

Handicap International report on bombing in Syria

## **Civilians forcibly displaced multiple times face a long and arduous journey**

**Montreal, October 5<sup>th</sup> 2017.** Today Handicap International (HI) published its report, [\*Everywhere the bombing followed us\*](#). According to its findings, the mass use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Syria forces civilians to flee over and over again, and has a devastating and lasting social and economic impact. Handicap International is appealing to the parties to the conflict to end the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The organisation is also calling on the international community to strongly condemn this practice and to take action to bring it to an end.

Based on the testimonies of 205 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the *Everywhere the bombing followed us* report reveals the **multiple forced displacement** caused by bombing. According to the report, nearly half of those interviewed were initially internally displaced in Syria before fleeing to Lebanon. More than half of the interviewees were **forced out again and again** before finding safe refuge in Lebanon: they were displaced **on average three times inside their home city** to escape bombing (some up to ten times), and then, for 133 of the interviewees, **one to three times inside the country's various cities** before they decided to seek refuge in Lebanon.

*"The mass use of explosive weapons in populated areas in the Syrian conflict has reduced an entire population to misery,"* says Jérôme Bobin, Executive Director for Handicap International Canada. *"More than half of Syrians are refugees in neighbouring countries or are internally displaced in the country. Forced displacement is coupled with the destruction of houses, personal goods and livelihoods. Families who flee suffer extreme deprivation. States must recognise the lasting humanitarian disaster caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas."*

Bombing and shelling were cited by interviewees **as the primary cause of their forced displacement within and from their home city** (36% of interviewees) and the third reason for fleeing to Lebanon (16% of interviewees) after armed violence (25% of interviewees) and the rise of crime inside Syria (23% of interviewees). The **mass forced displacement** of the Syrian population is caused by **personal injury** or the **death of a relative** in the bombing, the **destruction of homes** and **public infrastructure**, particularly the deterioration of health services, and the **collapse of livelihoods**, mainly in outlying suburbs.

*"The primary impact of bombing mentioned when describing the causes of forced displacement in Syria is the fear of being killed or injured, and yet indiscriminate bombing has become commonplace in the conflict in Syria,"* explains Jérôme Bobin, Executive Director for Handicap International Canada. *"Syrians do not find a safe haven straightaway. They move over and over again, taking convoluted routes. Forced displacement can last several months, causing even greater distress to the people involved."*

This report also highlights the impoverishment of the Syrian population, who often lose everything: **44 percent of interviewees lost their livelihoods (cattle, businesses, and so on) as a result of the use of explosive weapons.** Displaced people lost some of their goods and livelihoods **over and over again**, each time they were victims of or exposed to fresh violence and were **forced out again.** **Ninety percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon interviewed for this report had lost their homes or livelihoods** due to the use of explosive weapons.

The report reveals the **loss of dignity** felt by interviewees due to the dramatic consequences of mass bombing for Syrians: lost homes and livelihoods, sudden impoverishment, disorientation due to forced displacement, disrupted school education and repeated dependence on charity. After the **physical risks** (50% of interviewees) and the **destruction of homes and public infrastructure** (36%), the **psychological impact** of fear, stress and distress were mentioned by interviewees as the **third collective impact** of the use of explosive weapons in Syria (35%).

*“War does not justify everything. There are international rules that must be enforced, such as the laws that require belligerent parties to protect civilians from the effects of war,”* says Jérôme Bobin, Executive Director for Handicap International Canada. *“Attacks using explosive weapons, particularly with a wide-area impact, in populated areas have indiscriminate effects. Ninety-two percent of casualties of this practice are civilians. All States have a responsibility to ensure international humanitarian law is upheld and enforced.”*

The study also shows that the destruction caused by bombing has a **specific impact** on women, who are **more vulnerable to the social chaos to which bombing gives rise, find themselves without the means to defend their physical integrity, and are more vulnerable to crime.** This report is a follow-up to the *Qasef: Escaping the bombs* report published in October 2016, which identified the mass use of explosive weapons in populated areas as one of the **primary causes of the mass displacement of Syrians.**

The full report available [here](#).

## International campaign against the bombing of civilian areas

Handicap International (HI) launched a civic campaign in early September, **Stop Bombing Civilians**, to collect one million signatures and alert States to the devastating impact on civilians of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The organisation is calling on States to sign a **political declaration** to bring an end to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and to recognise the suffering of civilians. To this end, the organisation has co-founded the **INEW** (International Network on Explosive Weapons) coalition of international and national organisations.

## Methodology

The *Everywhere the bombing followed us* report is based on a telephone survey of 205 Syrian refugees in Lebanon from 20 to 26 July 2017 and in-depth interviews with 14 Syrian women refugees from 4 to 10 August 2017. Interviewees (135 men and 72 women) were aged between 19 and 87.

## Handicap International and the Syrian crisis

More than 600,000 people have benefited from the actions taken by Handicap International (HI) since the launch of the organisation's operations in 2012. The organisation provides physical rehabilitation services and psychological support and distributes emergency aid to meet the basic needs of casualties, people with

disabilities and particularly vulnerable individuals. Handicap International also issues awareness-raising and safety messages targeted at local populations to prevent accidents caused by explosive remnants of war.

-30-

**More information on:** [www.handicap-international.ca](http://www.handicap-international.ca)

**Contact:**

Jérôme Bobin

Executive Director

Handicap International Canada

(514) 567-9228

[jerome.bobin@handicap-international.ca](mailto:jerome.bobin@handicap-international.ca)