

Syria Seen and Heard: Teacher's Guide



Seen and Heard – Bushra
'I want people to know how we live.'
Photo – Sam Tarling/Oxfam

Introduction – the background

The humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Syria was the subject of the Oxfam schools resource 'Syria: A children's crisis?' published online in September 2013 at <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/syria>. Despite recent initiatives to hold a peace conference in January 2014, the humanitarian crisis in Syria and its neighbours continues to deepen. This resource builds on 'Syria: A children's crisis?' and suggests new activities to demonstrate support and solidarity for Syria's children on the third anniversary of the beginning of the conflict.

The statistics of the Syria conflict are staggering. On 15 March 2014 it will be three years since the outbreak of the conflict. Since then, out of a total population of 21.4 million, 9.3 million Syrian citizens now require humanitarian support. In addition more than 2.25 million Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries as refugees.¹ More than 100,000 have died as a result of the conflict.

¹ [Syrian Humanitarian Bulletin](#), UN OCHA, Oct 8-Nov 4, 2013

This is a human crisis of shocking proportions, one that continues to require a massive international humanitarian response.

Syrian refugees have mainly moved to four countries; Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq. Oxfam has programmes for displaced people within Syria and refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Oxfam aims to support 650,000 people affected by the conflict by March 2014.

There are almost 560,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan alone. Almost 300,000 of these refugees are children under 18 and over 100,000 are infants under 5 years old.²

Many refugees who have fled to Jordan live in refugee camps established by the Jordanian government and the UN agencies. Za'atari is the largest of these camps. It was established in July 2012 and quickly grew to become Jordan's fourth largest settlement by May 2013. The camp had 110,000 residents by June 2013.

However, the majority of refugees in Jordan live in informal settlements dispersed across the country. These include tents and unfinished buildings. Progress has been made in providing children with education in the formal refugee camps. However, it is a challenge to get children into school when they are dispersed across the country in small settlements and public services are already stretched. As a result, 56% of the refugee children in Jordan still receive no formal education.³



Seen and Heard – Zainah

'We have tried to adapt with what we have here in our hands but it's too hard - next door they don't even have a door.'

Photo: Luca Sola/Oxfam

² Unicef bi-weekly [Humanitarian Situation Report](#) 15-28 November, 2013

³ See UNCHR – 'The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis' (2013) <http://unhcrmedia.org/demos/childrensreport/index.html>

There are no formal refugee camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Refugees live in over 1,200 informal settlements housed in buildings such as disused shopping centres and partly-built multi-storey car parks. As in Jordan, providing security, amenities and services to people living in such dispersed and unsatisfactory accommodation is challenging.

There are 800,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon of whom 270,000 are school-aged children. This massive influx of refugees has placed serious strains on the social structure and service provision of tiny Lebanon, which has a total population of only four million. Eighty per cent of the Syrian refugee children in Lebanon do not attend school. Furthermore, school drop-out rates for refugee children are over 20%. The Lebanese government and UN agencies are working together to triple the number of school places for Syrian children in Lebanon. Even if they are successful 200,000 Syrian children may still remain out of school in 2014.⁴

Both UNICEF and Justine Greening, the UK Secretary of State for International Development, have used the phrase 'lost generation' to describe the risks facing Syria's refugee children and the challenges of meeting their needs. By making sure these children are both seen and heard we can help to make sure that there will be 'no lost generation'.



Seen and Heard – Mohammed

'In the winter it's going to be very cold and it will snow. Water will flood the houses and the valley here will also flood.'

Photo: Sam Tarling/Oxfam

⁴ See UNCHR – 'The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis' (2013) <http://unhcrmedia.org/demos/childrensreport/index.html>

Syria Seen and Heard

The Seen and Heard project aims to move beyond the statistics and look at the human stories of children affected by the conflict. Virtually everyone in the UK is aware of events in Syria and the resulting humanitarian crises. However, fewer people may be aware of the scale of the conflict's impact upon children. The 'lost generation' phrase highlights the longer term effects of the conflict on young people, not only today but also in the future, when well-educated and skilled young people will be required to rebuild Syria.

The Seen and Heard project asks young people in the UK to ensure that the voices and experiences of Syrian children are both seen and heard by decision-makers. The project asks young people and their MPs to be 'multipliers' – devising and applying campaign strategies to ensure that their campaigning has the maximum possible impact.

The key challenges we're setting young people are to:

1. Raise awareness in their school and community of the impact of the Syrian conflict on children.
2. Collect as many postcard messages of support and solidarity for Syrian refugee children as they can and meet with, or send these to, their MP. A target of 500 – 1,000 messages in a secondary school should be achievable. The resource contains a workshop plan developing the skills of an effective multiplier.
3. Ask their MP to be a 'multiplier' too by demonstrating support for Syrian refugee children in Parliament, the media and her/his constituency.

