



CHILD PROTECTION ASSESSMENT **BASIRMA REFUGEE CAMP**

Introduction

This report was written in response to the need for qualitative information regarding the child protection concerns in Basirma Refugee Camp in Erbil. The camp has been hosting Syrian refugees since about two years¹ and currently more than 650 families are residing there, according to the camp management. Information regarding the child protection situation is needed to specialize and focus the assistance offered. Therefore, Terre des Hommes Italy, as the main child protection actor in Basirma, conducted an assessment of the child protection situation in the camp, which aimed to include all the minors currently residing in the camp.

The assessment was carried out by the Child Protection Unit between 16 December 2014 and 15 January 2015, as part of the Unicef funded project of Terre des Hommes Italy.

Objective of the Assessment

In Basirma Refugee Camp there are about 3500 individuals. In the months of November and December 2014, groups of Syrian refugees who fled from Kobane arrived in the camp. Most of them moved to other locations in Kurdistan after a few days, but some families remained in the camp.

Terre des Hommes Italy conducted small child protection assessments after every newly arrived group of refugees from Kobane.² The information (though limited) was very useful for specializing the services offered and gaining more knowledge about the child protection situation and most urgent concerns. However, it became clear that this information was not as such available for the refugee community already residing in Basirma.

The objective of this assessment was therefore to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data regarding the situation of children in Basirma. The priority of this assessment was to get a better understanding of the main child protection issues and the scale of these problems. At the same time, the assessment was used as a tool to make the social workers of the Child Protection Unit known in the camp and familiarize the community with the scope of their work.

Finally, the assessment aimed to measure the extent to which some services in the camp were known and assistance was received.

¹ The camp was opened on 26.08.2013; Basirma Camp Profile as of December 2014, available at: data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php, accessed on 10/02/2015;

² A total of 10 assessments were done in which the situation of a total of 602 children from Kobane was assessed.

Methodology

The assessment was done through a questionnaire consisting of 41 questions, some of which were depending on previously given answers. A minimum of 27 questions were asked to all the respondents, who were mainly the parents. The families were visited by Terre des homes Italy CPU social workers in their house and informed about the voluntary participation to the exercise, the objective of the questionnaire and the confidential manner in which their answers would be handled.

The questionnaire was written by Terre des Hommes Italy Child Protection Unit and reviewed by Unicef. The form was inserted in ODK in order to conduct the survey by tablet and to collect the data in a safe and most confidential manner.

A total of 637 families were interviewed. All families with underage children residing in the camp were targeted. Single persons were not included in this assessment, unless they were minors.

For the outcomes and conclusions of some of the data, the knowledge and experience of the CPU team was used independently of the survey. This was done in order to place some of the data in perspective, as well as to emphasize important child protection issues which cannot be highlighted enough in an assessment which aims to have parents as respondents.

Challenges

As mentioned, all families with underage children residing in the camp were targeted. However, after reviewing the outcome it became clear that some families with adult children or couples with pregnant women were interviewed by mistake as well. This happened because it was not always clear for the interviewers what the age of the children was when they started the interview, or if the children present in the house were the children of the respondent.

The respondents were informed that their information would be kept confidential and none of their individual answers would be shared with anyone. This was done in order to make the respondents feel at liberty to answer honestly, even regarding potentially uncomfortable questions. Despite this, at times the assessors received incorrect answers from families, especially when asked about employment and assistance received. The assessors were mostly from the camp as well and therefore they were sometimes aware of the fact that the actual situation of the family was different from the answers they gave. However, of course the results of this assessment were based solely on the answers received.

In the month it took to interview all families there might have been some changes in the situation in the camp, the family composition or the family situation (for instance regarding employment).

Finally, there were about 6 families with children who refused to participate in this assessment.

Findings

Household composition

Of the 637 households interviewed, 298 were effectively headed by a female. The other 339 were male headed households.

All the respondents together had a total of 1654 children. This is a division of their age groups:

AGE	# of children
0	106
1	56
2	156
3	137
4	108
5	100
6	103
7	132
8	98
9	104
10	97
11	78
12	69
13	71
14	71
15	74
16	56
17	38

The family size recorded ranged from 1 to 13 persons. Most families consist of 5 persons (113 families). As the family size gets higher the number of families gets less (10 families of 10 persons, 4 families of 11 persons and 1 family of 13 persons).

