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for every child

Every Day Counts

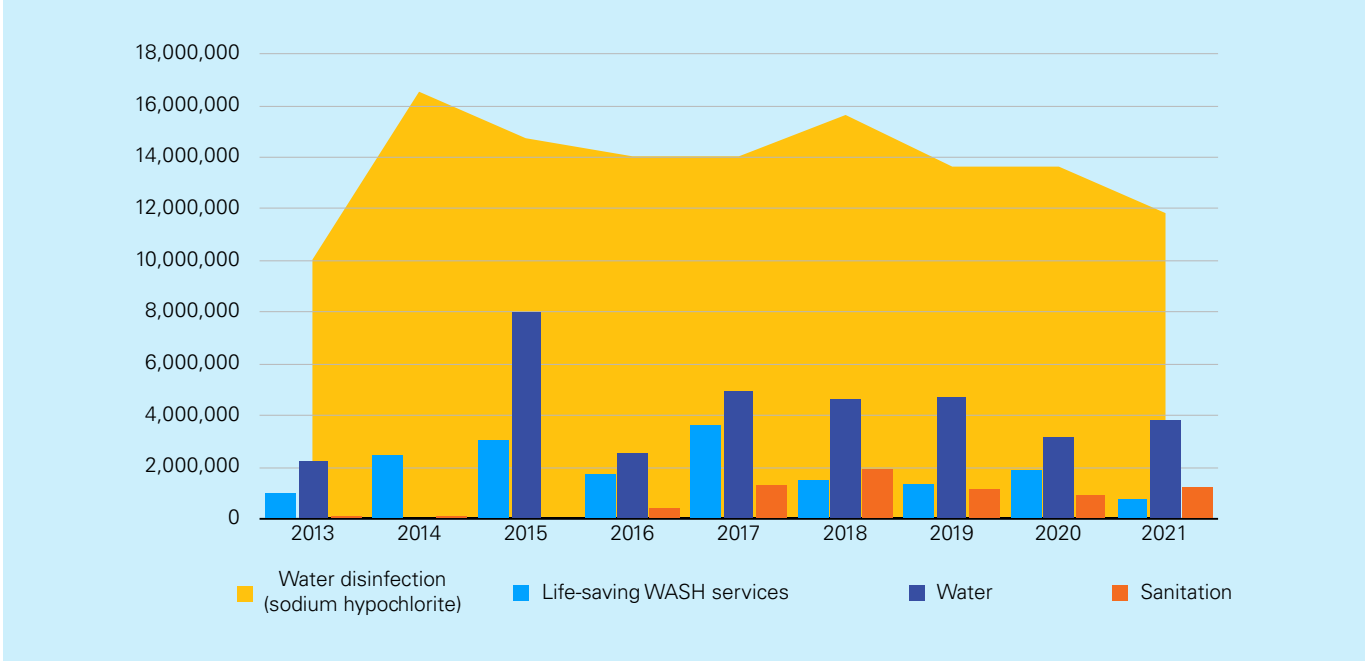
An outlook on WASH for the most vulnerable children in Syria

By staying and delivering over the past 10 years, UNICEF ensured that over four million Syrians a year – including those in the hardest-to-reach and besieged areas – had access to safe water and sanitation services. This has slowed down the deterioration of water and sanitation services, enabling a gradual shift from emergency response to recovery and resilience.

What has UNICEF done for Syrian children during the past 10 years of conflict?

Over the past 10 years, UNICEF has kept the water running in Syria. UNICEF has been importing 7,000 metric tons of sodium hypochlorite a year to disinfect the majority water systems across the country, benefiting 13.8 million people per year at an average annual cost of USD 2.5 million. Repairs and rehabilitation shored up water systems for an average 4.2 million people per year. UNICEF also filled the gap for an average of 1.9 million people per year who accessed clean water through water trucking and the distribution of fuel for pumping water and supplies for household water treatment. At times, the billions of litres of water trucked by UNICEF were the only source of water for families in eastern Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa, the Old City of Homs, Idleb, Rural Damascus and Deir-ez-Zor. Emergency water provision has also been a lifeline for those displaced into formal and informal settlements or living in areas where water networks fail, such as areas of Al-Hasakeh fed by Alouk water station.