The 3rd anniversary of the beginning of the Syria conflict

So far the UK has pledged more than £500 million in humanitarian aid and is pushing for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. However, MPs are in a strong position to be multipliers too. They can raise issues and keep them in the public eye by using both the formal and informal processes of Parliament. They also have a high media profile and can use this to promote issues they support. Finally, they can use social media outlets such as their websites and twitter feeds to share issues with constituents and a wider audience.

Oxfam is asking young people to ask their MPs to join them and make Syrian children 'seen and heard' on the third anniversary of the beginning of the Syrian conflict on 15 March 2014. The conflict will remain one of the world's most challenging humanitarian crises throughout 2014 and beyond. The third anniversary is a key moment for UK decision-makers and the public to demonstrate their solidarity and support for those affected by the conflict and to ensure that Syria does not suffer a 'lost generation'.



Seen and Heard – Muhamad

‘The last time I bought clothes was in Syria, which was over a year ago.’

Rasmiyeh – Muhamad’s mother

Photo: Sam Tarling/Oxfam

What Oxfam is asking schools to do

Oxfam is asking groups of young people to organise a postcard drive for Syria. This could be led by an Oxfam Youth Ambassadors Group or a group completing their Citizenship GCSE activity. The deadline is 11 April 2014.

The young people’s target is to project-manage the collection of as many postcard messages as possible for their MP. We believe a well-organised secondary school group could set itself the target of collecting 500 – 1,000 messages. Achieving this will involve:

- Ordering postcards for your school from your Oxfam contact or emailing education@oxfam.org.uk
- Ensuring that the school community is aware of the impact of the conflict on Syrian children and the purpose of the postcard messages. This can be done through peer teaching in assemblies, citizenship and PSHE lessons, registrations and at other suitable opportunities. The resource includes a PowerPoint presentation for young people to adapt and use.

- Promoting the activity through the school media, newsletter, website etc.
- Deciding the most effective times and places to collect postcard messages; and organising a rota. For example, young people could organise a stall outside the school restaurant at lunchtimes. The resource includes a workshop to develop planning skills to help organise this activity.
- Planning how to engage the wider school community. For example, collecting postcard messages from parents and teachers.
- Meeting MPs or sending postcards to MPs with a covering letter to coincide with the third anniversary of the conflict beginning on 15 March 2014. If this is not possible groups should aim to meet their MP before the end of the spring term on 11 April 2014.
- Letting Oxfam know how many postcards have been sent to MPs, and the actions your MP took to amplify the campaign.

Curriculum making and contacting MPs

These resources provide additional support for teachers wishing to explore this topic.

The Oxfam resource '**Syria: A Children's Crisis?**' can be downloaded at

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/syria>

It includes classroom resources, citizenship activities and ideas for school fundraising and provides an excellent background to this activity.

They Work For You provides contact details and other information about your MP at <http://www.theyworkforyou.com>. For example, it is possible to track an MP's actions in Parliament and therefore identify their degree of interest in this issue.

Virtually all MPs have a local constituency office and requests for a constituency meeting are usually best sent to these offices. Searching the MP's name on the internet will usually link to the MP's personal website containing contact details. If this fails, write to Name of MP, House of Commons London SW1A 0AA.

MPs are busy and receive many requests, letters and emails every day. Therefore you may not hear back from your MP quickly. In these circumstances it is acceptable to follow up with a polite reminder email or phone call after a few days. Bear in mind that Parliament doesn't meet on Fridays and MPs should be available to meet in their constituencies on this day every week.

Parliament's Education Service has extensive resources on the role of Parliament and MPs. Their resources can be downloaded at <http://www.parliament.uk/education/>. A particularly

relevant resource for Syria Seen and Heard is 'The Role of an MP' downloadable at <http://www.parliament.uk/education/teaching-resources-lesson-plans/role-of-an-mp-video/>

Get Global contains practical activities for young people to plan their own campaigning activities. It can be downloaded at <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/get-global>. A good starting point for this activity is Section 1: Get Global Steps p. 41-49.

The Syria conflict is fast moving and statistics are out of date as soon as they are published. The main **sources of up to date information** about the humanitarian emergency are:

- UN OCHA's **Syrian Humanitarian Bulletin**
- UNICEF's bi-weekly **Humanitarian Situation Report**
- UNHCR **Syria response portal** at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>
- The **Syria Needs Analysis Project** (ACAPS) Regional Analysis Syria overview
- News organizations such as the BBC and Al Jazeera.

These materials are updated regularly and the latest editions can be easily located using an internet search engine.

Your resources

Please share any new resources you develop by contacting your Oxfam contact or emailing education@oxfam.org.uk