



ISLAMIC RELIEF IN
SYRIA

**A LIFELINE FOR MILLIONS
FOR OVER A DECADE**

This publication is dedicated to the memory of Nebras Elhelw, an inspiring Islamic Relief volunteer who risked his life every day to assist vulnerable people in Syria.

Nebras was killed by an air strike in 2015. He was 27 years old. He is remembered by his colleagues as an energetic and selfless humanitarian.

His work lives on through Islamic Relief, and we will keep it going for as long as the crisis continues – with due respect and high regard for Nebras, who paid the ultimate price for helping those in need.



Nebras (left) carries essential items for those in need in Syria in 2015.

Cover Image: Solar panels installed by Islamic Relief enable Mustafa to grow food for his family.

ISLAMIC RELIEF IN SYRIA

Islamic Relief is a faith-inspired humanitarian and development agency working to save and transform the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable people. Established in the UK in 1984, we work in over 40 countries, assisting people according to need, and do not discriminate in any way.

When the crisis in Syria broke out in 2011, we began providing humanitarian aid to affected people in neighbouring countries. The following year, we started delivering projects inside Syria where we have remained on the ground as the years passed and the crisis deepened.

One of the largest charities still operating in Syria, Islamic Relief is also active in several neighbouring countries, where many Syrian refugees rely on our assistance. Every year we support millions of people affected by the crisis.


We have provided life-saving aid, including food and water supplies, medical treatment and shelter to families. We have also supported communities and individuals to rebuild their lives through programmes focused on livelihoods, food security and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Education, child welfare, orphan support and empowering women have also been integral parts of our work in Syria.



Um Anwar, a widow living in a camp, cares for her child, who has disabilities. Islamic Relief has provided the family with necessities including a tent, winter supplies and hygiene packs.

WHERE WE WORK

With a team of hundreds, Islamic Relief is one of the largest humanitarian organisations operating in northern Syria. We serve vulnerable people who are in great need, including those who have been forced from their homes. We have provided food for over 562,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) annually and have delivered vital healthcare support to almost 1.3 million people each year.



Aleppo
Idlib

For over a decade the crisis in Syria has taken a terrible toll on the population. More than six million people have been forced to flee the country, while millions more have become internally displaced – often several times. Every aspect of Syria’s infrastructure has been impacted, with shortages of food, fuel and medicines now an everyday reality for many.

Unemployment is widespread and children born since 2011 have been denied a safe and happy childhood. The Covid-19 pandemic has made the situation even worse, heaping pressure on a healthcare system already on the brink of collapse and prompting concerns about the safety of those living in overcrowded camps.

The people of Syria have lost their homes, livelihoods and in many cases their loved ones, with many at home and abroad struggling with poverty and fears of an uncertain future. But they have not lost hope.

Islamic Relief has been providing food, water and emergency shelter to Syrians since the crisis began. We are in awe of the strength and resilience of the Syrian people in the face of so many difficulties.

We stand with them in their calls for peace and continue to offer our support as they begin to rebuild their lives and communities.

In the north of Syria, and among refugee communities in neighbouring countries, Islamic Relief is starting people on the road to becoming self-reliant once more through livelihood projects that help parents feed their children and improve their quality of life.

Our health interventions, including supporting the only free heart surgery centre in northern Syria, improve access to care and save lives during the pandemic and beyond. In education, our work is helping to give hope and a sense of stability to children who have known nothing but hardship.

The challenges that Syria and its people face remain substantial and we recognise that delivering aid on its own is not enough. Islamic Relief continues to urge the international community to find a solution to the crisis, but we are committed to supporting those in need for as long as they need us.

I would like to thank our dedicated staff and volunteers in Syria and the neighbouring countries for their commitment to serving the most vulnerable, sometimes at great risk to themselves. A big thank you is also due to our partners and supporters whose generous donations make it possible to continue our life-saving work in Syria.



Dr Ahmed Nasr
Deputy Director,
Global Programme Operations

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN SYRIA



Over **14 million** people need humanitarian assistance

Almost **90%** of the population live below the poverty line



6.7 million people are internally displaced within Syria – 1.9 million of whom live in camps and informal settlements

50% of healthcare workers are thought to have fled the country



12.4 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from

2.45 million children were out of school in 2020



“OUR LIVES HAVE CHANGED A LOT”



Mustafa is using the money he used to spend on water to buy food for his children.

The crisis has forced Mustafa, 56, to flee several times in search of safety. Heavy bombardment drove him from his home in Aleppo to a village in northwestern Syria before he was forced to flee again to another village.