UNICEF WASH response, 2013-2021



In parallel, UNICEF has kept the water and sewage systems from deteriorating past the point of no return. UNICEF supported the repair and rehabilitation of critical water supply systems and infrastructure, guided by equity and the principle of "Minimum reliable services for All – rather than All services for Some"[1]. These interventions did not restore the WASH systems to their pre-war levels, as this can only be achieved through large scale reconstruction. However, these small-scale, targeted interventions restored a minimum level of services for a maximum number of children and their families. An average of 3.8 million people per year have benefitted as UNICEF rehabilitated wells, pumping stations, water distribution networks and sewage lines across the country. Altogether, these actions both met immediate needs and helped to prevent deterioration beyond a 'point of no return', at which point rehabilitation would have been economically unfeasible.

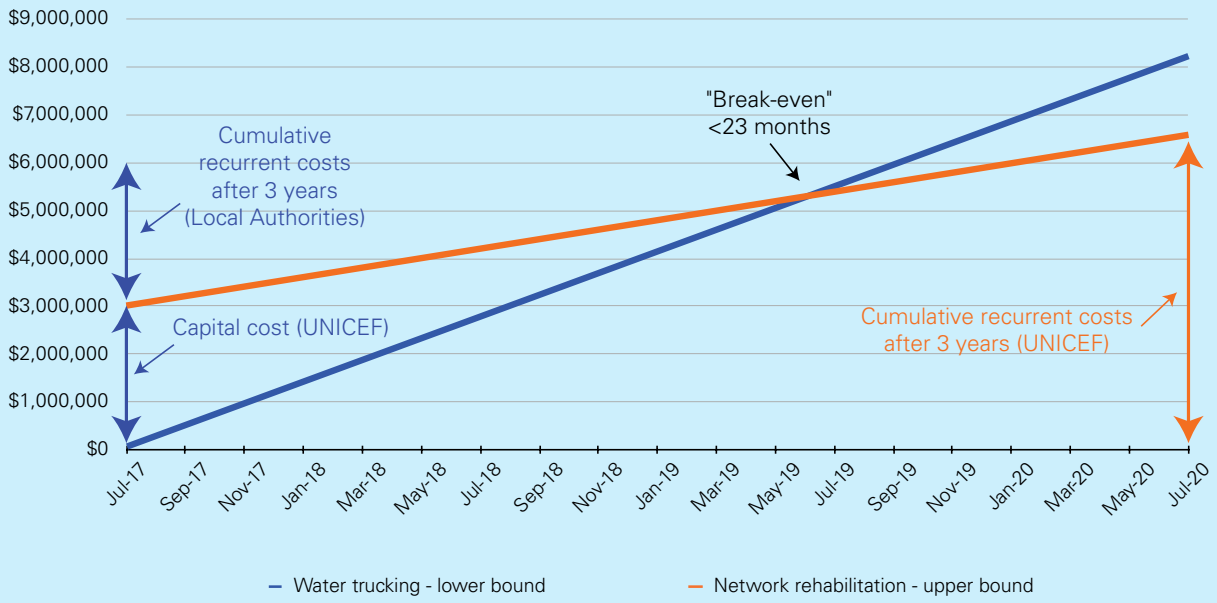
Point of no return: Point at which rehabilitation becomes economically and technically unfeasible

Where possible, **immediate life-saving interventions have been gradually transitioned to recovery and resilience approaches.** UNICEF's work in the town of Al Kisweh in Rural Damascus Governorate is one such example. There, UNICEF charted the course from water trucking during the acute emergency phase (2011-2015); to the light rehabilitation and restoration of infrastructure (2016-2018) to meet the needs of both host communities and internally displaced people (IDPs); to enhancing whole-system management through water safety planning[2] (2019 onwards). Investing in the rehabilitation of infrastructure not only improves the quality of the service but is also more cost effective over the long term. For the people of Al Kiseweh, 17 litres of water trucked per person each day increased to 39 litres after the rehabilitation. Despite the initial capital costs of the rehabilitation, services became cheaper than water trucking after only 23 months (see figure 2 on the 'break even' point).

