

Fresh threats loom over 720,000 Rohingya children 'cast adrift, trapped in limbo' – UNICEF

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya children are threatened in Bangladesh by approaching severe weather or by ongoing violence in Myanmar in their homeland, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) warned on Friday, calling urgently for scaled-up assistance ahead of the region's storm season and to address the root causes of the crisis.

"Some 720,000 Rohingya children are [essentially trapped](#) – either hemmed in by violence and forced displacement inside Myanmar or stranded in overcrowded camps in Bangladesh because they can't return home," Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Director of Emergency Programmes said Friday.

UNICEF's [report](#), *LIVES IN LIMBO: No End in Sight to the threats facing Rohingya children*, marks six months since the start of the latest exodus of Rohingya refugees into southern Bangladesh.

The agency says that floods caused by the forthcoming cyclone season are likely to engulf the fragile and insanitary camps where most of the refugees are living, raising the likelihood of waterborne disease outbreaks and forcing clinics, learning centres and other facilities for children to close.

The report also estimates that some 185,000 Rohingya children remain in Myanmar's Rakhine state, fearful of the violence and horror that drove so many of their relatives and neighbours to flee.

In Bangladesh, there are estimated to be around 534,000 Rohingya refugee children from last year's and previous influxes.

"This is a crisis without a quick fix that could take years to resolve unless there is a concerted effort to address its root causes," stressed Mr. Fontaine.

The report states that the Rohingya are a people cast adrift – chased from their homes and communities, trapped in limbo and deprived of their basic rights – while facing fresh threats to their well-being.

UNICEF calls on the Myanmar Government to end the violence, and to address what it terms a crisis of human rights in Rakhine state, referring to restrictions on Rohingya people's freedom of movement, extremely limited access to health care, education and livelihoods, and consequent dependence on humanitarian support.

According to the report, recognizing the Rohingya people's basic rights would create conditions necessary for the refugees to return to their former homes in Myanmar.

“People won’t go home unless they are guaranteed safety and security, unless they have citizenship, unless they can send their children to school and have a chance of a future,” Mr. Fontaine explained.

Since August 2017, a lack of access to many parts of the Rakhine state has severely restricted the work of UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies.

Immediate and unimpeded access to all children in the state is imperative – along with longer-term efforts to address intercommunal tension and promote social cohesion, said UNICEF.

Aid efforts led and overseen by the Bangladesh Government have averted disaster as local communities have accommodated 79,000 Rohingyas.

[UN migration agency seeks \\$194 million in funding to help Syrians affected by 7-year conflict](#)

The United Nations migration agency on Friday launched an appeal for \$194 million to help displaced Syrians living in and outside their war-torn country as well as the communities hosting them.

Seven years into the armed conflict in Syria, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Over 13 million people are still in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country, including 6.1 million internally displaced. Nearly 3 million people are living in hard-to-reach or besieged areas.

In addition, over 5.5 million Syrians have taken refuge in the five neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

With its 2018 appeal, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) seeks to assist:

- 1 million people with non-food items and shelter support
- 800,000 people with access to safe water and services
- 500,000 people with health services
- 500,000 people with community-led protection services
- 200,000 people with livelihood opportunities
- 135,000 displaced people to receive adequate services in camps
- 35,000 children to attend school

“These [interventions](#) are vital to ensuring that Syrians get the life-saving assistance and livelihood support that many desperately need,” said IOM

Director General William Lacy Swing, from the Organization's headquarters in Geneva.

Since the crisis began, economic growth within host countries has been severely affected. With high unemployment rates, especially among young people, and limited resource availability, it is challenging for governments and municipalities to provide basic services.

IOM tracked 850,000 internally displaced persons returning to their areas of origin during 2017. During the same period, however, 2.9 million people continued to flee their homes, illustrating the continuing adverse effect of violence and conflict on the Syrian population.

Access to primary health care has been drastically reduced inside Syria, while agricultural production has been cut in half compared to 2011 levels.

In 2017, IOM organized the transportation of over 37,000 Syrian refugees from Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt to 23 countries including Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Norway, the United States and the Netherlands, among others.

[Road to peace in Central African Republic remains 'long and difficult,' says UN envoy](#)

The violence plaguing communities across the Central African Republic (CAR) is a reminder that despite the efforts of all stakeholders, the path to peace, stability and reconciliation in the country remains long and difficult, a senior United Nations official told the Security Council on Thursday.

The "tragedy" of refugees and internally displaced persons unable to return to their homes due to violence and insecurity "darkens an already precarious humanitarian picture where the lives of nearly half of CAR's population would be unimaginable without emergency humanitarian assistance," said Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN mission in the country, known by its French acronym, [MINUSCA](#).

Such "unacceptable" abuses and violations of human rights are mostly committed by armed groups which have not yet shunned criminal activities and refuse to take up the Government's offer for dialogue, he added.

The UN envoy informed the 15-member Council of work undertaken by the Government to restore State presence and strengthen newly established

democratic institutions.

“This positive impetus is also seen in the reinforcement of national judicial structures,” he said, noting the recent establishment of the Bangui and Bouar Courts of Appeal and that preparations for the launching of the work of a special criminal court are “well advanced.”



UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head MINUSCA, addresses the Security Council.

Highlighting the importance campaign against immunity, Mr. Onanga-Anyanga said that the setting up of the formal justice systems together with the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms would a long way in ensuring lasting peace.

Also in his briefing, the head of MINUSCA informed the Security Council on the activities of the mission and its commitment to strong delivery of its mandate while abiding by the highest standards of conduct and discipline.

