



HANDS UP
FOUNDATION



Programme Report

January 2024

Charity no. 1156491

INTRODUCTION

Syria is spoken of less and less in international news. While we wish this was a reflection of a calmer state of affairs, this is not the case. Recently, Syria has seen an intensification in violence. Shelling and airstrikes in late 2023 injured **349 people**, including **77 children**, and **120,000 people** were displaced ¹.

An increasingly desperate population are living with fewer medical facilities and schools. The UN Security Council's upcoming vote on the renewal of the Bab al-Hawa crossing (through which over **80%** of UN aid enters North-West (NW) Syria) casts a dark shadow ². In July, the crossing was suspended following a Russian veto, leaving the population without UN supplies until a resolution was reached in September ³. There are fears the same veto will be used in upcoming votes, leaving people exposed and vulnerable to brutal winter conditions.

The situation is bleak, but we continue to work with our partners on the ground to ensure Syrian people have the medical services and education they need, every day and when emergencies strike. The following pages highlight the impact your support has. We hope this shows what we can achieve when we act together.

Our programmes are designed to deliver aid quickly and effectively to where it is most needed. Conflict, COVID-19, cholera, and last year's earthquakes have produced a context in which **16.7 million people** in Syria need humanitarian assistance, **7 million** of whom are children ⁴. While the conflict has been waging for over twelve years, and the earthquakes hit nearly a year ago, we cannot stress enough; the emergency is not over. We are committed to helping, however we can for the long term. Thank you for helping us to do this.

This report covers the period from 01 July to 31 December 2023 and reflects on the situation on the ground during this period.



IMPACT IN NUMBERS

In the latter half of 2023, we reached over 12,000 Syrians, (of these, 11,750 are people who were also affected by the February 2023 earthquakes).

We've funded:

- Psychological support and protection services for 3,165 earthquake victims
- Salaries for 25 medical staff
- Salaries for 17 educational staff
- Education for 200 Syrian refugee children
- Healthcare for over 8,536 patients, with over 10,516 free consultations
- Prosthetics for 52 patients, provision, fitting and physio support

ONGOING EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

The earthquakes which hit the Turkish Syrian border last February claimed over **55,000 lives** [5](#). This number is disastrous, but it brings hope to know that together, since the first **7.8 magnitude** earthquake struck on **6 February** last year [5](#), we have helped over **26,100 earthquake victims**.

We have been working with our partners on the ground to supply aid to those who need it most. We supplied essential baby formula for orphans and infants with mothers unable to breastfeed, vital medical equipment and services, as well as cash assistance to families who lost everything. You can find more details regarding our immediate emergency response in our [July 2023 Programme Report](#) [6](#), as well as our ongoing earthquake response on [pages 4 - 6](#).

While the immediate response is over, it will take years to mend the extensive damage, both mental and physical. Communities urgently need ongoing support to help them rebuild and repair the destruction. Our earthquake response programmes continue, and are designed to address these challenges by supporting the most vulnerable groups. These include children, people with disabilities, and women and girls vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV) and child marriage.



