



Syria's

DEVASTATING
DECADE



Cover page: While Ibrahim's father does all he can to comfort and take care of him, the boy still grieves for the mother he lost to the conflict 10 years ago.

Inside cover: Since fleeing the Abu Dahour area, Khaled has been living with his family in Leban camp, where they struggle with dire living conditions and deep poverty.

A Decade of Dire Suffering

The crisis in Syria began in March 2011, unleashing a previously unimaginable escalation of hardship which to date has continued unabated. The continued crisis has inflicted terrible suffering upon millions of people. Many face dire conditions inside Syria, while others have fled the country in search of safety only to face dire poverty and a life in limbo. For them, the tenth anniversary perhaps represents little more than a symbolic moment amid the milestones of misery.

Yet the fact that the Syrian crisis is now entering its second decade should at the very least provide the international community with cause to reflect, to question whether everything possible has been done to end the suffering. It should herald a redoubling of efforts to end a crisis that has led to the one of the largest movements of refugees in recent history and, at the start of 2021, left 9.8 million people in Syria facing food shortages.

In north-west Syria, where 60 per cent of those who remain displaced are estimated to be children, there is also the growing threat of the spread of Covid-19. While people elsewhere look ahead to the prospect of vaccines and the hope of respite from the disease, many Syrians face a bleaker reality. The country's devastated healthcare system has little prospect of being able to prevent the march of coronavirus, control its spread or even treat those that are infected. Intensive care beds, ventilators and oxygen are in perilously short supply, while families who do not know where their children's next meal is coming from have little choice but to find a way to make ends meet, regardless of the threat of infection from exposure to others.

In 2020, as coronavirus forced many organisations to halt or scale back their operations, Islamic Relief remained by the side of vulnerable people in Syria. We provided food to over 770,000 internally displaced people, vital healthcare support to almost 1.2 million people and personal protective equipment (PPE), sterilisation solutions and other medical equipment to 84 health facilities in north-west Syria. In a stark reminder of how urgently we need to see an end to this crisis, more than 15 Syrian hospitals supported by Islamic Relief came under attack during 2020.

As if the approximately 2.7 million displaced people in north-west Syria have not faced enough hardship, in January 2021 torrential rains struck the area. This threatened a new wave of disease and, for many, literally washed away their last remaining possessions and food stocks.

Amid the suffering, on a daily basis our teams bear witness to extraordinary acts of courage and heroism. Doctors risking their own health to treat those affected by Covid-19 without the necessary protective equipment or medicine. People that have been forced to repeatedly flee from place to place, often barefoot and with no possessions other than what that they can wrap around themselves while transporting their children to safety, yet who refuse to give up hope. Such resilience in the face of unrelenting crisis is an inspiration to every humanitarian worker inside Syria and beyond.

Since the onset of the crisis, Islamic Relief have invested over £350 million in delivering wide-ranging humanitarian programming in Syria and neighbouring countries. We remain one of the few international non-governmental organisations operating within the country's north-west, in which our incredible staff take on enormous challenges, often at great personal sacrifice, to assist vulnerable people. They make possible our vital work, which in 2020 alone saw £30 million invested in emergency projects. Thanks to their dedication, and the generosity of our donors, we are doing all we can to ease the suffering but the needs are growing and the shortfall in humanitarian funding for the crisis is huge.

As we mark the grim milestone of 10 dire years of crisis, the people of Syria need our help now, as much as they ever did. Over and over again, they tell us they long for peace. Islamic Relief calls again on the international community to increase support for desperately needed humanitarian efforts and apply pressure on all parties to immediately de-escalate the violence. And crucially, we call for action to secure a lasting solution to this dreadful crisis. Peacebuilding must focus on building viable livelihoods for the poorest families as well as supporting communities to become more resilient. Only then can the people of Syria live, work, and raise children in safety and security.



Waseem Ahmad,
Director of International Programmes,
Islamic Relief Worldwide



Key facts from 2020



11.1 Million
people in Syria need
humanitarian assistance



6.2 Million
Internally displaced
people in Syria



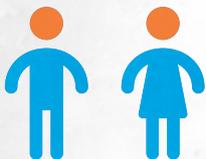
9.8 Million
people are food insecure
inside Syria



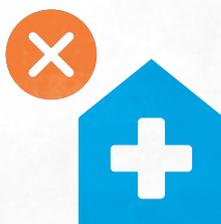
4.7 Million
people are in acute
need



5.5 Million
Syrian refugees in the
region



4.8 Million
children are in need



25 confirmed
attacks on healthcare
facilities



15 aid workers
killed in Syria

After 10 terrible years, Action is needed now!