“I have eight children. We live in poverty because of the lack of job opportunities,” Mustafa says.

“Previously, we used to buy water through tankers, but now Islamic Relief has installed solar panels for the water station in the village.”

The station now distributes water through a water network to the village for free.

“In the past, we did not have a reliable source of water. We had to look for water tankers and pay money, but now water reaches homes without the effort or trouble we suffered in the past.

“We used to collect water from underground tanks. It was exposed to insects and diseases, but now we no longer need to store water. We are drinking clean water, taking showers, and watering the plants. I am very happy now.

“We are saving the money we used to spend on water to buy food for our young children. Our lives have changed a lot, water is life.”

OVER A DECADE OF LIFESAVING SUPPORT

2012

Following the outbreak of the crisis, Islamic Relief builds camps for newly displaced people in the north of Syria through our emergency response projects.



2013

Islamic Relief provides clean water for displaced people by digging several wells in northern Syria and pumping water to camps and villages.



2014

During the holy month of Ramadan, Islamic Relief distributes food parcels to people in camps, helping them to break their fast.



2015

Islamic Relief distributes food parcels to assist crisis-hit families in the city of Aleppo during a period of particularly intense conflict.



2016

As the crisis reaches its fifth year, Islamic Relief works to help empower struggling families to improve their income through livelihoods projects.



2017

Islamic Relief puts smiles on the faces of children living in camps in Syria by supporting them with food, clothes and learning materials.



2018

Throughout the crisis, Islamic Relief continues to provide free flour and bread to displaced people and poor families in camps on the Turkish-Syrian border.



2019

Each year, Islamic Relief distributes qurbani meat packages to displaced people living in camps in the north of Syria, helping them to celebrate Eid.



2020

As Covid-19 engulfs the globe, Islamic Relief works to limit the spread of the virus in Syria's camps and to provide health facilities with essential protective equipment.



2021

The Islamic Relief Centre for Cardiac Surgery performs its first heart surgery. The facility is a lifeline to patients in northern Syria.



ISLAMIC RELIEF'S PROGRAMMES

RELIABLE LIVELIHOODS TO RESTORE HOPE AND FIGHT HUNGER



Islamic Relief supports Syrian refugees to grow their own food.

The people of Syria are paying a heavy price for over a decade of devastating crisis. More than half of the population has been uprooted from their homes, often more than once. Many people are now living in dire conditions, while the millions who fled the country face poverty and precarious futures abroad.

The Syrian economy has contracted sharply, and repeated economic shocks have triggered price hikes, fuel shortages and the depreciation of the Syrian pound.

Spiralling food costs have pushed even more people into food insecurity, with millions now unsure where their next meal will come from.

Islamic Relief provides freshly baked bread and other food, reaching more than 575,000 people in 2020. That same year, nearly 92,000 people

benefited from our Ramadan food parcels, while almost 130,000 received qurbani meat from Islamic Relief during Eid al-Adha.

We also run livelihoods projects that help families in crisis to improve their living conditions and build more hopeful futures. In Syria and neighbouring countries, we help individuals and families to earn a sustainable income and become self-reliant once more.

In Turkey, Islamic Relief supports Syrian refugees to grow their own food through agricultural livelihoods programmes. Hundreds of people have embarked on these life-changing skills development programmes, which teach beekeeping and agricultural skills.

“WE FEEL HOPEFUL AND ENERGISED”



Abu Ziyad, from Aleppo, was forced to flee his home with his seven children and two grandchildren.

“There is no safety,” Abu Ziyad says, recalling that he used to cultivate his land with a wide range of crops. Then the crisis began, damaging his precious farmland and making it unsafe for people to visit their fields. Abu Ziyad says some of his friends were killed while tending to their harvests.

“I do not know the fate of my home or land now,” he says.

Abu Ziyad recently rented new land, and Islamic Relief has provided him with seeds and fertiliser.

“We were living in a state of stagnation and lethargy until this project came, and then we felt hopeful and energised,” he says.

“I spray fertilisers, clean the land of weeds and spray pesticides, and we hope to God that the rains will not be late, and that the season is abundant. I thank Islamic Relief for such projects as they represent a glimmer of hope for us to continue life.

“We used to depend on aid and food baskets, but now we have self-reliance, inactivity has

changed to activity, and we grow and work on the land as before,” he says, adding that the project has physical, mental and economic benefits.

