

Borealis and Better Shelter: Building a brighter future for 150,000 school children in Iraq

A partnership project between Borealis, Better Shelter and Terres des Hommes.

Borealis' social engagement strategy includes a commitment to promoting education and social integration. This recognises that businesses need to foster a healthy environment and stable society, in order to grow sustainably. In support of this aim, Borealis is a key partner of a programme run by Swiss non-governmental organisation Terre des hommes, to improve education for thousands of children in Iraq.

The Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq

The humanitarian crisis in Iraq is one of the largest in the world. Violence perpetrated by Islamic State forced 5.9 million people to leave their homes and affected 8.7 million people in total. This placed a particular burden on children, as their parents struggled to provide for their basic needs such as food, security or healthcare. As a result, many children have lost years of education and are suffering from severe trauma caused by the war. This is damaging for them as individuals and for their country, since young people will ultimately be responsible for rebuilding the nation.

Although the restoration of Iraq will take many years, nearly 4 million people have already returned to their homes, where they have found

the local infrastructure destroyed by years of fighting. In these difficult circumstances, families may try to cope by putting their children to work to support the family income or by arranging early marriages, so the children miss out on school.

Those children who can attend school are often hampered by the distance to the nearest facilities, overcrowded classrooms and the lack of materials. With up to 100 students per teacher, children may have to attend school in shifts.

Better Shelter is a for-profit start-up social enterprise, initiated with the support of the IKEA Foundation and UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency. It has developed an innovative solution to provide cost-effective and adaptable shelters for people displaced by conflict or natural disasters. The shelters are constructed from extrusion foamed plastic panels, using PP material supplied by Borealis. Compared to traditional tents used in refugee camps, this makes the shelters much stronger and better able to withstand wind, rain and snow, while being lightweight, easy to transport and recyclable. In addition, the shelters are modular, allowing a number of them to be connected to each other. Many have already been used in UNHCR refugee camps.



CASE STUDY

“This project is a true example of how Borealis brings value to people, planet and profit,” says Jeroen Frederix, Borealis’ business development manager for PO foam solutions. “We take an end-to-end approach, starting from business development and working throughout the value chain, while being committed to ensuring our solutions bring value to society by partnering with NGOs in the field.”

To target the areas and schools with the greatest needs, Terre de Hommes designed a programme in conjunction with the Iraqi Ministry of Education at a national level, the District of Education at district and governorate levels, and headteachers and teachers at a school level. Terre de Hommes then assessed more than 200 schools in September 2018, before distributing Better Shelter units equipped with desks, chairs, a white board, fire extinguishers and electricity connections.

Borealis joined with Better Shelter and Terre de Hommes to fund a significant part of the programme. This covered the costs of Better Shelter delivering 500 units to Terre de Hommes, as well as their subsequent implementation in Iraq. In total, through substantial funding by Borealis and other donors, Terre de Hommes has distributed 1,152 shelters to 330 schools in the Kirkuk and Salah al-Din regions of Iraq. The schools have an average of 450 students each, meaning that around 150,000 students have benefitted so far.

The Al-Ayoubi school is one of those to benefit. “I had 220 students that I had to teach in four classrooms,” says Mr. Rafid Majeed, Headmaster. “It was crowded and learning quality was dropping as a consequence. Today, the school has eight classrooms with 27 students per class, which allows us as teachers to deliver better education and enroll more students for the upcoming semester.”

“The Better Shelter Programme is an excellent fit with the Education & Social Integration focus area of our Borealis Social Fund strategy,” says Dorothea Wiplinger, Borealis’ Sustainability Manager. “Children suffer most in times of crisis and war. Borealis is glad to support a programme that provides them with a space of learning and where they can forget for a while the many traumatising experiences they had during their childhood.”



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