For a decade, the crisis in Syria has taken a terrible toll on the civilian population that has not abated over the years. A military escalation at the start of 2020 triggered a massive exodus with hundreds of thousands of people – many of whom had been displaced many times before – fleeing north. In northern Syria, where Islamic Relief operates, the humanitarian situation deteriorated further as food, fuel and medicine ran perilously short.

Then came the coronavirus pandemic. Covid-19 threatens to overwhelm the healthcare system, which was already on the brink, and is inflicting yet more damage on Syria's collapsing economy, pushing vulnerable people into ever deepening poverty. In Syria more than 11.1 million people need humanitarian aid, and millions more face precarious futures as refugees in nearby countries. In northern Syria, most of the population is in dire need.

- At least 11.1 million people in Syria need humanitarian assistance
- 4.7 million people are in acute need
- 4.8 million children are in need
- 6.2 million people are subject to protracted displacement in Syria
- 254,000 Palestinian refugees uprooted from homes in Syria
- 5.6 million Syrian refugees in the region
- 13 people killed and scores injured in 25 confirmed attacks on healthcare facilities in 2020
- 15 aid workers killed in Syria in 2020.

As one of the largest aid organisations still operating in northern Syria, the generosity of our supporters means Islamic Relief remains as a lifeline for many. In 2020 we delivered emergency programming worth £30 million, supporting:

- 2.5 million* people with health and nutrition, shelter and survival items, water and sanitation, food security and livelihoods, and education support
- 84 health facilities – including hospitals, healthcare centres, mobile surgical units, dialysis centres, Thalassaemia centres and blood banks – with drugs, disposables, equipment and stipends for healthcare staff
- Hospitals with equipment vital to treat people with Covid-19 and reduce the spread of coronavirus
- More than 140,000 people with tents and survival items such as blankets, mattresses and plastic sheets
- Some 770,000 people with food parcels, fresh bread and support to earn a living
- Over 310,000 people with water and sanitation services including provision of clean drinking water and better sanitation facilities.

Islamic Relief remains committed to continuing and expanding our life-saving work, and providing sustained humanitarian assistance whenever we can. But there is only so much that aid organisations like ours can do without a permanent and enduring end to the crisis. This is why aid efforts must be matched with a political will to find a lasting solution to the crisis.

- We call on the international community and donor governments to apply pressure on all parties to immediately de-escalate the situation. All actors must not target civilians.
- We call on all actors – including the donor community, governments and all armed groups – to ensure that those forced to flee their homes have adequate access to protection, food, shelter, healthcare, education and other essential aid.
- We call on the UN Security Council to renew UNSC resolution 2533 – which allows for cross-border aid from one border crossing – and protect its aid provisions which are due to expire on 10 July 2021.
- We call on the international community and donors to increase desperately needed funding. Only 55 per cent of the United Nations' humanitarian response plan for 2020 was funded, leaving a staggering \$ 1.7 billion shortfall.
- We call on all parties and the international community to ensure that the 2020 truce agreement in Idlib is maintained and the ceasefire conditions are monitored to avoid further displacement of people from Idlib.
- We call on all parties to respect International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and international human rights law and ensure the protection of civilians.
- We call on governments to ensure that the transfer of funds for vital humanitarian work inside Syria is not held up, and that measures intended to protect against terrorism do not disrupt or discourage legitimate humanitarian activities.

*Islamic Relief aims to maximise the positive impact we make by integrating projects wherever possible. In this figure, which includes people reached in all our sectors of intervention, some people may have been counted in more than one sector. For example, those who have received food, shelter, or WASH support may have also accessed health facilities supported by Islamic Relief.

“Vast challenges beset aid workers as we help people in dire need”

Hamza*, an Islamic Relief aid worker in Idlib, northern Syria, reveals the risks, hardships and unexpected joys of serving vulnerable people in the crisis-torn country.