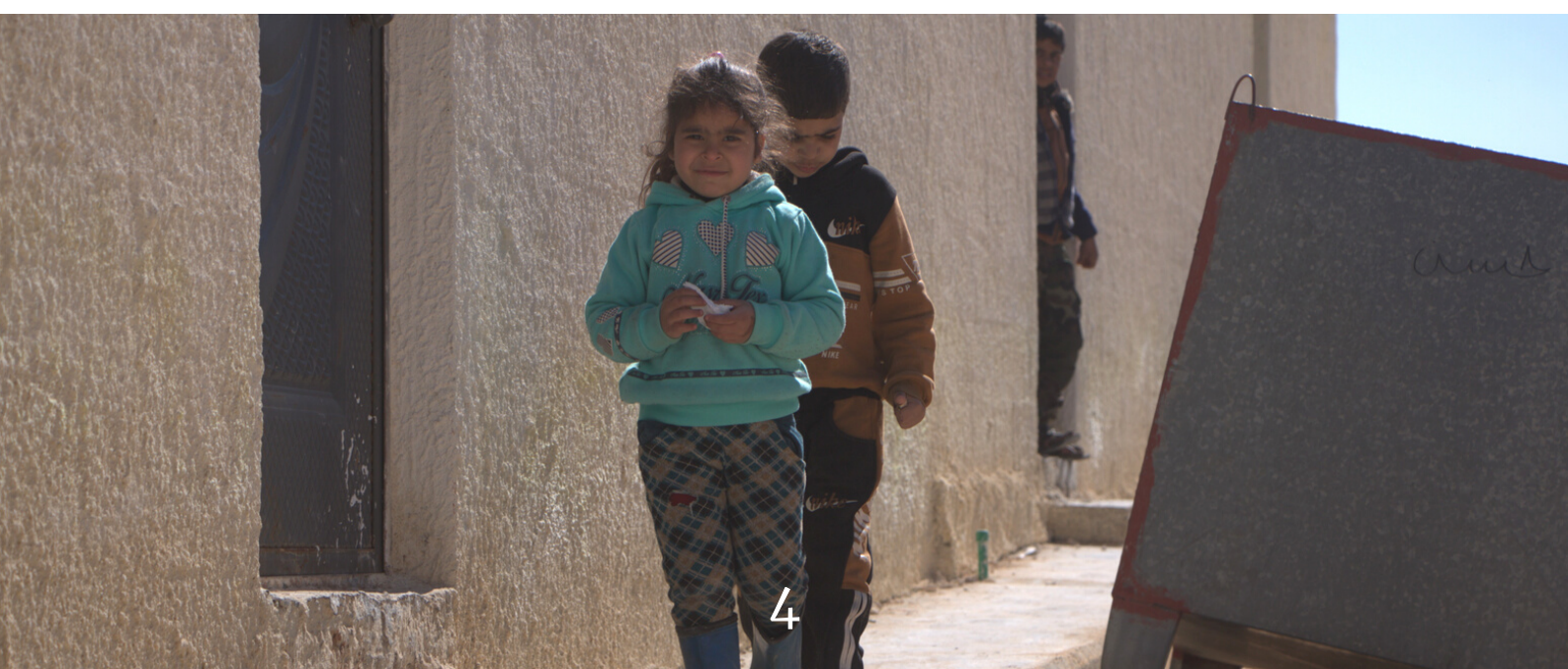
PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

We have been working with our partner, SAMS, to address the psychological trauma experienced by children following the earthquakes. While the physical damage is tangible, the mental effects all too often remain unseen and unaddressed.

Hatay, Turkey was one of the cities worst hit by the earthquakes in February 7. Many of the children the team worked with were still experiencing PTSD and sleep disorders. 905 of these children were given kits specifically designed to support them through their trauma, including play kits, colouring books, puzzles and games. The most vulnerable children, such as orphans and those with disabilities were prioritised. 95% reported high satisfaction, the kits helping to alleviate the stress experienced following the earthquakes and prepare them for the coming school year - a key aspect of resuming normality.

PLAYGROUNDS FOR CHILDREN

Syrian children under 12 year's old have only ever known their country in conflict, and are now struggling with trauma caused by the earthquake. The importance of the ability to play safely - to simply be a child - cannot be underestimated. When asked what they needed the most, children in NW Syria told our partners, Physicians Across Continents (PAC), they wanted somewhere to play. Together, we're making this possible for an initial two communities in NW Syria. Construction has started in the first location of Aleppo and preparations are underway in Idleb. We look forward to reporting on the impact in our next Programme Report.



GBV & PROTECTION PROGRAMME

“Hardest to reach, most at risk.” This is how a recent World Vision report described the women and children in Syrian widow camps ⁸. These camps in NW Syria are characterised by extreme violence – physical, verbal and sexual – and hold tens of thousands of widows and children whose families have been torn apart by the conflict in Syria.

