

# Syria: No Lost Generation

Displaced. Uprooted. Orphaned. The children of Syria are paying the heaviest price for the conflict.

GRADES 6-8

# Three Years of Conflict in Syria

Since 2011 a brutal war in Syria has taken more than 140,000 lives and **displaced** millions from their homes. The war has made daily headlines. But how did it begin and where do things stand today?

The conflict started in March 2011 in the southern city of Daraa. A group of 15 schoolchildren were arrested and mistreated for painting political graffiti on the walls of a school. When demonstrators demanded that they be released, the police cracked down and dozens of protesters were killed. The unrest soon spread to other parts of the country. At first the protesters just wanted more freedom and democracy, but as the violence grew worse, many called for President Bashar al-Assad to step down.

Since that time fighting has increased between Assad's forces and rebel groups, such as the Free Syrian Army, trying to bring down the government. By the summer of 2012 the war had reached Damascus, Syria's capital, and Aleppo, its largest city. In July of that year the Red Cross declared the conflict a civil war.

In 2013 a **chemical weapons** attack near Damascus killed hundreds of people and caused thousands of others to become sick. President Assad denied



Boys line up to fill water containers in Aleppo, where fighting has caused interruptions to the water supply.

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responsibility for the attack, but people around the world became outraged and demanded a strong response. Eventually the Russian government helped to negotiate a deal in which the Syrian government agreed to have all of its chemical weapons destroyed. That process started in October 2013.

Meanwhile the fighting continues into its fourth year as the conflict developed into a **stalemate**. Both sides have been accused of **human rights** abuses. Floods of **refugees** have poured out of the country into neighboring Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt, disrupting those countries and hurting their economies. Many nations and **humanitarian** aid organizations have sent food and emergency supplies to help the victims of the war, but the suffering has outstripped their reach.

A peace conference in Switzerland in early 2014 brought new hope for the people of Syria, but for now the nations of the world struggle to find a solution to this conflict that is destroying so many lives.

## ODD ONE OUT

Each boldface term is followed by three words or phrases to the right. Circle one word or phrase on the right that does not relate to the term to the left (and be ready to explain your choice!).

- |                            |             |             |                       |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. <b>Chemical weapons</b> | Terrifying  | Gas         | Legal                 |
| 2. <b>Displaced</b>        | Welcomed    | Forced out  | Abused                |
| 3. <b>Human rights</b>     | Optional    | From birth  | Protect freedoms      |
| 4. <b>Humanitarian</b>     | Caring      | Life-saving | Involved in the fight |
| 5. <b>Refugees</b>         | Vulnerable  | Foreign     | Prisoners of war      |
| 6. <b>Stalemate</b>        | Frustrating | Triumphant  | Vicious               |



# Focus on Syrian History

## 2500 B.C.

Damascus is settled; as Syria's capital today, it is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world

## 636

Damascus comes under Muslim rule and serves as the capital of an empire stretching from Spain to India for 89 years

## 1517

Damascus falls under rule of the Ottoman Turks, marking the start of 400 years of Ottoman rule over Syria

## 1946

Syria becomes independent after World War II

## 2000

Upon Hafiz al-Assad's death, Bashir al-Assad, his son, takes power and shows little interest in political reform

## 34 A.D.

During Roman times, Paul the Apostle establishes the first organized Christian church in the world at Antioch (according to tradition)

## 1098

Christian European Crusaders establish the Principality of Antioch and rule until 1268, when the city falls to the Muslim rulers of Egypt

## 1920

After defeating the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria after World War I, France is given control over Syria from the defeated Ottoman Empire

## 1970

Hafiz al-Assad ends a period of instability by seizing power and establishing authoritarian rule

## 2011

Syria gets caught up in the so-called "Arab Spring" as protests against the government spread from Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in the Middle East

**INTERPRET IT:** How many times has Syria changed hands in this timeline?

## Map It!

Use the information in this reading and the map below to answer the following questions.



1. Which of the countries taking in Syrian refugees does not border Syria? Why might Syrians seek refuge there?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What information does the map contain that suggests why Syria and the surrounding region have been strategically important for thousands of years?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Feature Story

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Adnan, 5, with untreated burns, is held by his father in a makeshift encampment for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Three years into the conflict in Syria, children are paying the heaviest price. The United Nations estimates that over 9 million people are in need of assistance because of the conflict, over 4 million of whom are children. In addition, of the 6.5 million people displaced, almost 3 million are children. Over a million child refugees are now in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt. Thousands more are streaming across Syria's borders every week. Some 2.3 million children inside Syria—and another 800,000 Syrian refugee children—are not in school. In short, the crisis is reaching a point of no return, including the risk of a “lost generation” of Syrian children.