“Even after ten years a large segment of Syria’s population – orphans, widows, children and older people – **continue to live the daily pain of crisis**. These people have nothing to do with the crisis but bombs are dropped on their homes, forcing them to flee. **Where they once lived with dignity and security**, they now live in grinding poverty in tents that do not protect them from the elements. As a Syrian, I consider these people to be my family. It is my duty to stand by them and help them in any way possible.

“I have also been displaced on multiple occasions. I left my home in 2012 due to the intense aerial bombing in the Damascus countryside, and from there went to Idlib and several other places. The bombing followed us from one village to another. In the end, we could not stand the situation any longer. Six years ago I took my wife and children to a neighbouring country, while I stayed here to support Islamic Relief’s life-saving work.

“I am far away from my wife and five children, but I am happy with my choices – **serving the vulnerable people of Syria helps me to deal with the pain of seldom seeing my family**. When I sit and eat with orphaned children, for example, I feel indescribable happiness: happiness that does not come with wealth nor anything other than serving people. It is a great motivation.

*Name changed to protect his identity.



“The challenges of working in Syria are vast. Every day we grapple with a lack of electricity and water, rare access to the internet, and the constant threat of bombing. If I need petrol for my car, I may spend hours searching for fuel and still not find it. Finding a house to rent is very difficult, due to the extent of displacement.

“The city depends on mobile water tanks, so it is often difficult to find water for a shower or basic wash. Communications are often cut off, meaning that I cannot always contact my wife and children, which makes me very tense. At times I have been unable to contact my family for several days and they worry I have been killed.

“When the sun rises in the morning, I face these and many other problems, but they must be overcome to serve the people. **Islamic Relief goes into dangerous areas to reach people in need.** In a country ravaged by crisis, we must carefully plan each and every movement in advance so we can travel safely from one place to another.

“We work and live each day to help vulnerable people in any way we can. This is a source of great pride for the whole team.”

“Coronavirus is now spreading here in northern Syria. The Syrian people have seen the deadly impact of this disease in other countries. But faced with the daily fight for survival in this crisis, many do not pay attention, even as coronavirus cases increase day by day. Organisations like Islamic Relief are educating people about the dangers, but many people live in camps, squeezed into tents with others, making it very difficult for them to practice social distancing.

“Despite doing everything I can to adhere to the rules of safety and social distancing, **I was unfortunately struck by coronavirus. My body became weak and I could no longer move.** The hospitals and quarantine centres were full of infected people and so I stayed at home alone. My neighbours cared for me, while taking the necessary precautions, and thanks to God, I recovered and returned to my work.

“On the tenth anniversary of the Syrian crisis, **I wish that every displaced person can return to their home, every mother who has been separated from her children can come back to them,** for people to reunite, and for peace to prevail once again in this country. As for me, I wish to live with my wife and children again, to stay close to them, to take care of them and to live a peaceful, happy life with them.”



An Islamic Relief volunteer delivers food parcels to displaced families in a camp in northern Syrian.

2012-2020

SYRIA OPERATION FUNDING

£350

MILLION

ACROSS THE REGION



WHAT ARE WE DELIVERING?



Healthcare



Shelter



Food Security



Education



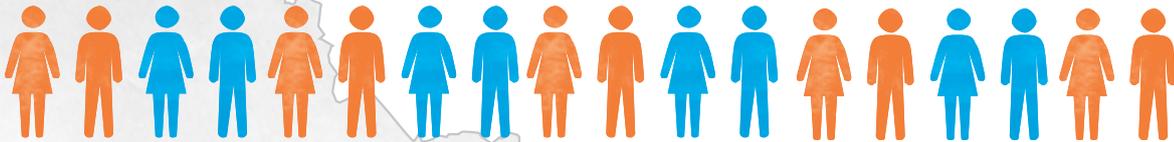
Livelihoods



Water, sanitation
and hygiene



Orphan
sponsorship



2,500,000*

PEOPLE HELPED IN 2020

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in 2021 even more people in Syria – an estimated 13 million – could require humanitarian assistance. The country is locked in a protracted crisis that has led to a wide range of humanitarian needs arising from hostilities. These include, among others, extensive explosive hazard contamination, psychological trauma, and gender-based violence.

Further displacement events and an increase in hostilities would further deepen needs in the country. Another grave threat is the spread of coronavirus. Even as Covid-19 vaccines become available, they are unlikely to reach large numbers of people living in the north-west of the country in the coming months. The deadly virus is expected to spread further, most acutely affecting people living in overcrowded areas where basic service provision is weak.

