers

Even cancer hospitals lack equipment and have insufficient capacity, making it even more difficult for disabled and sick children to access health services. Psychological support units are limited to a single room, and in some regions there are none at all.

In post-war regions, malnutrition, problems of access to health services and their impact on children with disabilities negatively affect children's recovery processes. Families who have difficulty in accessing hygiene products cannot continue to care for their children and diseases spread rapidly.

5.3 Limitation of Mobility and Access

Most children with physical disabilities do not have access to support devices such as wheelchairs, crutches and orthopedic shoes. In some areas, even if there is a chair, it cannot last long because the roads are bad. Lack of transportation facilities has made it almost impossible for children with disabilities to attend school.



5.4 Rebuilding

Since 2011, the war has caused massive physical and social destruction in many parts of Syria.

- **Displacement and Shelter Problem:** Approximately 2 million people live in camps in northern Syria. The vast majority of these people have no place to return to due to the destruction of their homes during the conflict.
- **Lack of Reconstruction:** No comprehensive reconstruction process has begun in the country since 2011. Access to housing, education, health and infrastructure services in particular is extremely limited.
- **Infrastructure Inadequacies:** The vast majority of basic public services such as drinking water, sewerage, roads, energy, schools and health facilities are either dysfunctional or non-existent.
- **Population Growth:** Syria's population is doubling every 15 years according to current trends. This increase further increases the burden on already inadequate infrastructure.
- **Socioeconomic Disruption:** In addition to the housing crisis, the lack of access to employment, education and basic social services creates long-term vulnerability in all segments of society.



6. NECESSARY STEPS TO BE TAKEN

Based on observations from the field, it is recommended that the following steps be prioritized and implemented for the well-being of children:

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS:

1. Opening of additional education centers (especially for out-of-school children)
2. Increasing digital education tools.
3. Establishment of psychosocial support (PSS) projects.
4. Establishment of mobile support teams for children.
5. Hygiene kits, nutrition support and stationery supplies.
6. Establishment of temporary shelters and protection centers for homeless children living on the streets.
7. Implementation of special programs for moral, ethical and religious educations.

MEDIUM TERM ACTIONS

1. Special education, trauma sensitivity and PSS training for teachers.
2. Providing motivational and mental health support to orphanage and community center staff.
3. Mainstreaming family support programs.
4. Organizing special rehabilitation and screening campaigns for children with disabilities.
5. Increasing family-based education programs for illiterate mothers.

LONG TERM ACTIONS

1. Building new schools and child-friendly spaces (especially in rural areas).
2. Reorganization of schools, prioritizing accessibility for children with disabilities.
3. Conducting community-wide awareness campaigns to normalize psychological support services.
4. Establishing a national database of orphans and children with disabilities.
5. Establishing platforms to strengthen coordination between government and NGO's.





A CHILD BUILDS A WORLD!

As Children of Earth Association, since the year 2016, we have been working for children whose rights are at risk, especially children affected by crises such as war, conflict, migration and natural disasters.



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o f e a r t h

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