### Read Between the Lines:

- What is pushing the Syrian crisis to the “point of no return”?
- What can be done to stop this damage before an entire generation is “lost”?

# No Lost Generation

As the Syrian crisis rages on, entering its fourth year, an entire generation of children is being shaped by violence and hopelessness.

The executive director of UNICEF, Anthony Lake, summarizes the situation this way:

*Children face tremendous dangers on a daily basis. They are being killed, maimed, and orphaned by conflict. Health clinics that have not been damaged or destroyed struggle to deliver life-saving services. Clean water and adequate sanitation ... are increasingly scarce. Many schools have been damaged, destroyed, or taken over by displaced people seeking shelter. [Children are] seeing family members killed, ... separated from their parents, and ... terrified by the constant thunder of shelling. ... All around them, their dreams and opportunities for the future are being lost. And as they lose their childhoods, their [scars] can create [an endless cycle of] violence, with all that implies for the region as a whole.*

Since Lake spoke these words, the situation has only worsened. That's why the world community must step up to prevent the children of Syria from becoming a lost generation. Right now, they are enduring child labor, recruitment into armed groups, and deep emotional wounds. We—the world—need to provide them with safe environments, where their human rights can

be upheld and they can feel like children again. We must get Syrian children learning and developing their skills. And we must ensure they have all the opportunities available to children everywhere.

We are global citizens. We must demand that there be no lost generation for our fellow global citizens in Syria.

### In their own words

Read the excerpt below from an interview with Amineh Salwan, a woman who survived the 2013 chemical attack in Syria and has been speaking throughout the United States. Use the excerpt and details from the feature story on this page to write a letter to the President providing your suggestions for a policy on protecting Syrian children.

**INTERVIEWER:** ... Do you feel the U.S. has been helpful to your country...?

**SALWAN:** No. They can do a lot of things, but they are not doing... [T]he people inside [Syria] think that everybody knows what's going on, and they're not moving. But what I figured out here, that... the [American] government knows everything, but the people of America don't know.

Excerpt from NPR, “A Survivor of Syria’s Chemical Attacks Speaks Out,” February 10, 2014, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=274348905>.

# Inside Syria: What I Saw



A girl carrying water walks past a pile of debris on a street in the city of Aleppo.

## Think, Write, Discuss...

- Of the rights denied to Syrian children due to the war, which do you think are the most difficult to live without? Why?
- Do you think UNICEF and other aid organizations are doing enough to protect children's rights? Why? What do you think it will take for children's rights to be fully restored?
- What qualities do you think it takes to be an emergency worker? Could you imagine yourself doing this type of work someday? Why, or why not?

### Compose Your Thoughts:

Imagine you are Abdulkadir Musse and it is a few hours after sending the dispatch above. Write a letter home to your family in which you share your thoughts and feelings about your work and the situation in Syria.

UNICEF emergency specialist Abdulkadir Musse reports from Al Waer, Syria, on the outskirts of the war-torn city of Homs. These passages are from an October 2013 visit.

I was last in Al Waer in May 2013. More buildings have been destroyed since then, with more piles of rubble strewn about. With no one to collect it, garbage is piling up in the streets contributing to the spread of diseases.

Many children are bearing the marks of insect bites. I visited a shelter in an unfinished building. ... People sleep on mats on the floor and many windows and doors are open to the outside. ... The biggest concern for mothers I met was the safety of their children amid the shelling.

Winter was another major issue, with a need for children's winter clothing. "How are we going to keep the children clean during winter if there is no hot water?" one mother asked.

A hospital that was full of patients on my last visit is now practically deserted. ... Medical supplies are limited. ... The hospital is on the point of closing. UNICEF supports two mobile health teams, which visit shelters daily. ... Around 72,000 children have been reached since the teams started work in March.

Of the 11 schools in Al Waer, which used to support 70,000 children, 10 are being used as shelters for displaced families. The single operating school serves around 2,000 children. ... Other children learn in the yard, where they are exposed to the increasingly cold temperatures and stray bullets.