As a result, there is a high need for multi-sectoral efforts to respond to the increased protection risks. It is vital to maintain critical basic services, including through repairing and reconstructing key civilian infrastructure. It is also vital to focus on mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on people's health and its consequences on already fragile livelihoods, education and protection needs.

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FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS



Muhammad and his family are living in a camp for displaced people. They receive a food basket containing basic but essential items like lentil, rice, bulgur, and sugar.



The decade-long crisis has had a devastating socioeconomic impact on millions of Syrians, reducing purchasing power and depriving them of basic services and the ability to meet their basic needs. It has also severely limited employment opportunities, further increasing poverty and vulnerability. The average food basket in Syria cost 247 per cent more in October 2020 than at the same time in 2019. Spiralling food costs have pushed even more people into food insecurity: by July 2020 some 9.3 million people did not know where their next meal was coming from.¹

Deep inside Syria, Islamic Relief has been providing food and freshly baked bread, reaching over 720,000 people in 2020. Nearly 108,000 people benefitted from food parcels distributed at Ramadan, while qurbani meat reached almost 61,000 individuals at Eid al-Adha.

Also this year, Syrian refugees in neighbouring Turkey received support through our agriculture-based livelihood programme. Aiming to build the resilience of vulnerable families, we are enabling 450 households to improve their livelihoods and access to food. Altogether, over 2,100 people have so far embarked on life-changing agriculture and beekeeping enterprises and vocational skills development.

“We rise by helping others”

“I could not find a job here because this city is small and has a large number of Syrians. I cannot leave my children at home and be away from them for a long time,” says Hoda, one of at least 5.6 million people to have fled Syria since the crisis began.

She and her young children endured squalid conditions in one of Syria’s many camps for displaced people, before crossing the Turkish border in a bid for safety. Living in Hatay, they faced gruelling poverty as Hoda, a widow, struggled to find work until Islamic Relief intervened.

“Now I work in the greenhouse that Islamic Relief provided for us,” says the mother-of-four, describing the support she received to help her earn a reliable living. She was given crops to maintain and sell for a profit. “I originally come from an agricultural area, yet they provided further training for me also. I help my friends in the project and teach them what I know.”

Hoda’s family are one of 450 in the area to receive help through agriculture, beekeeping and vocational development support projects provided by Islamic Relief. Many of these families have been given plots of land so they can plant tomatoes, strawberries and sustain beehives, offering a reliable source of food and income.



Hoda in the greenhouse in Hatay, Turkey, in which she now earns a living, enabling her to support her four children.

¹https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO2021_EN.pdf

SHELTER AND SURVIVAL ITEMS

Islamic Relief has been meeting the basic needs of vulnerable internally displaced people. In 2020 our particular focus was on filling gaps in provision in camps and other sites hosting internally displaced people, and helping them to get through the harsh winter months.

During the 2019/2020 winter, our winter survival programme reached over 120,000 displaced people in Syria. They received vouchers with which to buy essential basics, and survival items such as blankets, plastic sheets and mattresses, which helped to improve their wellbeing and preserved their lives and dignity.



The heavy rain and floods that struck northern Syrian this winter destroyed the tent in which Ammar and his family were sheltering. They received plastic sheets and tents to help them protect themselves from the harsh winter elements.

“Before the crisis we earned a good living. Now we depend on charity.”

“We were sleeping when the bombing started, but woke up terrified. Children and women were screaming,” says Umm Ismail, 62, recalling the night bombs fell on her village, in Jabal Al-Akrad, in Salma.

“We fled barefooted, as far away from the danger as possible. We wandered through the darkness of the night. The only light showing us the way came from the rockets falling from the sky. We were very afraid.”

She and her family reached a neighbouring village, where they stayed until that also came under bombardment, forcing them to flee again.

They have now been living in dire conditions in a camp near the Syrian-Turkish border for five years.

“I live in this tent with my children and grandchildren. My husband passed away several years ago,” says Umm Ismail, explaining that there is no work in the area and the family struggle to make ends meet.

“My son suffered from a nervous breakdown at the beginning of the crisis. He was shell-shocked when our village was bombed, causing his condition to deteriorate still further.”