In these camps, even before the earthquakes, 95% of women felt depressed or hopeless ⁸. With no ‘right’ to move freely, they are unable to work to provide an income and often have no choice but to resort to ‘survival sex’ to support themselves and their family. Their daughters are forced into child marriage, and sons recruited by armed groups. Following natural disasters, like the earthquakes, women and girls are disproportionately impacted, facing greater risk of violence ⁹. This project aims to address that risk.

Working with our partner, Maram Foundation, we are providing child protection and GBV services within twelve widow camps in Idlib. So far, the team have reached over 2,260 people, with sessions on topics such as the importance of education, child labour, nutrition and rights, including referring over 96 cases for medical needs, mental health needs and other requirements.



RANA'S STORY

49% of girls (aged over 11) are involved in child labour, and **83% of children** (aged over 11) living in NW Syria's widow camps are in desperate need of safe spaces and protection ⁹. These are the children whose lives we aim to improve through our project with Maram.

Ten year old Rana (*name changed for protection purposes*) has been displaced for the majority of her life because of the conflict in Syria. In this time, she has not been able to attend school as her family cannot afford it. Ashamed of her appearance and tattered clothes, she isolated herself from children her age, fearing bullying and judgement.

The Maram case worker guided Rana towards the case management services, gaining approval from her caregiver and developing an action plan to help. This included parenting skills group sessions for her caregiver, psychological support sessions to improve Rana's self confidence, and family awareness sessions to explain the importance of education.

Following this, Rana was referred to another NGO which provides the stationery she needs for school, as well as directly supporting the cost of her tuition.

Rana is now much happier, and the support she is given by her family has significantly improved. Hers is only one story, of the **2,260 people** reached so far by this project. Thank you for helping to change their stories for the better.





Primary Healthcare

Tel Abyad, North Syria

HEALTHCARE

**Please note, this is also part of our long-term earthquake response.*

The protracted conflict and resulting political and socio-economic crises in Syria have left a severe scarcity of medical staff, facilities and equipment [10](#), alongside an increased number of threats to the population's health. **Half a million children** are chronically malnourished and epidemic-prone diseases, such as acute diarrhoea and leishmaniasis (flesh-eating disease), are one of the greatest causes of illness [10](#), [11](#).

It is in this context that the Primary Health Clinic, run by our long-term partner, Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS), operates. Over the reporting period, all running costs were covered to ensure the clinic can continue to provide a lifeline for a community of **50,000 people** in Tel Abyad, Northern Syria, through free consultations. These include, but are not limited to, reproductive health services, dental services, and services for leishmaniasis and cholera. This programme was contributed to from Earthquake Appeal funds, to allow the team to respond to increased demand on services caused by the displacement of people to the area.

The team of **25** doctors, nurses and medical staff work every day to ensure curable diseases do not claim lives. Vitality, the clinic conducts outreach sessions with both the host and internally displaced communities, growing health awareness and screening for malnutrition. As **12.9 million** are food insecure in Syria [12](#), these services are essential. From July to October 2023 the team reached over **3,000 people** with the community outreach programme alone.



PROGRESS & IMPACT

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE CLINIC

From July to September 2023, the team helped 8,536 patients through 10,516 consultations. These included*:

- 4,351 for women, 41%
- 2,177 for men, 21%
- 1,979 for girls, 19%
- 2,009 for boys, 19%

**Further reporting for this programme is due at the end of January.*

From July to September 2023, paediatric services were the most commonly required at the clinic, representing 29% of all consultations, with internal and OBGYN following in demand, representing 27% and 17%, respectively.

Over the reporting period, Northern regions of Syria experienced a cholera outbreak. Without treatment, the disease can lead to death within hours ¹³. Cholera is generally spread by water infected by the cholera bacteria and is most likely to spread in areas with inadequate sanitation and water treatment ¹³. The team worked to educate people on the dangers of this, and how to best protect themselves and their communities. Their work is life-saving and would not be possible without your support, thank you.



PROGRESS & IMPACT

MOBILE CLINIC

From March to July 2023, the team helped 3,205 patients through 4,813 consultations. These headline statistics were included in our previous July 2023 Programme Report, here we are pleased to report on the full impact.