Al Waer presents extraordinary challenges ... but we and our partners are committed to continue to help children facing such desperate conditions.



# The Convention on the **Rights of the Child**

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In the United States your rights are protected by the U.S. Constitution and many local laws. Did you know that there are also rights established for people no matter where in the world they reside? As part of the United Nations' International Bill of Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) sets out the special rights that you and young people everywhere are entitled to. Rights to basic needs like health care and education. Rights that expand opportunities to reach your full potential, like nondiscrimination and protection against child labor. Since its adoption in 1989, the CRC has become the most widely accepted human rights treaty in history. Whether they are currently being protected or not, the rights in the CRC are your rights.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read each right listed below from the CRC and put it in your own words in the right-hand column.

## The right in the CRC (excerpted):

## Put it in your own words:

### Article 9

States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when ... such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.

### Article 22

States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status ... shall ... receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention.

### Article 24

States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services

### Article 28

States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and ... shall, in particular, make primary education compulsory and available free to all.

### Article 38

States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.



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# Helping the Children of Syria

UNICEF and its partners have been working to help Syria's children throughout the conflict. To help them survive winter's cold, they have distributed blankets, installed heaters in refugee camps, and provided children with badly needed warm winter clothes — jackets, boots, gloves, and hats. They have also delivered clean drinking water to 10 million people in Syria alone.

To respond to the country's first outbreak of polio in 14 years (a disease of the nervous system), UNICEF and its partners are planning to immunize 2.2 million children under five inside Syria and almost 21 million children in the region.

UNICEF and its partners are supporting education by providing textbooks and school kits for 1 million children and learning programs for 585,000 children, with a goal of promoting access to quality education for nearly 4 million children this year. They are establishing child-friendly spaces — safe places where children can play, socialize, and act like children again each day — and building large playgrounds and enclosed areas where teenagers can play soccer.

Children are also receiving critical care and support to deal with the emotional trauma they have experienced. Whether through group therapy or counseling sessions, addressing the impact war has had on a child's well-being is critical.

There are many ways that you can help, too:

- **Stay Informed** — Learn more about the crisis in Syria and help to educate your friends and family. Check out these news and current events websites created especially for children: [CBC News](#), [DOGOnews](#), [Indy Kids](#), [KidsPost](#), [Teaching Kids News](#).
- **Advocate** — Write to your United States [senators](#) and [members of Congress](#) sharing your concern for the children of Syria. Encourage them to increase funds for international aid.



This child-friendly center, supported by UNICEF, serves Syrian refugees and others in Lebanon.