Only one of Umm Ismail’s children is able to obtain occasional work, but their wages are not enough to cover even the family’s basic needs.

“I feel sad about the situation I face now. It is a heartache that never leaves me. We used to earn a good livelihood and eat delicious food. Now we can barely afford the price of bread. We rely on charity,” says the grandmother, who also worries that her family are ill equipped to protect themselves from Covid-19.

“We are very afraid of coronavirus. We try to reduce contact with others to protect ourselves, but we do not always have money to buy masks or cleaning supplies. Thank God, Islamic Relief provides us with food and hygiene baskets. The basket keeps us going for about a month. It contains rice, sugar, lentils, and bulgur, as well as legumes, cleaning and sterilisation materials.”



Originally from Maarat al-Nu'man in Syria, Umm Abdo and her two children now face dire conditions in Khirbet camp. Islamic Relief provides them with coal, which they burn to keep warm.

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

Islamic Relief has been helping to increase access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) supplies and services through interventions that in 2020 included sanitation solutions, as well as sewage and waste management systems. We are also helping to improve the hygiene practices of vulnerable people in northern Syria.

A vital project has been to establish water-pumping networks powered by solar-energy, as well as sewage networks and garbage containers in the northern Aleppo region. Islamic Relief has provided additional support for people with disabilities, prioritising them for support and ensuring that they can access it. We also worked with local councils to build their capacity to manage their water systems and repair existing water sources. In addition we have maintained WASH facilities in 12 schools and shown local people how good hygiene practices can help keep disease at bay.

Altogether, our WASH interventions reached over 312,000 people this year.

Umm Maher's temperature is checked during one of her frequent visits to the Islamic Relief medical centre in Ram Hamdan village. It is one of a range of preventative measures taken to our health centre protect patients and staff during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Doctors have faced everything in crisis-torn Syria but Covid-19 still fills us with fear”

There is now another frontline in Syria: the fight against coronavirus. Dr Ahmed Ghandour, a surgeon in Al-Rahma Hospital in Darkoush, Idlib, reflects on the latest danger facing already vulnerable people.

“If richer nations, with all their resources and capabilities, have been unable to control the Covid-19 pandemic, what hope is there for a country ravaged by crisis, whose economy is in tatters and whose people are exhausted, physically and psychologically? We have faced barrel bombs, destruction and displacement. We have faced everything and now face the new danger of Covid-19. The disease strikes fear in me and every other doctor.

“We know that we may put our families in danger, but when I go home, how can I tell my son, ‘Stay away from me, because I may be infected with coronavirus?’ [At the hospital] we follow strict hygiene and sanitation methods but the hospital cannot afford personal protective items (PPE). Organisations such as Islamic Relief have provided us with masks and gloves in addition to sterilisers, soap and other basic items. This has had a major impact in limiting the spread of the virus among medical staff.

“However, the challenge of protecting patients and their families remains. People struggle to feed their families – how can they afford PPE? Most people here live in camps and face a terrible dilemma. Should they try to quarantine in the small tent they share with their family, or in the houses that are home to multiple families, or should they go out and to try to earn a living to provide for their family, putting themselves at greater risk in the process?”





Kaljibrin city in Syria lacked the electricity required to pump water from deep wells to the water networks. Then Islamic Relief established a solar energy system, supplying environmentally-friendly, reliable energy powering the water station, so it can provide water to 18,000 local people.

“We face shortages of everything. People cannot buy fairly basic medicine, such as something to reduce a fever, and we have difficulty securing the right medicines for patients. We urgently need more intensive care beds and we desperately need ventilators and oxygen.”

“Each life lost is another tragedy. As the crisis drags on, Syrians face even greater danger with this disease.”

“I thank everyone who have stood by the side of the Syrian people, especially Islamic Relief, who have provided intensive care devices and helped to reduce the cost of treatment for many patients. They have also provided kidney dialysis devices and helped to establish a centre to treat those affected by Covid-19. But it is more than just the vital equipment and free medicines. We feel that they feel our pain and stand with us through these darkest of times.”



Since the crisis began in Syria, cardiologist Dr Ghandour has worked in several hospitals in Idlib governorate, Syria.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND HEALTH

Rama, from Saraqib, lives with her family in Laban camp. The winter clothes and survival items her family receives from Islamic Relief put a smile on her face.