Pregnancies

The assessment recorded 94 pregnancies in the camp.

Medical conditions

307 families indicated there was a member of the family suffering from a severe medical condition. In this section the respondent could indicate the condition. The survey did not ask for any medical documents to substantiate the claim. Some conditions indicated would not be considered "severe" as the survey intended to record. The medical conditions most mentioned were disc (32), diabetes (27), blood pressure problems (26), asthma (24), disabilities (16 times mentioned, though the problem mentioned was not always considered a disability according to the definition), and other medical problems and diseases.

However, later in the assessment when the respondents were asked about existing vulnerabilities in the family, only 26 of the 307 indicated a severe medical condition as a vulnerability.

The survey did not focus specifically on children with a medical condition; because when one member of the household suffers from a serious medical problem this will always affect the child.

Child birth in camp and birth registration

124 families indicated that at least one of their children was born in Basirma Camp. Of these newborns 114 were registered. Only 10 children remained without birth registration.

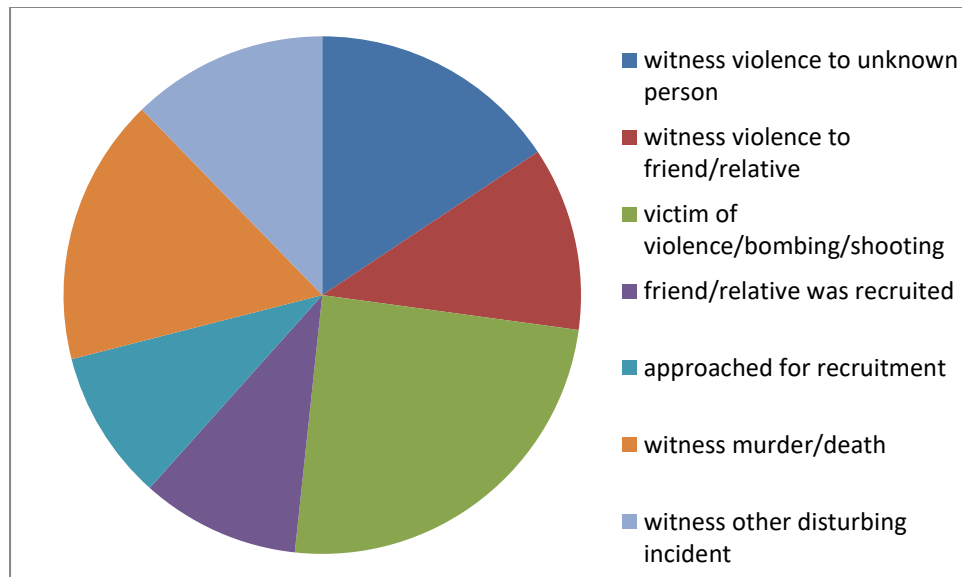
As reasons for this the families indicated that transportation in and out of the camp was not available and/or expensive; the family did not know where to register; the family has been too busy; the family that the attempt at registration was not accepted by the authorities; and one family indicated they will go back to Syria.

Compared to the number of newborns, the number of unregistered children is low. It is a good sign that most families did indeed register the birth of their child. However, the experience of the CPU shows that many families and/or parents to be are not aware of all the requirements for birth registration (f.i. marriage certificate).

Child trauma/experiences in Syria

The survey asked if (one of the) children in the household had witnessed or experienced any traumatizing incidents in Syria. The outcome was the following:

Incident:	# of children:
- The child witnessed violence/harm against an unknown person	60 children
- The child witnessed violence/harm against friends/family members	44 children
- The child was subjected to violence/bombing/shooting	94 children
- A friend/family member was recruited into an armed group	38 children
- An armed group approached the child/the family for recruitment	36 children
- The child witnessed murder/death	64 children
- The child witnessed another disturbing incident of war	47 children



The answers above reflect the experience is of 182 children, because in most cases the child had witnessed/been subjected to more than one of the scenarios. Therefore the numbers above collectively (383 children) do not represent the number of children who suffered these experiences.