Being outside has also allowed Abu Ziyad to continue to work despite the upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Due to the spread of the coronavirus, many job opportunities have stopped. However this agricultural project prevented mixing with people and polluted air and saved us from certain death due to coronavirus,” he says.

Abu Ziyad hopes to see his children married, and to one day build his own home like the one he lived in before the crisis.

“We will install solar panels that give us electricity. We can operate a small television so that the young children can watch useful programmes and entertainment.

“This project gives us the hope to build a house and live a healthy life away from the camps,” he says.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS AND LEARNERS



Children learn at a school supported by Islamic Relief in Idlib.

Millions of Syrian children are out of school, and still more are at risk of dropping out. School buildings have been damaged and destroyed, leaving parents fearful of sending their children to school.

Displacement and the Covid-19 pandemic have further disrupted children's access to education. Many schools have been unable to implement measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and most students lack the equipment needed for remote learning.

Educational support for more than 9.2 million people

Islamic Relief is committed to supporting schools in Syria by providing training for teachers along with monthly stipends to allow the teachers and administrative staff to continue working. We also contribute essential materials to schools including desks, laptops and printers.

We help children focus on their studies by providing them with stationery and school bags. Islamic Relief is also looking out for the health of Syria's young people, by making counselling services available through schools, and ensuring children receive nutritious school meals.

"I WISH FOR ALL THE CHILDREN TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES AND SCHOOLS"

Sali, 10, was born at the beginning of the crisis in Syria. She was forced to flee her village and leave her school, but has since returned to both.

"We have gone through many economic, psychological and other crises. I lost my friends because of the war, they all fled. I'm so sad about that.

"I thank God that I am now in my village despite the great destruction that has befallen it. I was very pleased to return to the village school, although it was bombed and a large part of it was destroyed.

"I hope to God that this crisis ends, so that the children of Syria can return to their homes. My dream is to become a teacher in order to teach them, take care of them, and make up for what they lost in knowledge.

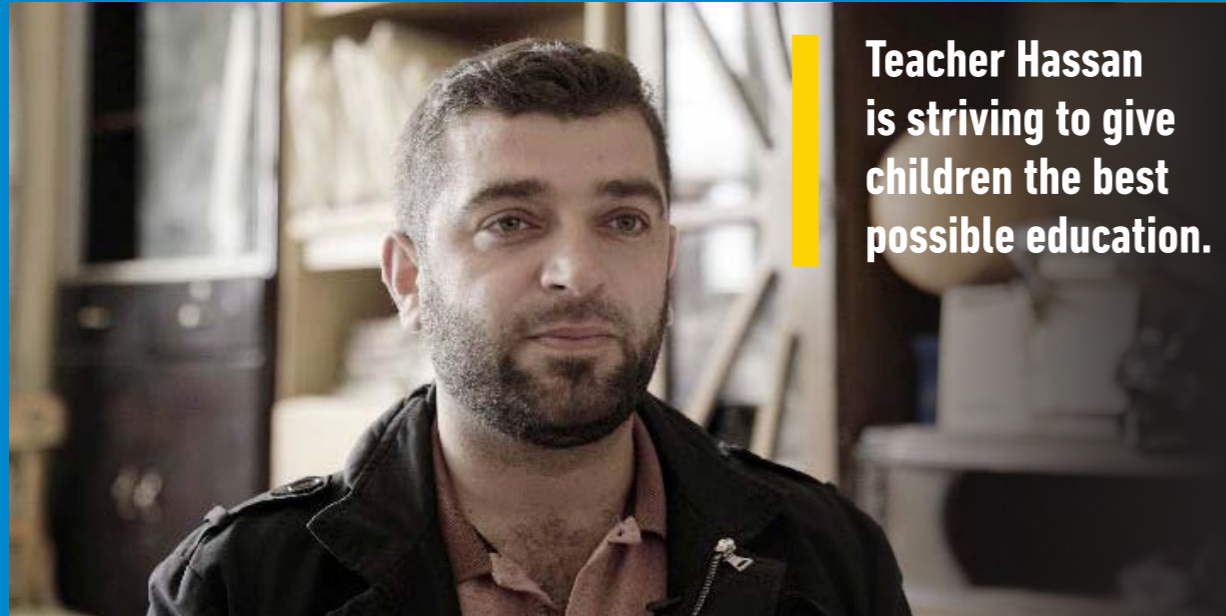
"I wish for all the children to return to their villages and schools. When I see the camps, I grieve a lot and feel the tragedy of how the children in them suffer from rain, cold and storms. I am very sad for them.

