

SYRIA

DECEMBER 2018 – FEBRUARY 2019



Humanitarian Figures

13 million

People in need of humanitarian aid and assistance across the country, including 5.2 million who are in acute need, according to a February UNOCHA report sourced by [Relief Web](#)

6.2 million

People had been displaced by the end of 2018, many more than once, according to the World Health Organisation's annual report sourced by [Relief Web](#)

1.2 million

People live in UN declared hard-to-reach areas. The [World Health Organisation](#) also reports that two thirds of Syrians are currently living below the poverty line

139

Airstrikes on hospitals were recorded over the course of 2018, according to review by [World Health Organisation](#). 101 people were killed and 189 people were injured. 42 attacks affected access to life-saving health supplies

Highlights

- > Civilians leave Islamic State's final enclave in Syria as the caliphate nears its end
- > The UK Government faces moral dilemma over resettlement of British wives and children of Isis fighters
- > Donald Trump reverses one of the biggest decisions of his presidency, claims US troops will remain in Syria

Key Developments

- > In December, the UN released the [2019 – 2020 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan](#) to deal with the continued impact of the Syria crisis. The \$5.5 billion plan has been drawn up to support the national efforts of Syria's neighbouring countries which have offered asylum and protection to refugee populations since the start of the crisis. [5.6 million Syrians are registered across the region](#) with records showing that one million infants have been born into displacement since 2011.
- > In northwestern Syria, [an estimated 2.7 million men](#), women and children are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance. This figure includes [1.7 million](#) internally displaced persons (IDPs) many of whom were displaced several times and have been living in camps for many years. 40 per cent of Syria's children are currently denied an education and nearly 2 million residents depend on water trucking for most of their clean water.
- > The battle to defeat ISIS is [reportedly in its final stages as US-backed troops](#) escort civilians from the Jihadist group's final enclave in the village of Baghouz near the Iraqi border. In February, more than 40 trucks transported thousands of men, women and children in a large-scale evacuation effort. The Syrian Democratic Forces [estimates there are 2000 others](#) who remain inside the pocket of territory, and plan to expel ISIS fighters once they are evacuated.

Context

Now in its eighth year, the Syrian conflict has caused devastation to thousands of families, and reduced much of the country to rubble. Roughly [half of the country's 22 million population has been displaced](#), both internally and seeking refuge in neighbouring countries as well as Europe. Millions are in need of humanitarian assistance. In 2011 peaceful protests in Daraa, inspired by the Arab Springs in neighbouring countries, campaigned for a pro-democratic government, however, these were [soon quashed by President Assad](#) and a full-blown civil war ensued.

The conflict is further complicated by the lack of a clear-cut opposition versus Government scenario. Instead, there is the Sunni majority, the President's Shia Alawaite sect, Syria's Kurds and extremist groups, namely the so-called Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda. Government backing is mainly from Russia and Iran, while the US, Turkey and Saudi Arabia back the rebels. The international community [has condemned the use of chemical weapons](#), which have often been used alongside missile attacks and air strikes that have led to significant civilian casualties. Continued military operations and rebel insurgencies have resulted in the gradual migration of people to the northwestern province of Idlib as the government regains control of Syria's major cities. The impending humanitarian crisis remains as Idlib becomes the target for potential military operations.

Political map of Syria

Starting in Daraa in the south, the conflict has gradually moved northwards through Damascus and its suburbs, to Hamah (Hamah) via Homs and eventually incorporating Aleppo and Raqqa.

HART partner St. Ephrem Patriarchal Development Committee (EPDC) is currently running a project in Maaloula; a town about 50km northeast of Damascus.



Latest Developments in Syria

World Health Organisation (WHO) Releases Syria Report

Millions of civilians continued to come under attack in 2018 according to the annual [World Health Organisation Report](#), which was released on the 15th February. Many of those bearing the brunt of the conflict were [1.5 million newly-displaced](#) people who fled violent clashes in areas including the south and north-west, eastern Ghouta, northern rural Homs and eastern Deirez-Zior. WHO reports there were outbreaks of measles, leishmaniosis (a parasitic disease) and acute diarrhoea fuelled by displacement, poor living conditions and hostilities. Deliberate targeting of water networks led to shortages of safe drinking water with [35% of the population](#) relying on unsafe and alternative water sources.

Thousands of Children from Around the World Remain Trapped in Syria

A report by Save the Children claims more than [2,500 children from 30 countries](#) are trapped in just three refugee camps alone. The children are being held in segregated areas, away from the camps' populations with foreign women who are believed to be former Islamic State members and sympathisers. This issue made national headlines in February as the US and the UK have removed the citizenship of two mothers who wished to return from Syria to their home countries. Some children, just days old, are caught in an international battle. [Usama Hasan, head of Islamic Studies at Quilliam International says](#): *"There is a moral responsibility for every country to take these children back."*

US Troops to Remain in Syria

In December, President Trump claimed ISIS had been defeated and announced his plan to withdraw [2,000 American troops from Syria](#), where soldiers have been training the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This decision to end deployment was met with months of backlash from European allies, lawmakers in the Democratic and Republic parties, and US military leadership, which pointed out major flaws in his withdrawal plan. [The Pentagon and the US intelligence community say ISIS still has thousands of fighters](#) left in Syria, and that if US troops were to withdraw at this point, ISIS could recoup its major losses and regain territories.

White Helmets Volunteers Resettled in the UK

In February, the Home Office confirmed that [100 volunteers and family members from the Syria White Helmets](#) civil defence group have been resettled in the UK. The Home Secretary Sajid Javid said: *"White Helmets volunteers saved the lives of thousands of innocent civilians during the Syrian conflict and suffered terrible losses in the process. I am therefore proud that the UK is resettling these brave individuals and their families and giving them the opportunity to rebuild their lives here."* The White Helmets have [saved more than 115,000 lives in Syria's war zones](#), according to the UK government.

Timeline of Events

December

The UN releases its 2019-2020 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan

January

Trump Announces Withdrawal of US Troops

February

Civilians evacuated from ISIS' final, dying enclave as caliphate nears end

The World Health Organisation releases Annual Report

Save the Children Reports Thousands of Children from Around the World Are Trapped in Syria

US Troops to Stay in Syria as Trump Reverses Withdrawal Plan

Home Office confirms 100 White Helmet Volunteers Have Been Resettled in the UK