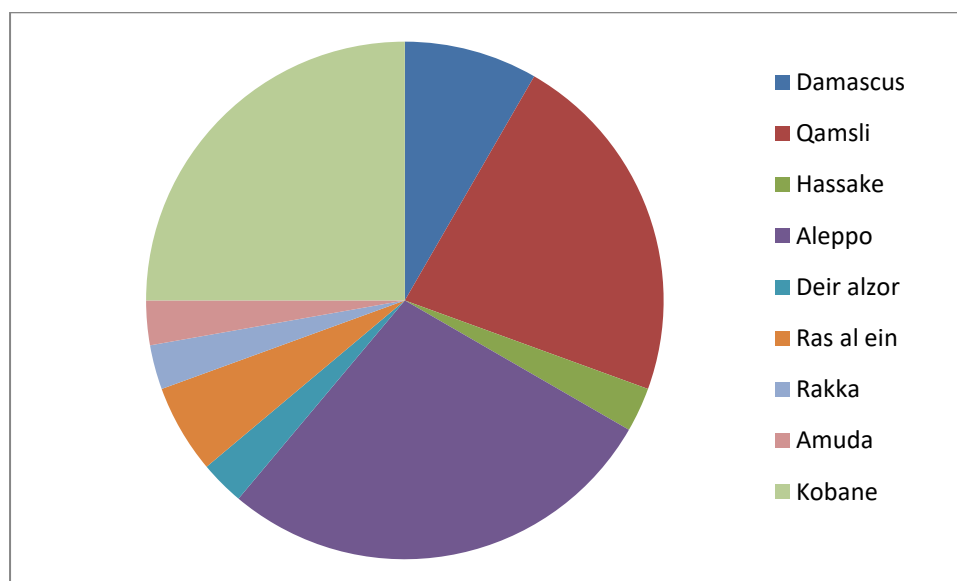
160 families indicated their child/children suffered from trauma and/or a significant change in behaviour and/or other psychological problems as a result of what was witnessed or experienced in Syria. However, only 53 of these 160 families sought psychological support for the child/children.

Later in the survey, 38 of the remaining 107 families indicate they are aware of psychosocial support services and services of a psychiatrist offered in the camp.

This shows that the number of families seeking psychological help for their child is small, despite the fact that some families know about the existence of such services. However, the majority of families are apparently unaware of the services offered in the camp.

Forced recruitment

36 families were approached for recruitment for a child into an armed group. Most of these families are from Kobane, Aleppo and Qamsli. This number is relatively high, but not surprising considering the Child Protection Unit already discovered this topic to be a significant issue for the UASC from Kobane. However, it further substantiates a worrying development towards the use of child soldiers by the fighting groups in Syria.



Witness of murder/death

Also significant is the high number of children who have witnessed a murder or death. 64 children have apparently experienced this in Syria. However, only half of this group indicates their child/children to suffer from a trauma as a result of anything witnessed or experienced. In this group too, the majority of the families are coming from Kobane and Aleppo.

Separated children

The survey included a question regarding the presence of unrelated children in the family. Here we aimed to include all children who are not part of the immediate family (thus also nieces, nephews, grandchildren etc.) in order to get an overview of children who are in the camp without their parents.

According to the findings there are 21 families taking care of children who are not part of their immediate family. Almost all of those children are in a way related to the family: 12 are nieces/nephews, 2 are grandchildren, and 6 are otherwise related to the family. Only one child is living with an unrelated family. 14 out of the 21 children are in contact with their parents/family.

At the moment there are no unaccompanied children in Basirma Camp. During the influx of Kobane refugee some unaccompanied children were identified and followed, but camp security allowed them to leave Basirma Camp as soon as they had a sponsor, so none of them stayed. Compared to

the total number of families in Basirma this number of separated children is low, however, these children are in a more vulnerable situation and need monitoring.