"I am sending a message to all the children who have lost their homes and schools: Do not lose hope because I am sure that one day everything will return to the way it was."

Sali wants to be a teacher so she can help children make up for the knowledge they lost during the years of crisis.



“EDUCATION IS A HOPE FOR THE NEW GENERATION”



Teacher Hassan is striving to give children the best possible education.

Hassan is an Arabic language teacher whose village was bombed. Despite the difficulties, he is striving to make sure children receive an education.

“When I returned home, the shock was great. I found my house was a remnant where the beautiful memories disappeared under the rubble and debris.

“I found the school where I had been working as a teacher in ruins. I entered the school and the scenes of destruction were indescribable.

“This was a huge shock. I lost my home, the school I work at, and the good memories. These repeated shocks gave me a great incentive to stay in the country.

“I love my country and its people very much. There are many children who are missing out on education in Syria due to the crisis, and we are doing our best to mitigate the negative effects on students by providing everything we can.

“Before the crisis, there was a strong relationship between students and teachers, as we used to hold honouring ceremonies for outstanding students. But after the intensification of the crisis, we began living in a state of constant fear that we would be forced to evacuate students during school hours.

“Teachers are volunteers, working without pay, and the lack of support poses difficulties for us and for the parents of the students. Many parents are displaced people who cannot send their children to school because of poverty and their inability to secure school supplies.

“The teacher lives in a difficult financial situation and needs a salary to meet the needs and requirements of their family as well as to perform their role as a teacher well.

“The schools that operate now face great challenges due to the lack of classrooms. The classrooms are full of students since other schools have been destroyed. We are converting administrative rooms into classrooms.

“The destroyed schools need repairing so that students can return to their classrooms and the educational process can run smoothly.

“Educational staff are highly qualified and committed to students despite the difficulties. This is what encouraged parents to send their children to school.

“I hope that our town will return to what it was before the crisis, and that the destroyed schools will be repaired and filled with their students and teachers again. Education is a hope for the new generation.”

LIFE-SAVING HEALTHCARE INTERVENTIONS



Staff work on patients at a heart surgery centre funded by Islamic Relief in northern Syria.

After years of crisis and the arrival of Covid-19, Syria's healthcare sector is on the brink of collapse. The few remaining health facilities lack the medicine, equipment, and resources to provide desperately needed care.

The rising cost of essential commodities, particularly fuel, is making it difficult for hospitals and other healthcare facilities in northern Syria to continue their essential work.

Islamic Relief is providing life-saving healthcare in Syria, running facilities including mobile emergency units and

specialist dialysis centres, as well as providing support during the Covid-19 pandemic.

We established and continue to support the only heart surgery centre in northern Syria – an essential service for patients in the area, many of whom previously had to travel to Turkey to receive treatment. At the centre patients are treated for free.

Healthcare for almost 1.3 million people

ON THE COVID-19 FRONTLINE

Dr Ihsan is worried about how Covid-19 is affecting displaced people.



Dr Ihsan, a cardiologist working at a hospital in northern Syria, is deeply worried about the dangers of Covid-19, especially in camps sheltering displaced families.

"In camps, people are living in very poor conditions and are unable to practise good hygiene. Clean water is not available all the time. People are unable to regularly wash their hands as they do not have water or soap. They cannot afford to buy face masks.

"People cannot socially distance due to the cramped conditions. If someone gets coronavirus, it is impossible for them to quarantine as they are living in a tent with six other people. We pray to Allah to help these people.

"We medical staff are the most exposed to the virus, and even if we are not afraid for ourselves, we worry about our families. I am most worried about my mother who is very elderly and has heart disease. I am also worried about my children, but thankfully the virus has a milder effect on children.

"We don't know what is going to happen. We dream about all displaced people being able to go home, leaving behind their tents and their miserable situation."

"MY HEART IS PUMPING PERFECTLY"



Ahmed's health has improved significantly after he received free treatment at a heart surgery centre funded by Islamic Relief.

Ahmed, 58, suffered from severe heart disease and was facing the prospect of an expensive treatment in Turkey before hearing about Islamic Relief's heart surgery centre.

"A doctor told me that surgery was the only option, and that I needed to travel to Turkey for the operation. I had a lot of anxiety about travelling to Turkey, as no one was allowed to travel with me, and it would cost around \$500. Heart patients suffer from a major crisis if the crossings between Syria and Turkey are closed.

"I heard from someone that Islamic Relief was preparing the first heart surgery centre in northern Syria that treats patients for free, and I felt comfortable just hearing the news.

