THE COST OF **WAR**

Calculating the impact of the collapse of Syria's education system on the country's future

Save the Children

PHOTO: SAVE THE CHILDREN

View from the window of a school in northern Syria that was destroyed in a recent attack. This school is supported – and had been rehabilitated – by Save the Children. It has been attacked three times, the last time so seriously that most of the building was destroyed. Thankfully no children or teachers were in the school at the time of the attack.

As we approach the fourth anniversary of the war in Syria, almost 3 million Syrian children are out of school, putting them at risk of exploitation and threatening their futures. Unless this situation is urgently addressed, the prospects for eventual peace, stability and economic prosperity in Syria look uncertain.

A slow and silent assault on a child is committed each time their right to education is denied. Now new analysis by Save the Children, CfBT Education Trust (CfBT) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) also highlights the devastating economic cost that 2.8 million children missing school is likely to have both on Syria's children themselves and on the future of their country.

We estimate the direct costs of replacing damaged, destroyed or occupied schools and lost school equipment could be as high as £2 billion ($3 billion). Importantly, we estimate that the long-term impact on Syria's economy of 2.8 million Syrian children never returning to school could be as much as 5.4% of gross domestic product (GDP), which equates to almost £1.5 billion ($2.18 billion).

Save the Children is calling on donors, countries that host refugee children from Syria, parties to the conflict in Syria and the international community as a whole to **make 2015 the year that we get Syrian children's futures back on track**. They must urgently:

- **prioritise** education as a key component of the Syria crisis response and fully fund the UN Appeals of $224 million required for education for Syria and the $445 million required for the region at the 'Kuwait III' donor conference at the end of March
- **call on the champions** of the No Lost Generation Initiative – including humanitarian and development partners from the UK, USA, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as regional governments – to develop a new 'No Lost Generation' strategy for 2015–18, with a comprehensive and fully costed education and protection plan for Syria's children – both those who have become refugees and those who remain inside Syria
- **work together** to ensure that key barriers to Syrian children's access to education inside Syria and in the region are addressed
- **press for the implementation** of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict and an end to attacks on education in Syria, and ensure that schools are safe places for children.

SYRIA'S EDUCATION CRISIS

Before the war, almost all of Syria's children were enrolled in primary school and literacy rates were at 95% for 15–24-year-olds.[1] Four years into the conflict, almost 3 million children are no longer in school and Syria is now estimated to have one of the lowest enrolment rates in the world.[2] Enrolment in Aleppo is as low as 6%,[3] while half of refugee children are not receiving any education.[4]

KEY FACTS: EDUCATION IN CRISIS

- Basic education enrolment in Syria has fallen from close to 100% to an average of 50%. In areas like Aleppo, which has seen active conflict for a prolonged period, that is closer to 6%.
- At least a quarter of schools have been damaged or destroyed.
- Almost 3 million Syrian children are out of school.
- In 2014, half of refugee children were not receiving any form of education.
- Education programmes are underfunded by almost 50%.[5]

INSIDE SYRIA

Syrian schools are under attack and there has never been a more dangerous time for Syrian children to try to get an education. At least a quarter of schools have been damaged, destroyed, used for military purposes or occupied by displaced people.[6] Others are deserted as parents keep their children at home and out of school for fear of bombings and arbitrary attacks. Save the Children's own education programmes inside Syria have been affected by attacks. Between August 2013 and February 2015, there were at least 23 incidents of shelling, airstrikes or explosions on or near the facilities we support. The brave teachers still working in these areas have found ways to keep educating children despite the dangers, including home schooling and reduced school hours.

However, while the scale of attacks on education is shocking and presents a very real danger to children's education in Syria, it is important to recognise that this does not mean education is over. As we have demonstrated through our own education programming in northern Syria, education can be delivered safely even in areas of active conflict if communities are involved from the outset and sufficient and thorough planning takes place to ensure safe spaces for learning are identified and home-based learning activities are available if going to school is no longer safe.

Not only do children have the right to an education in any context but also education can protect children in times of conflict. When children are in school, they are less vulnerable to protection risks such as child labour, early marriage and recruitment to armed groups. Children's well-being also improves as school restores a sense of stability in their lives and they learn better ways of coping with their situations. In a context like Syria, children's safety and well-being is at the core of our education response. We work with local communities to prepare for, manage and respond to the impact of conflict on their children's learning. In turn, communities regain a degree of control over their situation and children gain a greater sense of well-being when they know there are plans in place to keep them both safe and learning.

While Save the Children has made great progress in northern Syria, we are only reaching 2% of out-of-school children. We have capacity to support more communities to restart education in their areas and a proven model for others to replicate, but due to insecurity and the chronic underfunding of the Syrian education response we cannot scale up our efforts.