Married children

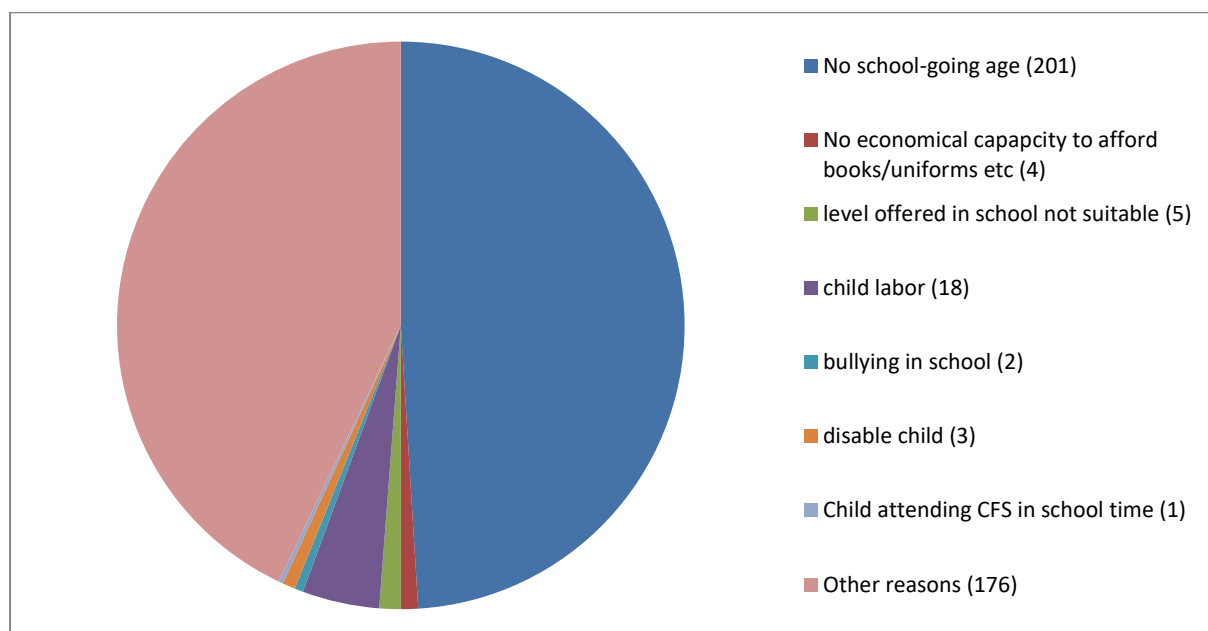
Respondents were asked if any of their minor children were married in the last two years. For this question it was irrelevant if the marriage was concluded in the camp, or in any other location before or after fleeing from Syria.

The survey showed that in 13 of the interviewed families a minor child was married in the last two years. Most families indicated that the reason for the early marriage was security (9) while 3 families indicated the marriage was because of emotional reasons (love). In one case tradition was given as the reason for marriage. This number is low compared to the total children of (potential) marriage age in the camp, however the issue remains relevant and monitoring continues to be needed.

School

The families were asked if all their children were going to school. 239 families indicated that all their children were attending school. The majority of the respondents (398 families) answered that not all their children were going to school. Below are the outcomes of the reasons for not attending (several answers could be given as different reasons might be simultaneously applicable).

Reason:	# of children:
- The child is not of school-going age	201 children
- The family cannot afford the books/uniform/other school needs	4 children
- The level offered is not suitable for the child	5 children
- The child is working	18 children
- The child was bullied in school	1 child
- The child’s disability prevents him/her from going to school	3 children
- Custom/tradition prevents the child from going to school	0 children
- The child is attending the CFS in school time	1 child
- Other reasons	176 children



The “other reasons” were sometimes mentioned in combination with the other options above, but parents also clarified that their child/children did not attend school because the families does not consider the certificate received from the school valid; or the certificate will not allow the child to get into college anyway. Parents further mentioned that they were unhappy with the quality of the

school teachers; favoritisms by teachers; aggression from school staff and finally, unwillingness from children to go to school.³

Household income and working members

The families were asked about their source of income. The following options and answers were given (combinations were possible):

Source of income:	# of families
- Work inside the camp	117 families
- Work outside the camp	111 families
- Volunteer work (stipend)	80 families
- Humanitarian assistance	28 families
- No form of income	296 families

Additionally, respondents were asked who in the family was working. In most cases (265 families) this was the head of the household or his or her spouse. In 39 cases an adult child was providing (part of) the family income. In 9 families a minor child was working⁴ and in 7 of those cases the child was providing the only income of the family. Mostly this was work done outside the camp.⁵ In all cases of child labor the respondents were requested to indicate the type of work the child was doing. The children were doing daily labor work, or worked in services such as restaurants or hotel.

Families who had a minor child working also all indicated they had at least one child out of school, and the main reason for this was due to work and/or financial problems. 5 of the 9 families with minors working were female headed. This could be taken as an indication of the additional risk of children working when part of a single-parent household.

Access to water

Many families indicated they did not have enough access to water for drinking, cooking and hygiene purposes (409 families). At the same time, most of them also indicated before not to have a source of income (223 of the 409) which might be a reason for their lack of access to water, while many other families did not see this as a problem.