Consultations included:

- 1,876 for women, 39%
- 806 for men, 17%
- 1,250 for girls, 26%
- 881 for boys, 18%

Women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, are at greatest risk of not being able to access the medical services they need. Immobility, societal norms and poverty, can all act as barriers to seeing a doctor. To ensure people in the rural area of Ali Bajliyah have access to the medical services they need, Hands Up funded a Mobile Clinic, operated by SAMS, to deliver primary and reproductive health services.

This project was not without its challenges. Tribal clashes in the surrounding area caused local prices to surge and impeded access to clean water. The February earthquakes delayed the delivery of the mobile truck itself. Despite this, the mobile clinic's activities were launched in **March 2023**.

Diarrhoea, respiratory infections, leishmaniasis, measles and malnutrition, are among the conditions most commonly treated by the Mobile Clinic's four staff. The clinic maintained a focus on supporting pregnant women and new mothers, offering reproductive health care and family planning services. These services are a vital step towards achieving gender equality and female empowerment.

In spite of challenges, the Mobile Clinic delivered medical services to **3,205 patients** in a remote area, where no other healthcare services are available.



Education Centre
Bekaa Valley, Lebanon

EDUCATION

“School means my future, it means everything to me” says Ahmed, a student at the school for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, funded by Hands Up.

Nearly **one third** of school-aged refugee children in Lebanon have never been to school ¹⁴. The influx of Syrian refugees to the country, coupled with ongoing economic crisis, financial collapse, political instability and COVID-19, have pushed an already over-stretched education system to the breaking point. There is a shortage of spaces in public schools and many refugees lack the required civil documentation, or can’t afford the transportation required to send their children to school, even if they’re lucky enough to find a space.

In October, our Board Chair, George Butler, was with the team in Lebanon as the Syrian refugee children, aged **7-13 years old**, who otherwise would have no access to education, arrived for the start of the new academic year at the education centre, funded by Hands Up. Run by our partner, SAWA, the centre provides informal education for children who have no means of accessing the formal education system. A sea of smiles, the children come to learn Arabic, English, maths, science, social studies, life skills, and are given psychosocial support sessions to help them deal with the traumatic experiences many have already faced in their lives. In short, the centre provides an essential support system which equips them for a brighter future.

With Lebanese public schools showing no signs of providing the spaces needed to accommodate Syrian refugee children ¹⁴, SAWA's centre is critical to ensure that these children do not fall further behind and continue to have access to learning. Yet, in the current economic crisis, raising the funds required for the centre is a struggle. We are actively fundraising to keep this centre open and continue its life-changing work. If you'd like to help, please contact us: contact@handsupfoundation.org.



PROGRESS & IMPACT

EDUCATION

200 Syrian refugee children currently attend our education centre in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. Here, their 13 teachers, and 4 support staff, equip them with the education they need to “achieve our dreams”, as student Kawthar says.

The context of extreme economic crisis in Lebanon and an increasingly unreceptive fundraising environment, meant we had to make difficult decisions throughout the reporting period. In short, the cost of a child’s education has increased while funds available have decreased. While 266 children completed the academic year 2022-2023, it was not possible to hold sessions over their summer holiday. Budget constraints also meant that we have had to make the very difficult decision of reducing the intake for the academic year starting in October, to 200 children. Budgets have been altered to allow the year to run as efficiently and effectively as possible, while sustaining the high quality of education. While we are extremely disappointed not to be able to reach as many students, where there is the opportunity to help even one, we remain committed.

Many of the children have experienced traumatic events, including forced displacement, extreme poverty, the loss of loved ones, threats of deportation to Syria, and now, fears of the escalation of violence from tensions with Israel. Helping students to deal with this is a core component of the school’s services and is delivered through dedicated psycho-social support sessions.

Reporting for the academic year so far is due at the end of January, and will be included in our next Programme Report.