Humanitarian needs are increasing and the conditions facing internally displaced people continue to worsen. As food insecurity rises, it is vital to expand livelihood and agricultural support and assist those for whom hunger has become a constant companion. Coordinated nutrition, food security, health and WASH interventions are urgently required to tackle chronic malnutrition among under-fives and nutritional deficiencies in pregnant and breastfeeding women.

As well as providing vital food aid, Islamic Relief is also delivering life-saving healthcare interventions.

We are running healthcare facilities such as mobile emergency units, health centres and specialist dialysis centres, and have also established and supported the only heart surgery centre. **In addition, in 2020 we provided medical items that are vital in many healthcare settings, including:**

- Physiotherapy and recovery items such as splints, mobility assistance devices, crutches, and braces
- Medical disposables and specialist instruments and equipment.

Islamic Relief is also at the forefront of the response to the Covid-19 outbreak. We have delivered awareness-raising activities in primary healthcare centres. As part of efforts to reduce the spread of coronavirus, we gave 84 health facilities personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks, gloves, and medical gowns, as well as no-contact thermometers, hand disinfectant gels, disinfectant sprays and other sterilisation solutions. As a result, thousands of people were able to access free healthcare services.

Dr Farouk carries out open-heart surgery at the Heart Surgery Center supported by Islamic Relief near Idlib, Syria.

“This centre is a source of pride for us and the whole world”

“The post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), continued trauma and continuous displacement that I have faced are the reason my health has suffered so badly,” says Ahmed, from Kafr Nabl, who had a heart condition that was being worsened by stress.

Then the 75-year-old became the first patient to receive specialist surgery at the only heart surgery centre in northern Syria, which was established and supported by Islamic Relief as part of efforts to support Syria’s collapsing healthcare sector. It has made a huge difference to his health.

“Thank God, I am in the best health now. The feeling is indescribable. I thank Islamic Relief.”

The rising cost of essential commodities, particularly fuel, is making it increasingly difficult for hospitals and healthcare facilities in north-west Syria to function. In addition, many face major security concerns and a severe lack of medical supplies, leaving people without the life-saving and life-changing healthcare they need.

Islamic Relief’s healthcare interventions include a project to provide healthcare to over 1.2 million people in the region. Alongside running healthcare facilities, we provide wages to healthcare staff, essential training and support with running costs. We also offer transport for those who would not otherwise be able to travel to healthcare facilities, and have set up referral systems between healthcare facilities.



ORPHAN SPONSORSHIP

Children who have lost their father, or both parents, are often plunged into poverty and vulnerability. In 2020, Islamic Relief's orphan sponsorship programme provided a safety net for around 800 Syrian refugee orphans in Turkey. Their families received a regular stipend, enabling them to meet their basic needs and send the children to school.

Sponsored orphans also benefited from a new, complementary project aimed at offering the children valuable educational, entertainment and spiritual activities. An incredible 70 Islamic Relief volunteers helped deliver the project until it had to be halted to reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus.

Where possible, Islamic Relief ensures sponsored orphans also benefit from other suitable interventions, such as food distributions. There are scores of Syrian children on the waiting list for support from the programme.

In 2021 Islamic Relief plans to expand the scope of our orphans sponsorship programme to include orphans inside Syria.



"Islamic Relief's support means a huge amount to my family," says Amina, who fled Syria with her children after the death of her husband. They now live in Turkey, in a former shop with no sanitation facilities or heating.

With young children to take care of alone, Amina is seldom able to go out to work. The little she earns as a cleaner is not enough to pay the rent, and she and her children were no strangers to going to sleep hungry. Their only regular source of income was from the Red Crescent, which provided a monthly stipend of 120 Turkish liras (about £12.33) per person.

Her 14-year-old son, Zakaria, was on the verge of dropping out of school in order to find a job. But then Islamic Relief intervened, enrolling her youngest son, seven-year-old Mutaz, on our orphan sponsorship scheme. The financial support helps meet the family's basic needs, and ensures that Mutaz, a bright boy who loves school, can continue his education. The family have also received food parcels, hygiene kits, essential items like blankets and clothing, as well as counselling to help them come to terms with all they have endured.

"I feel better when I think that there is always someone who will help me and my children."



Since fleeing Tal Jabeen village, in the Hama countryside, Ruba has been living with her family in one of the Qah camps near the Turkish border.



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