However, the majority (377 families) of the 409 respondents indicated to have received food assistance and/or vouchers, which could also be used to increase access to water.

Access hygiene items

165 respondents indicated they have insufficient access to hygiene items. However, 86 of them indicated they have received hygiene products and/or awareness.

When cross checking with the families with pregnant women it showed that only 16 families with pregnancies indicated to have insufficient access to hygiene items. However, 47 families with a baby in the family indicated they did not have access to hygiene items (which include diapers and other baby products).

³ The reasons included here under "other reasons" are derived partly from the survey and partly from the experiences of the CPU team when doing case management and counselling.

⁴ 10 cases of child labor have been identified and assisted since the start of the CPU in November 2014. It has proven to be a sensitive and misunderstood topic among families. Often they do not regard the income generating activities of their child "work" or they feel hesitant to mention the issue to the social worker out of fear of being judged or forced to make the child stop working.

⁵ It should be noted that since the tragic incident of the death of a child while working outside the camp, near Harir, the CPU noted that parents have been more hesitant to let their children go out of the camp unsupervised. Therefore, current child labor situation might be different from what is reflected in the survey as this exercise took place before the death of the child.

This conclusion was supported by the general findings of the assessments done in the newly arrived Kobane group; there too did the families indicate often their need for diapers and other baby hygiene products.

Winterization

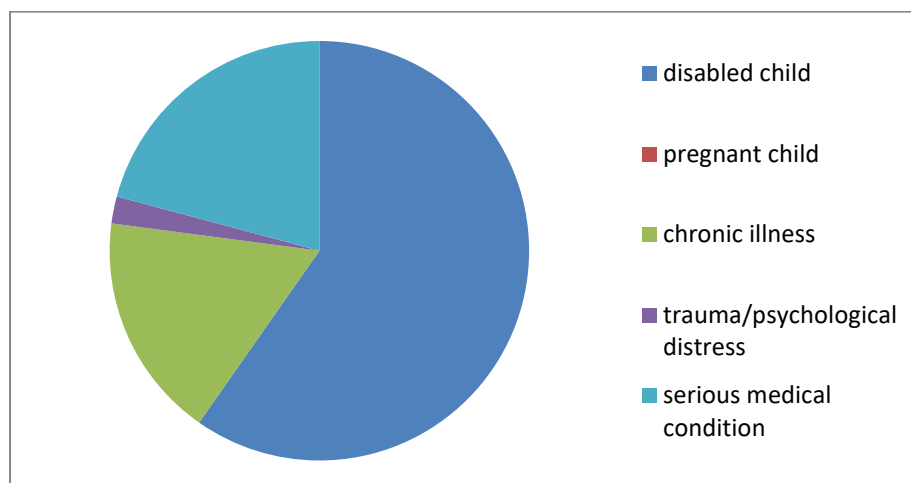
The majority of the respondents (458 families) indicated they have insufficient access to winterization items⁶. The families were asked to indicate what they were most in need of (several answers could apply):

Winterization needs:	# families who indicated this as a need:
- Jackets for children	332 families
- Jackets for adults	295 families
- Shoes for children	286 families
- Shoes for adults	252 families
- Blankets	408 families
- Stove	212 families
- Matrass	421 families

Vulnerabilities

The majority of the respondents indicated there were no vulnerabilities in the family (498 families).

Possible vulnerabilities were:	# of families were this was present:
- Child with disabilities	86 families
- Pregnant child	0 families
- Chronic illness	25 families
- Trauma / psychological distress	3 families
- Serious medical condition	30 families