1 Key criteria include: Balance among areas of influence; severity scale mapping; affordability of local services (private water trucking etc.) and areas with high numbers of IDPs and returnees

2 Water safety planning is a comprehensive risk assessment and risk management approach that encompasses all steps in a drinking-water supply chain, from catchment to consumer.

Figure 2: Break-even point



The WASH situation in Syria in 2022

Across Syria, 47 per cent of the population rely on alternative and often unsafe water sources to meet or complement their water needs and at least 70 per cent of the discharged sewage is untreated[3]. An estimated two thirds of water treatment plants, half of pumping stations, one third of water towers, one quarter of sewage treatment plants and one sixth of wells have been damaged. The situation in IDP camps is particularly critical, requiring the provision of full package of emergency WASH services.

3 OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), 2022.

42% of people rely on alternative, often unsafe water

70% of sewage is being discharged untreated

2/3 of water treatment plants damaged

The lack of electricity is a main bottleneck for the WASH sector, limiting the existing network from effectively distributing existing water quantities. The electricity production has dropped year after year. Electricity and water have been used as weapons of war across the country, by different parties of the conflict, attacking the living conditions of civilian populations, especially in crisis zones and besieged areas. As an example, Alouk water station is frequently out of operation due to crossline electricity issues and reduced access for technical staff. This deprives more than 960,000 people in Al-Hasakeh Governorate of safe water several times a year and for extended periods, including more than one in every five days in 2021.

The sector is also adversely affected by 'brain drain' with 40 per cent of staff (especially in mid-management) having left the public service over the last ten years. This has led to the promotion of lower-level staff to higher posts without them having had the necessary training. **Public expenditures on water and sanitation have decreased steadily over the years.** Allocations to the General Establishments of Potable Water and Sanitation (GEPWS), which falls under the Electricity, Gas and Water function, amounts to Syrian Pound (SYP) 37 billion in 2021, up from SYP 28 billion in 2020. However, in real terms, allocations (taking into account inflation) have decreased by 56 per cent.

What can UNICEF do for children in the next 10 years?

UNICEF will accelerate its shift from a primarily emergency response to a continuum of rapid, sustained and equitable response with longer-term solutions that build the resilience of communities and sector systems to endure shocks and crises, including in response to the changing climate. In IDP and other emergency settings, especially in heavily affected areas of the north-west and north-east, the delivery of emergency WASH services will need to continue while transitioning towards more sustainable solutions, such as establishing connections to existing water networks or simplified water and sewer networks.

UNICEF will go beyond the light rehabilitation of essential WASH infrastructure, and support more large-scale rehabilitations in an effort to stop and ultimately, reverse the deterioration of WASH services. In addition, local water and sanitation system operators will receive supplies and capacity building, allowing them to undertake the operation and maintenance of critical water and sanitation infrastructure in highly vulnerable communities.

UNICEF will also help set up local supply chains. In 2021, UNICEF conducted a feasibility study on the local production of sodium hypochlorite. The study recommended to manufacture 75 per cent (sodium hypochlorite through two local factories) and continue to import 25 per cent (calcium hypochlorite aka chlorine powder) of Syria's overall disinfection needs. If implemented, the two factories will greatly reduce reliance on costly imports of chlorine products by fostering low-cost local production.

Finally, given the negative impacts climate change is expected to have on the sustainability of WASH services and behaviors, UNICEF **will further integrate climate resilience in its programming**. This will involve understanding and managing risks resulting in the protection of water resources, adaptation to increasing water scarcity and deteriorating water quality, and climate-resilient water and sanitation technologies and systems with a focus on renewable energies.

Estimated budget requirements for 2022-2024	
Pillar 1: Provision of life-saving WASH interventions	$76,000,000
Pillar 2: Restoration of WASH services	$186,000,000
Pillar 3: Strengthening the resilience of WASH infrastructure and services	$40,000,000
Total	**$302,000,000**

UNICEF Syria

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For any enquires please contact:

WASH Section, UNICEF Syria Country Office
East Mazzeh, Al Shafiee St., Bldg. 2
P.O. Box 9413
Damascus, Syria
Tel: (+963) 11 619 1300


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