REFUGEE-HOSTING COUNTRIES

For many refugee children from Syria, full-time education is a luxury. Almost half of school-aged refugees are not receiving any form of education and only 340,000 are enrolled in formal education.[7] In some areas that figure is even worse: in Lebanon, which has taken in the largest number of refugees, 78% of Syrian children are out of school.[8]

For those who do get some access to education, it is often patchy and insufficient. Unfamiliar curricula, language barriers, overcrowding and discrimination against children from Syria are all barriers to learning. The majority of refugee children live outside formal camps and in host communities or informal

settlements. Their access to education is thwarted by the already limited capacity of the public education systems in host countries and the acute financial pressures their families are facing. For refugee families who have lost everything, the pressure to earn money can force young people into child labour and early marriage, taking them out of school and making them less likely to ever return.[9]

THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN EDUCATION DURING TIMES OF CONFLICT

Every child, no matter what their circumstances, has a right to education. But there are also practical economic and political reasons why continued schooling should be a priority, even for countries in the midst of war.

For Syria, which needs to end and then recover from a particularly destructive and brutal war, education will be the key to ensuring it stabilises and rebuilds. There is a broad consensus among economists on education's role as a driver of economic growth and access to good quality education is critical for helping people rise out of their circumstances, as higher levels of education lead to higher wages. Economists estimate that for every additional year of schooling, an individual's potential income increases by 10%.[10]

Research shows that low quality – or lack of – education leaves young people facing unemployment or low-paid jobs, which in turn can make them vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups who offer them a source of income and prestige. There is strong evidence showing that education – and in particular secondary education – reduces the likelihood of conflict by increasing the income opportunities and life choices for young people.[11]

PHOTO: KHALIL ASHAWI/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Children at a school newly opened by Save the Children in northern Syria hold a 'back to school' campaign where they perform songs and plays to encourage more children from the community to restart their education. Before this school was rehabilitated by Save the Children, many children in the community had been out of school for two years.

ANALYSIS: THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF SYRIA'S EDUCATION CRISIS

KEY FINDINGS

- Direct cost of replacing damaged, destroyed or occupied schools, lost school equipment and training replacement teachers could be £2.1 billion ($3.2 billion).
- Syrian children who do not complete primary school education are likely to earn 32% less in their first job than Syrian children who completed secondary school and 56% less than Syrian children who completed university.
- Cost to Syria's economy of lost wages suffered by Syrian children who missed school as a result of conflict: up to 5.4% of GDP, equating to future annual costs of almost £1.46 billion ($2.18 billion).

We have seen how the war in Syria has decimated the education sector and created more than a million school-aged refugees[12] with little or no access to learning. In addition to losing the protective benefits of education and the opportunities it offers to broaden their minds and their possibilities for the future, the economic impact of these years of lost education will be severe. CfBT, AIR and Save the Children have calculated both the direct and indirect financial impacts of this.

DIRECT IMPACT

A review of all available data in this analysis found that between 4,955 and 14,080 schools have been damaged, destroyed or occupied since the start of the crisis in March 2011. Attacks on schools have devastating human costs, as Save the Children documented in its *Futures Under Threat* report in 2014;[13] for the purposes of the economic analysis they also create clear direct financial costs in terms of rebuilding and repairing damage and replacing equipment. We estimate these costs could come to £2.01 billion ($3 billion). When we take into account the costs of training teachers to replace those who have been killed and paying salaries of teachers who are unable to access their students, we project a total figure for the direct impact of attacks on education to be up to £2.14 billion ($3.2 billion).

INDIRECT IMPACT

The impact that conflict has on education also represents a cost to society through its effect on wider social and economic goals. While these latter effects are hard to estimate, it is possible to draw some key conclusions.

Before the conflict, Syrian children who failed to complete their primary school education were likely to earn 32% less in their first job than Syrian children who completed secondary school and 56% less than Syrian children who completed university.[14] We expect that Syria's current out-of-school population will face similar, if not worse, earning prospects if they remain out of school. The reduction in earning potential of each individual child has repercussions for the whole economy. We have estimated the likely cost to Syria's economy of out-of-school children by comparing it with other countries that have also suffered significant economic loss due to large

NOTE ON DATA

The nature of the war in Syria means that up-to-date, reliable data are hard to come by. Our calculations draw on those sources that are available, including UN reports and cross-sector humanitarian analyses, but given the limitations of the data our figures are necessarily approximate. However, they at least give a sense of the order of magnitude of the problem.

Our analysis is based on the estimated total number of out-of-school Syrian children inside Syria and across the region as of December 2013, which is the most recent data for which figures are available. It is only a snapshot in time; many more Syrian children are likely to have left school since then and with every day that the conflict continues and children are denied access to education, the human and economic costs will only get higher. The following figures represent the damage done to the prospects of Syria's children and the future economy of their country if they never go back to school.