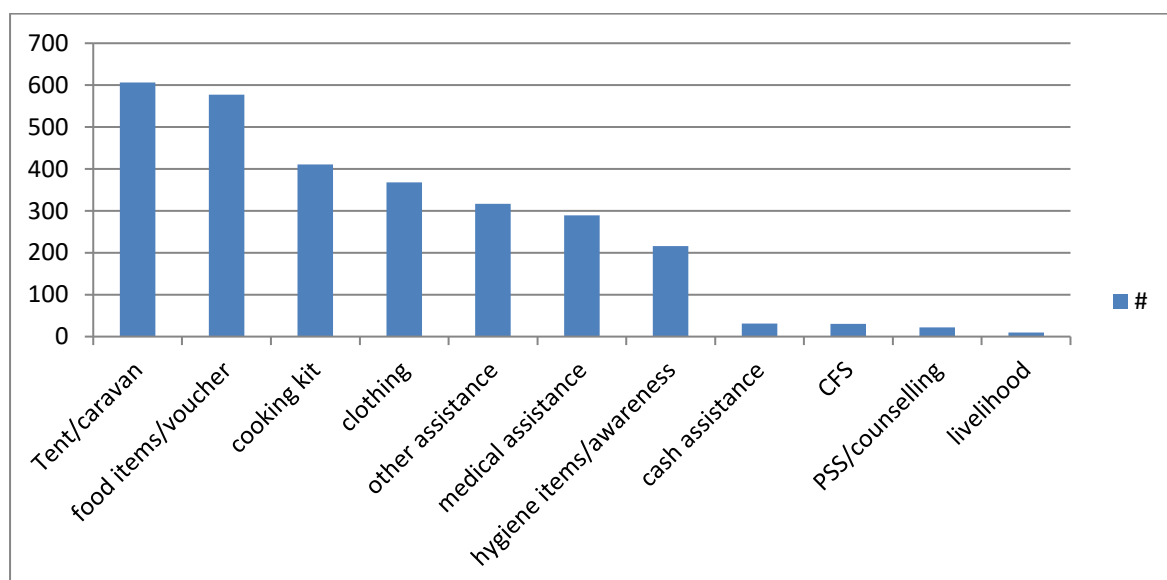
However, it is significant to note that 119 of these families indicated before that their children had suffered trauma and/or significant change of behavior and/or psychological problems as a result of an incident witnessed or experienced in Syria. Clearly the families did not consider this as a vulnerability when given the possible answers.

⁶ Please note that this survey reflects the situation as it was before several winterization distributions as done by TdH and Barzani Foundation.

Assistance received

The respondents were asked about the assistance they had received since arriving in the camp. Several answers were possible.

Type of assistance received:	# of families who received this:
- Tent or caravan	606 families
- Food items or voucher	577 families
- Cooking kit	411 families
- Hygiene products and/or awareness	216 families
- School items or assistance	83 families
- Clothing	368 families
- Health care assistance	289 families
- Psychosocial support/counselling	22 families
- Child friendly Space	30 families
- Vocational training or livelihood assistance	10 families
- Cash assistance	31 families
- Other types of assistance	317 families



The answers to the assistance received do not seem to reflect the reality correctly, especially regarding the immaterial services such as psychosocial support, CFS and education.⁷ However, it is possible that the respondents did not recognize the type of assistance, or were hesitant to tell the interviewer about for instance psychosocial support received.

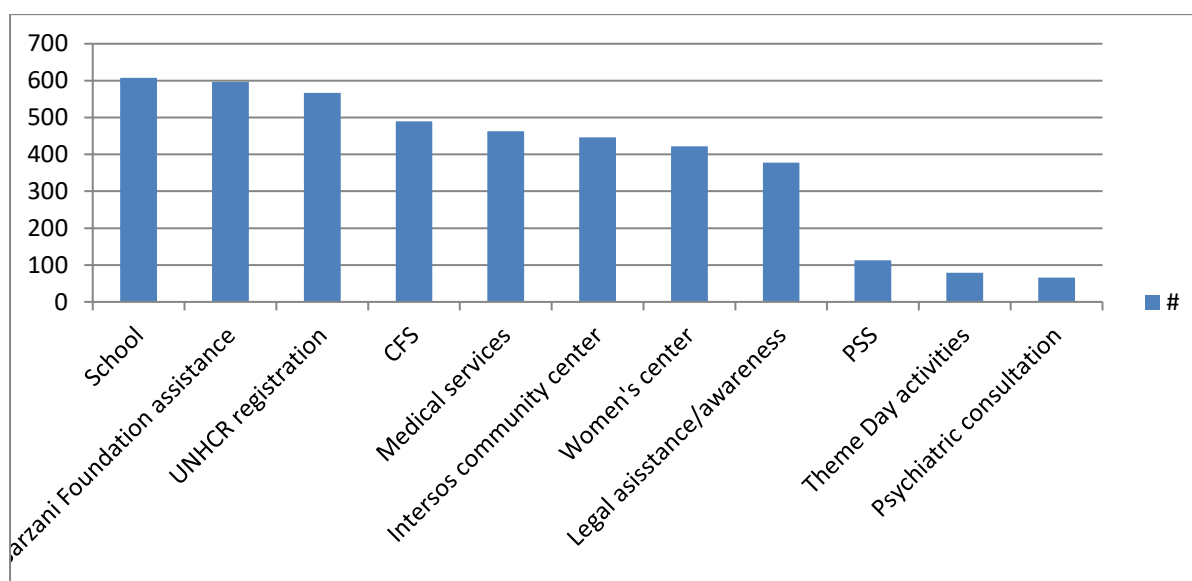
Awareness of service providers in the camp

