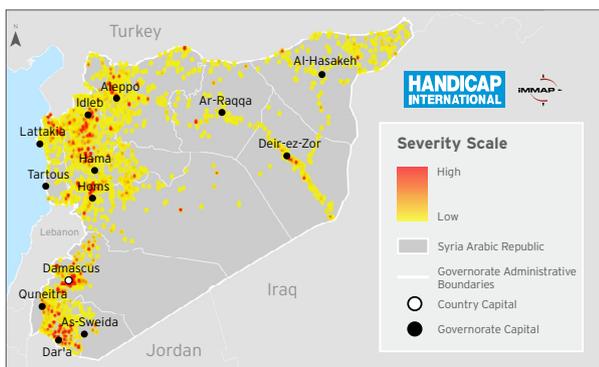


Perspectives from Syrian refugees

The Syrian civil war has raged since 2011 and has led to numerous civilian deaths, injuries and mass displacement. As a result of the conflict, over 10.9 million Syrians are displaced: 6.1 million within Syria and 4.8 million as refugees.² Based on a review of literature regarding the use of explosive weapons in Syria and displacement, on interviews of key informants, and on interviews of families of Syrian refugees in Jordan, this study shows that forced displacement in Syria is strongly correlated with the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

“Bombing and death became part of our daily lives in Syria”³



Intensity of use of explosive weapons in Syria between December 2012 and mid-February 2015, Handicap International

This study confirms that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Syria is at times nearly continuous with indiscriminate bombing that lasts for days. Analysis of the use of explosive weapons in the governorates of Aleppo, Damascus, Deraa and Homs highlights the diversity of types of explosive weapons which were used in populated areas in Syria, in particular explosive weapons with wide area effects: from barrel bombs to rockets, cluster munitions, mortars or car bombs - with a strong shift, over time, from a mostly ground-intensive campaign of widespread shelling through bombardment to more directed air attacks.

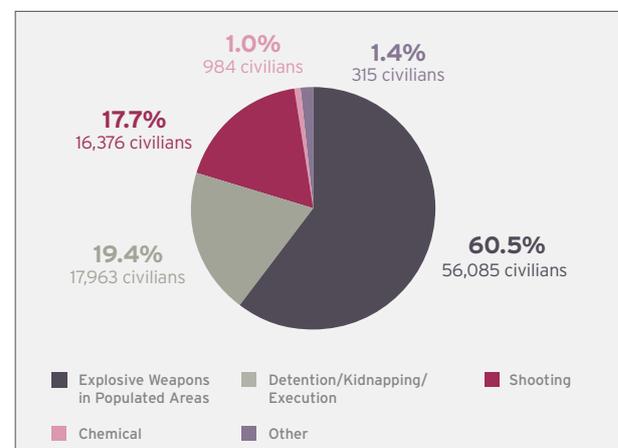
“I was forced out of my country because of the bombing”

All Syrians interviewed said they fled because of the various effects of the conflict, and **most of them stressed that the main reason for leaving their homes was the use of explosive weapons in their villages, towns and cities.** The primary impact of explosive weapons, especially those with wide area effects, which is mentioned when describing the causes of forced displacement in Syria, is **the fear of being killed or injured by those weapons, or of seeing one’s family members killed or injured.** Explosive weapons are indeed reportedly the main cause for civilian deaths in Syria.

Another direct cause of displacement is **the destruction of houses and livelihoods, which forces the families to flee their home.**

There are also reverberating effects of explosive weapons, i.e. long term damages impacting the living conditions of affected communities, which should be considered when analyzing causes for displacement. Interviewees explained how explosive weapons

destroy water and electricity infrastructure, fuel depots and the pipes carrying fuel are destroyed, roads and bridges are made inaccessible, severely restricting the delivery of food and humanitarian aid; health facilities are damaged or destroyed.



War-related causes of civilian death in Syria between 2012-2016.⁴

1. Qasef, قصف: arabic for "bombing".

2. OCHA (as of Sep 2016). In addition, 4.5 million live in besieged cities.

3. All quotes are from interviews with Syrian refugees in Jordan realised between the 17th and the 25th of July 2016 by HI team.

4. IRIN, "How Syrians Are Being Killed," July 2016. <http://www.irinnews.org/maps-and-graphics/2016/07/25/how-syrians-are-being-killed>.

“Wherever we would go there was bombing”

The pattern of multiple forced displacement was another finding of the study - when civilians are forced to leave due to war, they are often forced out again and again, up to 25 times, as they flee bombs throughout their journey. Interviewees had to go through multiple waypoints throughout Syria that they hoped were safe but proved to be insecure, due to indiscriminate attacks on civilians and widespread violations of human rights. Those internally displaced face immediate and direct threats to their security, acute challenges to access essential services such as health, food and water, and a very uncertain future.

Although they escaped from the conflict, Syrian refugees still face other types of insecurities and dire living conditions, namely income insecurity and unsatisfied health needs. More generally, Syrians interviewed stressed how the use of explosive weapons in populated areas affected every aspect of their life, increasing their vulnerability and compromising their future.



Picture provided by an interviewee of his house, after a barrel bomb attack.

“The emotional impact is much worse”



Aside from the long term contamination they create, impeding a safe and quick return of refugees and internally displaced to their homes, explosive weapons also leave deep emotional scars. All interviewees described high levels of fear and stress. **The use of explosive weapons in populated areas destroys communities and separates families**, altering the cultural and social landscape of the whole country.

© D. Parel / Handicap International - July 2016.

Aisha lives alone with her five children in Jordan. She gave birth alone, during a bombing incident, to her now 3-year-old son.

Key recommendations for the warring parties and the international community:

- Parties to the conflict should immediately cease all attacks on civilians and civilian facilities and put an end to all violations of international humanitarian law inside Syria. Parties to the conflict should immediately end the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and in particular the use of banned weapons such as cluster munitions.
- The international community should strongly condemn the use of explosive weapons, especially those with wide area effects, in populated areas in Syria.
- All States should support the development of an international commitment to end the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.
- All warring parties and the international community should ensure unhindered access to principled humanitarian aid, including protection and life-saving assistance to all those impacted by the conflict.
- The international community should ensure that the rights of survivors of explosive weapons, the families of those killed and injured, and affected communities from all impacted areas and wherever they are, are recognized.
- The international community should support the implementation of risk education and clearance efforts in Syria in the short- and long term.
- The international community should ensure that all forcibly-displaced people are given a haven, and in the long run, a durable solution that fully respects their dignity.