



Media Release

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SYRIA: Fears for more than 11,000 children in Idlib as flooding hits camps

At least 11,000 children who have been forced to flee their homes because of war are facing a desperate plight this winter after torrential rains hit Syria's Idlib province, says Save the Children.*

Heavy rains have led to flash flooding in camps for displaced people. Aid workers on the ground say conditions are miserable and dangerous for the thousands of children living in flimsy tents and half-built buildings with no windows or doors.

Reports of illness are increasing and in the worst-affected areas families are cut off from the outside world, unable to leave camps to access health facilities. Schools have also been closed in some areas. In previous years, young children have frozen to death in the camps – this winter, with 1.5 million people having been displaced in just the last year and shelter, blankets and heating fuel in short supply, the risks are greater.

An increase in violence between armed groups over the last few weeks has delayed emergency relief efforts in some areas, including distributions of tents and blankets to families left without shelter in freezing temperatures.

Conflict throughout Syria has already forced high numbers of people to flee into and within Idlib, in the north-west of the country. Almost half the population of 3 million has been displaced at least once and the province is home to one of the densest concentrations of internally displaced people in the world, with [317](#) displacement camps and shelters.

Ten year-old Maher (not his real name), who fled fighting further south to a camp in Idlib last year, said: *"We sleep on the floor, it's so cold at night. When the rain came we moved our tents onto higher land and we started a fire but everything got flooded."*

Save the Children's Syria Response Director, Sonia Khush, said: *"The conditions in the camps and settlements where displaced children are living are miserable, with families suffering through freezing temperatures with only the most basic protection from the elements. Malnourished and young children are particularly vulnerable to disease and illness in this weather."*

"At Save the Children-supported health facilities in the area we often see illnesses that flourish in unclean, crowded living conditions such as ear, eye and respiratory infections. Cases of anaemia are also common, due to children and pregnant women not having access to nutritious food."

A recent increase in violence in Idlib is concerning and has had an immediate impact on the most vulnerable. A demilitarised zone set up by the governments of Turkey and Russia along the frontline in Idlib last year has forestalled a major military offensive, and it is vital that this deal is fully

implemented. Any escalation in the conflict will lead to thousands more families being forced to flee – at least 700,000 are expected to be displaced in even a limited offensive.

Sonia Khush continued: *“We urgently need to scale up life-saving support for children and families facing a harsh winter in Idlib and elsewhere in Syria. Children are terrified at the prospect of more violence and displacement. As well as facilitating humanitarian access, all parties to the conflict must work together to reach a negotiated solution to the crisis that spares more than a million children in Idlib from further suffering.”*

In neighbouring Lebanon, Syrian refugees have been left stranded in freezing temperatures as the first heavy snowstorm of the year takes hold, with around 50,000 people living in informal settlements that could be affected by flooding. At least 66 informal settlements have been completely flooded as of Wednesday 9th January.

Save the Children’s teams are on the ground in Lebanon assisting families to resist the atrocious conditions. With support from partners, we are providing emergency relief to reinforce the shelters and remove floodwater.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Save the Children have spokespeople available. To arrange an interview, please contact Davina Hagan on 07732 601762 or davina.hagan@savethechildren.org

B-roll, interviews and photographs from flooded camps in Idlib are available [here](#)

- **Tents and food supplies washed away in heavy rains, leaving thousands to face winter without shelter.**
- **Flooding traps families in camps and forces schools to close.**
- **Renewed clashes and increased violence in Idlib are impeding the humanitarian relief efforts.**

* As of 02/01/19, 4,589 families across 108 displacement camps has been affected by the current floods. The average family size in Syria is 5 people (2 adults and 3 children), therefore at least 11,000 children living in camps could be directly impacted by floods.

- In the coming days Save the Children intends to distribute more than 1,000 blankets, sleeping mats and plastic sheeting as well as 300 hygiene kits which include soap, toothpaste, toothbrush and sanitary towels. Just \$1.75 could buy three pairs of thick socks for a child in Syria. \$38.46 could buy a diesel stove to heat up a room.
- An estimated 2.9 million people live in Idlib and the surrounding areas. At least 1.4 million of those are Internally Displaced Persons, who have already been forced to flee their homes at least once. Some children in Idlib have moved seven times or more seeking sanctuary from the conflict, and children are estimated to make up over half of the displaced. For more information, please see [Idlib Situation Report Number 1 September 18, 2018](#).
- Save the Children has produced a briefing, [“Idlib: Children’s Lives on the Line”](#) which sets out the humanitarian crisis facing civilians in NW Syria.
- A recent assessment found that out of 26 sub-districts in Idlib, 22 were found to have people living at a ‘crisis’ stage of food insecurity, with 3 sub-districts at an ‘emergency’ level. Two of these sub-districts – Sanjar and Dana – are home to almost half a million people. Any significant escalation in the conflict is likely to drive thousands more people into these areas along Idlib’s border, increasing food insecurity and stretching the humanitarian response beyond its limits.

- The Syria Crisis is now in its eighth year, and the humanitarian situation is worse than ever in many areas. There are now more than 13.1 million people who are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and more than half the country's population has been forced from their homes. Save the Children supports a wide range of programmes in Idlib, including schools, medical facilities, child protection and emergency relief.

About Save the Children

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In New Zealand and around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

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