The families were asked if they received information about the services available in the camp, and about their awareness of a number of organizations/services in the camp. Regarding the first point most families indicated that they did receive information about the services provided in the camp (385 families).

⁷ This survey was conducted by the same organization in charge of one of the Child Friendly Spaces in Basirma (TdH). Therefore, we are aware of the fact that many more families than indicated have been taking part in the activities offered by the CFS. Similarly, many of more children than indicated have been assisted by the services of the CPU. Possibly, the respondent is unaware of the services received by his/her children, or the respondent is embarrassed to tell the interviewer that psychosocial services were used by his/her family.

The respondents were asked if they were aware about the following services/organizations:

Service/organization:	# of families who are aware:
- School	608 families
- Child Friendly Space	490 families
- Psychosocial support services	113 families
- Psychiatric consultation	66 families
- Theme day activities	79 families
- Medical services	463 families
- UNHCR registration	567 families
- Legal awareness/assistance	378 families
- Women's center	422 families
- Intersos community Center	446 families
- Barzani Foundation assistance	596 families



This indicates that most families in the camp are well aware of most of the material services and locations, but that the immaterial services offered are far less widely known. Possibly this is because the need for these services is less (like the psychiatric consultation) or because they are not as visible as centers or distributions are.

Other notes / comments from the respondents

At the end of the survey the respondents were given the opportunity to make any other comments they considered relevant or necessary to be said regarding child protection issues/topics, or otherwise.

Many respondents indicated more work opportunities and/or a fairer distribution of the jobs is needed in the camp. Many families also claimed they needed financial aid. Families further complained about the state of the infrastructure in the camp (the roads, electricity, etc.) and/or about the state of their tent/caravan.

Additionally, many families indicated they would like to receive assistance vouchers instead of the assistance in kind as they do now. Regarding the situation of children, most families indicated they were in need of financial assistance to secure medical treatment for their child. Also mentioned often were winterization needs of children.

Conclusion and recommendation

The assessment indicates several main concerns regarding child protection. Based on the outcomes of this survey and the relevant experience of the Child Protection Unit the following conclusions and recommendations can be made:

Trauma and psychosocial support

The number of children who have witnessed or experienced a possibly traumatic incident in Syria is high. This is not surprising considering the violent nature of the war in their country, but the identification of trauma and need for psychosocial support should be increased. Based on CPU experience it is very likely that more children than indicated by the survey are suffering from trauma. Possibly the parents are not recognizing the signs of trauma in their children, or are unable or unwilling to ask for assistance in this matter.

This situation has to be combated by raising awareness among parents, caregivers and children about the signs of trauma or psychological distress, and the negative effects untreated psychological issues can have on a child's well-being and development. At the same time, awareness should be raised about the type and availability of psychosocial support and the benefits of group activities, education and recreational activities on a child's mental state. These services are already available in Basirma Camp, but the survey shows that though the community is mostly aware of their existence; they are not using these services a lot.

Education

The CPU and the protection partners in Basirma Camp were already aware of the high number of children out of school. This survey shows there is not necessarily a connection between the number of children out of school (due to reasons other than age) (197) and the number of children working (18). Based on the assessment the main reason for the fact that the children are out of school is linked to the parents' perception of the camp school, and the need for education in general, as well as their opinion of the (quality of the) education provided and the competence of the teachers.

Child labor

The survey indicates that only a small number of the children in Basirma Camp are working. Unfortunately, based on the experiences and cases management by the CPU involving child labor the number is likely to be higher.⁸ Regardless of the number of cases, child labor is a very serious issue which will not only negatively affect the child's emotional and physical development; it can also place the child at risk of physical and psychological violence, sexual violence, injuries and even death.⁹ For this topic too awareness in the family (for parents and children) is needed to decrease the number of children working or looking for work.