MUHAMMAD AND ABDULLAH'S STORY

Muhammed and Abdullah lost their Father **four years** ago. Soon after his death, their Mother was forced to leave Syria and tragically also lost her life, leaving the young boys orphaned.

The boys were taken in by their Uncle and enrolled in SAWA's education centre. Their grief was impossible to ignore and their education suffered as they struggled to interact in lessons, and lacked the confidence and interest to play with the other children.

The education and protection team at SAWA's learning centre have made incredible efforts to make the boys feel more comfortable and relieve some of their grief. Importantly, this included close correspondence with their Uncle and his family to ensure there was as much support as possible.

We are delighted to report that the boys are much happier, now interacting with an interest in lessons, and making solid friendships. Their academic results also reflect these positive changes, as the boys have become more carefree, looking forward to the future and understanding the vital role education will play in this.

Despite dramatic improvements, efforts to help the boys are not complete. Their loss is something they are learning to live with - it will not disappear - but with your support, we are helping them towards a better tomorrow.





Prosthetics Programme

Syrian Turkish Border

PROSTHETICS

**Please note, this is also part of our long-term earthquake response.*

Over 12 years of conflict in Syria have exposed **millions** to violence and injury, leaving over **one quarter** of the population (aged over two) with a disability ¹⁵. This includes **86,000 people** whose injuries lead to amputations ¹⁵. The earthquakes have only increased this number ¹⁶. For these people, daily tasks, like walking and writing, are challenging. Many also suffer from psychological illnesses, such as depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ¹⁷. Alongside this, many face barriers to employment and education, leading to marginalisation in society ¹⁵.

Working with our partner on the ground, Physicians Across Continents (PAC), and UK-based Koalaa, we are providing and fitting Koalaa prosthetics free of charge, along with the psychological and physiotherapy support patients need. Hope Step Centre, where patients receive these services, is the only free humanitarian centre that provides prosthetics services in Azaz District, and patients travel from all over NW Syria to access it.

The initial **100 Koalaa prosthetics** have been delivered, with a follow up system in place to support patients so they can get the most out of their new prosthetic limb. This marks the end of the initial project, and with these results, the start of a review period to refine our prosthetics programme, ensuring it is designed to best respond to the challenges on the ground. It is evident there is a lot to do, and we are always looking to improve, refine, and ultimately, make the greatest difference for the people we serve.



PROGRESS & IMPACT

PROSTHETICS

From June to December 2023, your donations achieved the following:

- 6 staff trained
- 52 patients provided and fitted with upper limb prosthesis
- 102 physiotherapy rehabilitation sessions provided
- 102 psychosocial support sessions provided

Many patients attend the clinic in a state of chronic depression, doubtful that anything can help their situation. This is why receiving physiotherapy and psychosocial support, alongside a new prosthetic, is a key element of our project. Overall, this meant that **over half** of our patients reported satisfaction with their new Koalaa prosthetic, wearing it regularly and finding it comfortable - an issue many face with traditional prosthetics.

Many patients reported increased confidence with their new prosthetic, telling us that they have become more active in their community as a result. Children like Hassan recounted how they are now able to play with their friends without feeling self-conscious or 'less than'. To have had such a profound effect is reassuring, but simultaneously indicates how much this project is needed. There are **86,000 amputees** in Syria ¹⁵ and we are committed to supporting them in the best way. No project in Syria is without its challenges and we are excited to see how we can take our prosthetics project forward to make the most positive impact, for the most people.



THANK YOU

2024 marks ten years since Hands Up was officially registered as a charity. Had you told us then that we would still be going a decade later, we wouldn't have believed you. First, we never anticipated that what started as a series of supper clubs, driven by dedication to our friends in Syria, would have gathered enough momentum to reach over **181,000 people**. We have you to thank for this. Second, and more sobering, we could never have imagined that the Syrian crisis would still be so extensive. The commitment we made 10 years ago still stands; we will do everything in our power to provide medical care and education for Syrian communities, every day, and when emergencies strike. Thank you for standing in solidarity and helping us to continue this vital work.

We always love hearing from you, please get in touch.

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