“Efforts are underway to more effectively protect civilian populations while ensuring the safety and security of our own peacekeepers,” he said, central to his, he underscored is ensuring full implementation of the Secretary-General’s zero tolerance policy to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

[‘You can still save lives’; UN aid](#)

chief urges Security Council action to halt violence in Syria's war-battered east Ghouta

The United Nations humanitarian chief on Thursday called for action by the Security Council to halt the appalling destruction of Syria's eastern Ghouta, where nearly 300 people have reportedly been killed in just the past few days, as "bombs and mortars have rained down on bakeries and medical facilities."

"What we need is a sustained cessation of hostilities and we need it desperately," UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock told the Council via video conference, adding: "Millions of battered and beleaguered children, women and men depend on meaningful action by this Council."

He told the gathering that as UN Member States, they are all aware that their obligations under international humanitarian law are just that; legally binding. "They are not favours to be traded in a game of death and destruction. Humanitarian access is not a 'nice-to-have.' It is a [legal requirement](#)."

Counter-terrorism efforts, Mr. Lowcock continued, cannot supersede the obligation to respect and protect civilians. "They do not justify the killing of civilians and the destruction of entire cities and neighborhoods."

"When an entire generation is robbed of its future, when hospital attacks have become the new normal, when sieges of entire cities and neighbourhoods have become a lasting reality for hundreds of thousands of people, the international community must take urgent and concrete action," he declared.

Reading out to the Council excerpts of thousands of text messages and social media posts received over the past three days by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria in Geneva, from civilians in eastern Ghouta pleading for help, Mr. Lowcock said one aid worker had lamented:

Air raids have targeted residential buildings. Whole families have died under the rubble. Today, as the battles intensify I call on you [...] to act to stop the systematic operations against civilians and open the roads for humanitarian assistance— *ERC Lowcock, reading a message from an aid worker in east Ghouta*

"Most air raids have intentionally targeted civilian residential buildings. Whole families have died under the rubble. Today, as the battles intensify I call on you [...] to act to stop the systematic operations against civilians and open the roads for humanitarian assistance."

Mr. Lowcock recalled that the Council had been briefed “in minute detail – month after month – on the scale of the suffering of the Syrian people,” with endless reports on dead and injured children, women and men.

“Airstrikes, mortars, rockets, barrel bombs, cluster munitions, chemical weapons, thermite bombs, suicide bombs snipers, double-tap attacks on civilians and the essential infrastructure they depend on, including hospitals and school, rape, illegal detention, torture, child recruitment and sieges of entire cities reminiscent of medieval times,” he detailed the situation.

He updated the members that over the past 24 hours, heavy shelling and aerial bombardment on multiple communities in East Ghouta continued, killing at least 50 and wounding some 200 people adding that according to some sources, the death toll since 19 February is close to 300 people.

Mr. Lowcock, noting that half of Syria’s population has either fled the country or faced repeated internal displacement.

“Eastern Ghouta is a living example of an entirely known, predictable, and preventable humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes,” he said, enumerating that nearly 400,000 people have been besieged for more than four years, thousands upon thousands of children face acute malnutrition and 700 people are in need of urgent medical evacuation to hospitals – just miles away from Damascus.

He highlighted that as the “appalling violence” ensues, accessing people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas remain elusive.

“Access is not only limited on aid deliveries, but we are also seeing growing challenges to our ability to independently assess needs on the ground and to monitor aid delivery,” he explained.

“You can still save lives in eastern Ghouta – and elsewhere in Syria. I urge you to do so,” the Emergency Relief Coordinator said.

UN receives 40 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in last quarter of 2017

The United Nations has received 40 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse across its entities and implementing partners for the last three months of 2017, including 15 reported from peacekeeping operations, UN Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric announced on Thursday.

“Not all allegations have been fully verified, and many are in the preliminary assessment phase,” Mr. Dujarric told reporters at the regular briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

The remaining 25 allegations were reported by UN agencies, funds and programmes, and include eight allegations relating to implementing partners.

Of the 40 allegations, 13 are categorized as sexual abuse, 24 as sexual exploitation, and three are of an unknown nature.

The allegations involve 54 victims; 30 are women and 16 are girls under the age of 18, and the ages of 8 others are unknown, with 12 of the 40 allegations occurred in 2017, seven in 2016, three in or before 2015, and the dates unknown for 18 of them.

Two allegations have been substantiated by an investigation; there were not substantiated; 15 are at various stages of investigation; 18 are under preliminary assessment; two are under review with limited information provided to the investigating entity, Mr. Dujarric said.

“With over 95,000 civilians and 90,000 uniformed personnel working for the UN, sexual exploitation and abuse are not reflective of the conduct of the majority of the dedicated women and men who serve the Organization,” he said, emphasizing however that “every allegation involving our personnel undermines our values and principles and the sacrifice of those who serve with pride and professionalism in some of the most dangerous places in the world.”

For this reason, Mr. Dujarric stressed, combating this scourge, and helping and empowering those who have been scarred by these egregious acts, continue to be key priorities for UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in 2018.

Measures taken by the UN include:

- Developing an electronic tool for screening UN staff dismissed as a result of substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, or who resigned or were dismissed during an investigation.
- A mandatory e-learning module for personnel within the UN system, as well as implementing partners and contractors, on prevention and reporting of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- The distribution of the “no excuse cards” in the six official languages and other languages across the UN system on UN personnel’s responsibilities and obligations with respect to conduct, as well as preventing and reporting sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Mandated quarterly reporting from all relevant entities across the UN system.
- The Secretary-General is regularly liaising with Member States to improve their accountability and bring justice to victims.
- Strengthening complaint reception mechanisms on the ground to enable victims to come forward, and conducting outreach activities to inform communities on the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse and the reporting mechanisms using various forms ranging from direct outreach, theatre, radio and TV programming, SMS-based and social media campaigns

as well as specific outreach to local media.

- Improving reporting and data collection methods, including through the development of a system-wide incident reporting form.