However, realistically, it is unlikely that families are able to take their child out of their employment when this is (one of the) main sources of income. Therefore, families should be aware that assistance will be offered aiming to improve their general situation; without judgment or breaking confidentiality. Potentially, awareness raising among NGO staff could also be necessary to ensure this attitude.

Additionally, the protection partners in Basirma should work together to provide different types of support to families in order to stop child labor. For instance: priority for livelihood opportunities, or

⁸ 10 cases of child labor have been identified and assisted since the start of the CPU in November 2014. It has proven to be a sensitive and misunderstood topic among families. Often they do not regard the income generating activities of their child "work" or they feel hesitant to mention the issue to the social worker out of fear of being judged or forced to make the child stop working.

⁹ As shown by the tragic death of the 14 years old boy who was hit by a car when selling goods by a road outside of the camp.

NGO cooperation in gathering cash assistance to fund urgent needs for which the children are working to pay¹⁰. In this regard it is important to note the danger of openly prioritizing families with working children for assistance, as it set a precedent which encourages child labor in order to gain (more) assistance. Therefore, the combination with awareness raising is absolutely needed.

Children involved with armed groups

Though not clearly visible in the outcome of the survey, the CPU has flagged the high number of children (at risk of) involvement with armed groups. Especially the UASC in the Kobane group indicated the fear of forced recruitment as one of the main reasons why they fled Syria without their family. It is therefore not unlikely that families with teenage boys fled for the same reason (among other reasons).

Furthermore, the CPU social workers have found that there are families in the community who regard fighting against IS as an honor for their children and the family. They praise the young men who leave to fight and thereby – sometimes unintentionally – encourage their children to do the same. Additionally, the teenage boys are especially receptive to this because they are often out of school, hanging around the camp with friends and without much to do. They feel a strong pull (either from relatives, media, or friends) to go and join the fight to free their country.

This is a very serious problem that is very difficult to detect and measure, especially in an assessment such as this one. Most likely, it will not be sufficient to tell the parents not to talk to their children about fighting, or to threaten the children with the dangerous and illegal nature of such a decision. However, it is essential that the topic is made discussable in awareness groups of this age group, and that their mindset is influenced in a manner they are receptive to. This will require efforts from more than only the CPU social workers. The possibility of a camp awareness campaign by several NGOs in the camp (as has been done successfully for other sensitive topics, such as early marriage) should be discussed, as well as the involvement of more specialized actors who might usually not be present in Basirma Camp.

Community participation

From the comments given by the respondents it is clear that the community is unhappy with several situations in the camp. At times, service providers and authorities are working to provide assistance in the way they regard best fitting for the situation, but overlook or fail to include the opinion of their beneficiaries. In Basirma already many effort have been made to include the camp community in decisions and policies, but it appears there is still a lot of discontent regarding job opportunities and maintenance in the camp.

It will be very difficult to combat the dissatisfaction about these issues, especially regarding employment, because many efforts have already been made but the community remains unhappy. Most likely this is because there simply is not enough work for everyone – no matter the distribution of the work – and therefore there will always be families unhappy with the arrangements. However, both the survey and the experiences of the CPU social workers show that the families are often upset about this topic because they do not understand how the employment system works and why certain choices have been made. For this reason, it would be good if the community leaders in the camp (perhaps the chairmen of the Camp Comities, spokespersons of camp sections, etc.) are thoroughly informed about the reasons behind decisions made (if not involved in the decision process) and asked to spread this information in the community. Also, the camp management could print and distribute the applicable rules and regulations.

¹⁰ The CPU and other NGOs have come across cases where an unfunded medical need for one of the family members urged the children to work in order to pay for the medication or operation needed.

Finally, regarding the voucher versus in kind assistance, here too it would be good if the community was better informed about the reason why the assistance is given in kind and not (as in other camps) in vouchers. Perhaps a discussion can be started with the organizations responsible for the distributions (in this case WFP), to see if a change can be made.

Community participation and awareness raising by the community in the community, as described above, will not only increase knowledge; but it can also build a sense of ownership and involvement in the camp activities and management. The inhabitants of Basirma Camp are already in a vulnerable situation as refugees in a more or less isolated location. By increasing their involvement in the decision making process regarding important topics (such as employment, but also topics and ways to raise awareness) their sense of dependence and vulnerability can be lessened.