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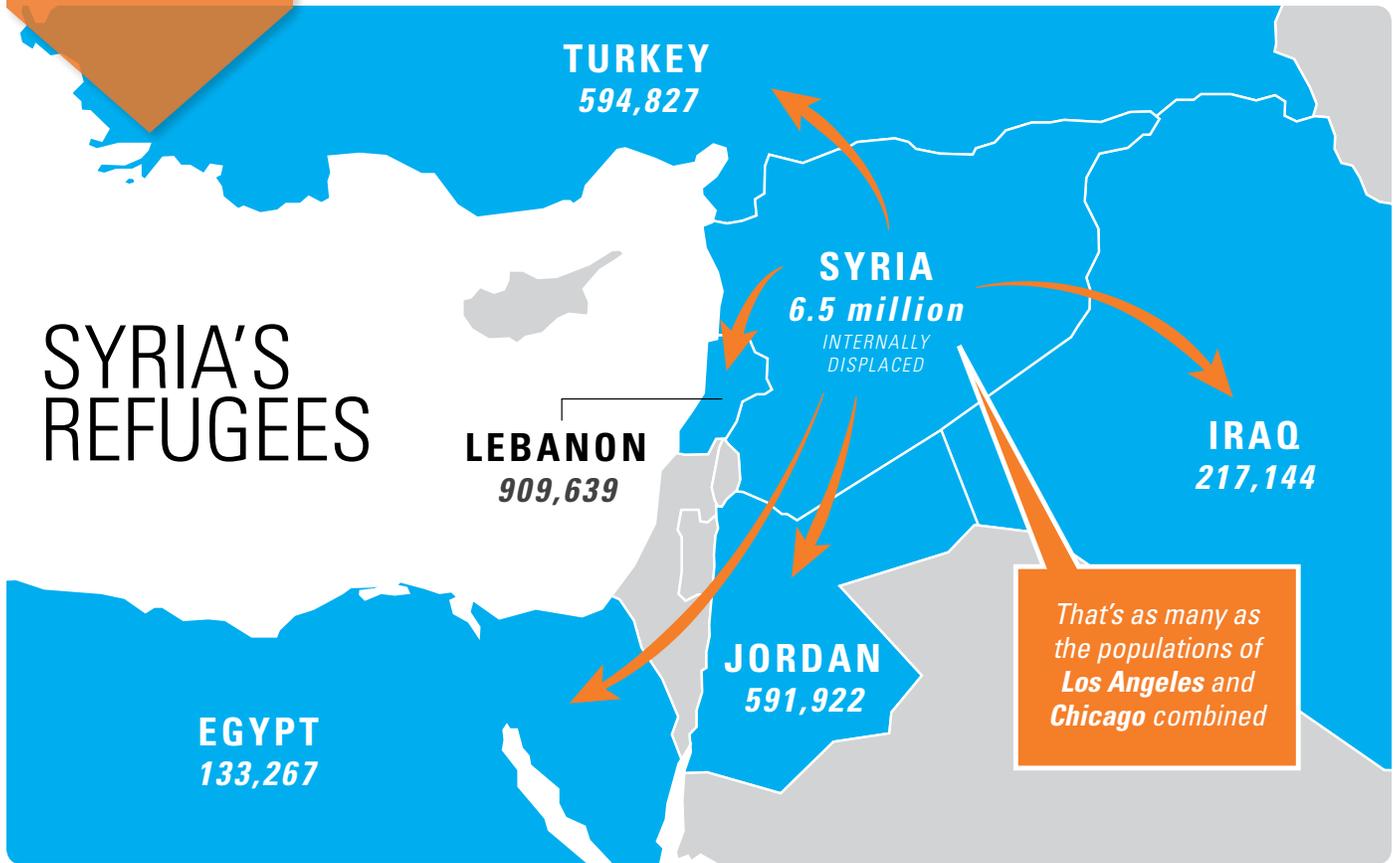
- **Donate** — Visit [teachunicef.org/taking-action-syrias-children](http://teachunicef.org/taking-action-syrias-children) to learn about hosting a fundraiser to benefit UNICEF or another organization that helps children. A bake sale, a movie night, or another event can be used to raise awareness and funds for children in need.
- **Make a Birthday Wish** — If you have a birthday or other special day coming soon, make a wish for the children of Syria. When asked what you want, say that a contribution to UNICEF or another organization that helps children is on your wish list.
- **Tweet for Good** — Every time this tweet is shared, \$1 will go toward aid:  
**#theworldneedsmore #education for the #ChildrenOfSyria - together we can help #Syria not lose a generation to war.**
- **Add Your Voice** — Send a message to the [#ChildrenOfSyria](http://childrenofsyria.info/add-your-voice) at [childrenofsyria.info/add-your-voice](http://childrenofsyria.info/add-your-voice) to help prevent a lost generation, and see what other people are saying.

**unicef**  works in more than 190 countries to help kids survive and grow. UNICEF supplies medicines and vaccinations, clean water, nutrition, shelter, and education. UNICEF also responds when emergencies occur, such as earthquakes, floods, and war.

#### How your donations help:

- \$30 supplies 60 children with notebooks and pencils.
- \$36 delivers 200 doses of polio vaccine to protect 66 children.
- \$57 buys 1 full set of warm winter clothes.
- \$68 provides 10 hungry children with nutrition for 5 days.

**BY THE NUMBERS**



List the number of Syrian refugees in each country shown on the map, rounded to the nearest thousand. Then calculate the total number of refugees.

Country	Number of Refugees (rounded)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
<b>Total</b>	



**A Workout for Your (Common) Core**

- What is the average number of Syrian refugees in each of these five countries (based on the rounded figures)? Excluding Iraq, what is the average number in the remaining four countries?
- Suppose Iraq wants to help Turkey by taking in some of its Syrian refugees. How many of these refugees would Iraq have to accept so that the average number of refugees in the other four countries decreases to 525,000?

Correlates with Standard 6.SP.5 for sixth grade mathematics in the Common Core State Standards