"When I heard about this centre, I went to them directly and the doctors conducted the necessary tests and analyses and set a date for the operation. They found that three veins were completely closed, and the fourth artery was 34 per cent closed.

"The doctors told me how surprised they were that I was still alive because of my poor condition and the blockage of the main arteries. I could not have had the operation in a private centre because of the high costs, which amount to \$6,000."

"I had the operation with complete success, thanks to God and the efforts of the doctors. All the costs of the surgery were free, I can't even express how happy I am.

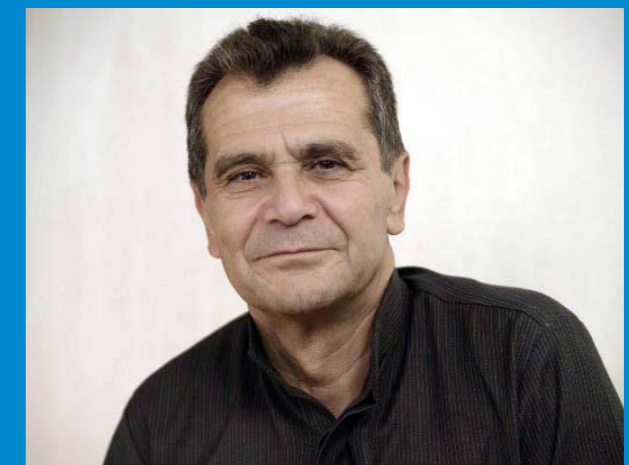
"After the operation and its success, my health improved significantly. Before the operation I would suffer while climbing the stairs of the house. I also felt very tired due to shortness of breath.

"I am very grateful that I was able to have the surgery for free at the Cardiac Surgery Centre with the support of Islamic Relief.

"I thank the medical staff for the excellent service they provided me and thank God I am now in the best condition. I go to the market four to five times every day to buy some things, and I walk without getting tired.

"I feel like I've been born again, and my heart is pumping perfectly.

"This centre is considered one of the most important medical centres in northern Syria. The centre is a lifeline for heart patients who do not have the money or the ability to travel."



PROVIDING COMFORT DURING THE COLD MONTHS



Um Abdo and her children warm themselves by the stove after receiving coal from Islamic Relief.

Winter in Syria is extremely harsh, bringing with it sub-zero temperatures, icy winds and snow. Many displaced families live in make-shift tents lacking proper protection from the elements. To try and keep warm, families sometimes resort to fuelling fires with plastic items or clothing. The fumes that are released are extremely toxic and can kill.

Islamic Relief helps to support Syrian families throughout the winter months by providing food, clothing, blankets, fuel, stoves and heaters. In the winter of 2019-2020 alone, our annual winter campaign helped almost 140,000 people to survive the harsh weather in Syria.

We also provide essential items to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries to help them cope during the cold months. We have distributed vouchers to buy fuel, as well as essentials such as blankets, plastic sheeting and mattresses.

WINTER MADE WARMER FOR FATIMA AND HER FAMILY

Fatima lost everything when her village was bombed. She now lives in a camp for displaced people with her young children. The harsh winter makes the family's situation even more difficult.

Fatima recalls a night when heavy snow and high winds destroyed many of the tents, including her own.

"Our clothes and beds were very wet and my children caught a cold. I will never forget it."

"Stones fall from the mountains during bad weather. It isn't possible to hear the stones coming, so when it happens, it is very frightening. Once, the stones hit our tent, but by the grace of God, we woke up in time to flee to our relatives in another camp. We ran

through heavy rain and complete darkness, as at the time, there was no electricity outside of the camp. I will never forget the horror of that night."

Whether sheltering in this camp, or in another, the family always face hardship.

"All of the camps are equal in their suffering. We hope that at least here, our conditions will be better than anywhere else."

The winter survival items distributed by Islamic Relief are a lifeline to families such as Fatima's. They receive warm clothing for children, plastic sheets for tents, blankets, and mattresses as well as fuel for heating.



Fatima and her children smile after receiving a package of essential items from Islamic Relief.

PARCELS OF JOY FOR RAMADAN AND EID



A man receives a Ramadan food parcel in a Syrian refugee camp in Turkey.

Every year, Islamic Relief provides vulnerable families in Syria, and refugees in neighbouring countries, with food parcels during Ramadan, and qurbani meat for Eid al-Adha. We strive to ensure that some of those living in hardship are able to break their fast during the holy month and celebrate Eid.