Finally, our analysis only looks at the costs of the conflict on education to the Syrian economy and does not incorporate the additional costs to the economies of the neighbouring countries that are hosting refugees, which we know are also substantial.

out-of-school populations (including Yemen, Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo). Based on our comparisons, we estimate that the economic impact of 2.8 million Syrian children never returning to school could reach a staggering annual cost of £1.46 billion ($2.18 billion). And, as already emphasised, our analysis is only a snapshot in time: if the conflict continues to escalate and more children leave school and remain out of school, the economic impact will be even greater.

We also expect Syria's economy to suffer as a result of reduced access to school for those children who are still at least partly able to attend, leading to permanent reductions in average educational attainment. Drawing on experiences from other states similarly affected by conflict, we estimate that the current conflict might have the long-term impact of reducing national average years of schooling by 0.5 years. This may seem like a small drop but across the whole population it would be significant, translating to an additional annual economic cost to Syria's economy of over £821 million ($1.26 billion) or 3.1% of GDP.

Other factors that we have considered include the opportunity costs of schools being out of action because they have been damaged or destroyed, or because teachers are not teaching, and of reduced overall investment in education.

PHOTO: KHALIL ASHAWI/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Students in class at a school supported by Save the Children in northern Syria. Despite nearly all Syrian children attending school before the conflict, four years into the crisis Syria now has the second worst enrolment rate in the world with almost 3 million school-aged Syrian children no longer in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the hugely detrimental short-term and long-term impacts that missing school has on individual children and societies – and is having right now on Syria – **now is the time for the international community to prioritise education in the Syria crisis response**.

Education can have a transformative effect on the futures of Syria's children, on economic growth and on stability in Syria and the wider region. Going to school equips children with the skills they need for life and it protects them: when they are in school they are less vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups, early marriage and child labour. Without substantial investment in, and support for, education, the prospects of a generation of Syrian children, and Syria's chance at a prosperous and peaceful future, are bleak.

Giving the vast majority of Syrian children the opportunity to learn is an achievable aim, both in refugee-hosting countries and even inside Syria itself. Save the Children and other aid agencies are already supporting schools inside Syria, despite the risks and challenges, as well as working with neighbouring countries to help them provide education for refugee children and to mitigate the impact on host communities. While the underlying cause of the crisis in education – namely the ongoing war – remains unresolved, there is nonetheless considerably more that the international community should be doing to ensure that the right of Syria's children to education is prioritised and fully funded.

We call on donors, countries hosting Syrian refugees, parties to the conflict and the wider international community to:

- **recognise that** ensuring access to a good-quality education will protect Syria's children and have a transformative effect on their futures and the economic growth and stability of Syria and the region
- **prioritise** education as a key component of the Syria crisis response and fully fund the $224 million required for education for Syria and the $445 million required for the region at the 'Kuwait III' donor conference at the end of March
- **call on the champions** of the No Lost Generation Initiative – including humanitarian and development partners in the UK, USA, UN agencies and NGOs, as well as regional governments – to develop a new 'No Lost Generation' strategy for 2015–18, with a comprehensive and fully costed education and protection plan for Syria's children
- **convene** a second pledging event at the 70th UN General Assembly and commit to fully fund the new strategy
- **work together** to ensure that key barriers to the education of refugees in the region are addressed
- **take immediate steps** to hold all parties to the conflict accountable for breaches of international law, including attacks on schools, and establish a protection monitoring and reporting mechanism to ensure the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2139, and investigate and report on violations
- **signal their support** for keeping schools safe by implementing the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict
- **press for** an end to attacks on schools and push for a political solution to the conflict.

ENDNOTES

[1] UNESCO, Syria country profile, http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=SYR&regioncode=40525

[2] Save the Children, 2014, 'Futures Under Threat'

[3] Syria Integrated Needs Assessment, 2013, http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-integrated-needs-assessment-december-2013-enartr

[4] UNHCR, 2015, 'Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2015–2018', Strategic Overview, p.28

[5] See http://childrenofsyria.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Final-2014-Results-Dashboard_10-Feb.pdf

[6] OCHA, '2015 Strategic Response Plan: Syrian Arab Republic', p.3

[7] UNICEF, 2015, http://childrenofsyria.info/2015/02/16/syria-crisis-dashboard-2014-2/

[8] UNHCR, December 2014, 'Lebanon Education Update', http://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unhcr-lebanon-monthly-updates-december-2014

[9] Save the Children, 2014, 'Futures Under Threat; the Impact of the Education Crisis on Syria's Children', http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/futures-under-threat

[10] UNICEF, 2015, 'The Investment Case for Education and Equity', p.8

[11] Østby and Urdal, 2010, 'Education and Civil Conflict: A Review of the Quantitative, Empirical Literature', Background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011

[12] As of 11 March 2015, 34.1% or 1.28 million registered Syrian refugees are aged between 5–17 years old. See https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

[13] See http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/futures-under-threat

[14] European Training Foundation, 2012, 'Results Of The Youth Transition Survey 2009', p.37.

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We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.
We help them achieve their potential.

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