Wherever possible, we integrate these seasonal food distributions with our other projects so we can make sure we are reaching those we need us most.

Each year, more than 180,000 people in Syria benefit from our Ramadan and qurbani distributions.



Syrian children living in a camp in Turkey smile as qurbani meat is distributed.

MEAT PARCELS MAKING FAMILIES SMILE AGAIN



Um Yousef gives thanks for qurbani meat distributed by Islamic Relief.

Um Yousef, a widow with two young children, lives in a camp for displaced people. She is one of the recipients of an Islamic Relief qurbani meat package.

“We have no breadwinner, we rely entirely on Allah for help. Almost everyone in this camp is suffering. The living conditions are bad, we can’t afford food, clothes or basic necessities,” Um Yousef says.

She worries that poor nutrition is harming her children’s physical and mental growth. But Um Yousef was able to put aside that fear for a few days during Eid, after receiving three kilos of qurbani meat.

“You can see people smiling again. People are happy they can receive some qurbani meat to share with their families.

“I cooked the meat and fed my children. We had not eaten meat for months. It was very tasty.”

VITAL SUPPORT FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

Hana is supporting her family after receiving training through Islamic Relief.



The crisis has driven more than six million people from Syria in the hope of finding safety and a better life. Most live in neighbouring countries.

Islamic Relief is working to help Syrian refugees rebuild their lives by providing support and training, so they can become self-reliant once more.

After her husband died, Hana, 52, fled Syria with her two daughters. Seeking safety in Turkey, she was the family's sole provider.

"I was handed the role of father and mother at home: raising children and getting them daily sustenance. It was a great responsibility," says Hana.

"My monthly income was about \$150. It was not enough to meet my needs and the needs of my orphaned daughters. I was living in stressful, difficult circumstances. We used to wait monthly for food aid and orphan sponsorship support to be able to meet some of our daily needs".

Then Islamic Relief stepped in, offering Hana a place on a livelihoods project for widowed women.

"Islamic Relief provided us with everything we need. They provided us with complete training on how to deal with plants, plant and care for them, and harvest them. They also provided us with nylon and iron to build greenhouses, and they helped us step by step to advance the project.

"The engineers followed up with us, helping to solve all the problems that we faced. Islamic Relief also leased land for us for three years.

"This project is considered a clean and environmentally friendly project, as it contributes to keeping the environment clean and beautifying the city.

"We planted strawberries on the land and the yield was excellent - even more than we expected. We sell everything, and we get enough money. It has brought great benefit and our lives have been positively affected for the better. The project gives us self-confidence.

"I have become very active, relying on myself. My daughters look at me with pride because we have our own project, and my eldest daughter goes with me to help. After being dependent on others, I became a productive woman and a contributor to society.

"I was not able to buy clothes and meet my children's needs in the past, whether school needs, Eid clothes, or paying the rent, electricity, and water bills. Now, thanks to the project, I have the ability to meet all these needs without the help of anyone."

HELPING CHILDREN THRIVE



More than 1,300 orphans supported

Almost six million children have been born since the crisis in Syria began, according to the United Nations (UN). They have been denied a happy, safe and secure childhood. Instead, fear, displacement and hardship have been their constant companions.

A child dies by violence every 10 hours on average in Syria, and more than 2.5 million children have been uprooted and forced to flee in search of safety, the UN says. Many children have also lost their parents and close relatives during the crisis.

Their access to education has been severely disrupted and international aid groups have warned that the psychological scars of being born into this environment will take years to heal.

Islamic Relief has been working to support children throughout the crisis with projects focused on psycho-social support and education. Our aim is to help ensure that children are protected and able to enjoy their childhood in safety.

In neighbouring Turkey, we are supporting some 1,300 orphaned children who are living as refugees. The regular stipends that their guardians receive ensures they have access to the education, shelter, nutrition and healthcare they need in order to thrive.

IMPACT IN NUMBERS

On average, Islamic Relief has helped more than 2 million people *each year* in Syria.



1.5 million people received food aid



890,000 people given winter survival assistance



12,000 people received livelihoods support



780,000 people served by water projects



More than 3 million people reached by Ramadan and qurbani distributions



430,000 people helped through our Covid-19 response



11 education projects reached 92,000 people



41 health projects reached almost 140,000 people



More than 380 projects delivered from 2012 to 2021



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Islamic Relief's vital work in Syria and with Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries is made possible by the generosity of our supporters, donors and partners around the world. We warmly thank these individuals, businesses and institutional donors for their support for our operations, which are a lifeline for so many vulnerable people.



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