

No Lost Generation Child Protection Strategy in the Syria Crisis

Overview of the UNICEF's response strategy

The overarching objective of the Child Protection Sector in the Syria response is to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Since the development of the *No Lost Generation*¹ initiative in the third quarter of 2013, UNICEF has progressively phased in a 5 pillar strategy for addressing child protection issues in country and regional response modalities (e.g. RRP, SHARP, CRFS, national resilience plans...). This strategic framework aims to harmonise the child protection response throughout the sub-region in both Syria and refugee contexts. It is sufficiently flexible for responses to be country-specific and adjusted according to emerging needs and changing circumstances.

The 5 pillars are: i) generating evidence, ii) strengthening child protection systems, iii) enhancing child and community resilience, iv) integrating child protection into other sectors and v) protection advocacy. The framework also includes cross-cutting themes in sustainability and strengthening partnerships with government, UN agencies, international and national NGOs and community groups closest to children. The need to include a specific pillar on protection advocacy was identified during the recent Syria crisis sub-regional child protection consultation and is based on the recognition that Syria is first and foremost a "protection crisis". The key underlying barriers to ensuring that children survive and that their most basic humanitarian needs are met are the continuous, systematic and widespread violations of IHL and HRL committed with impunity by all parties of the conflict. Giving more visibility to the protection advocacy agenda within the overall response is also critical as part of the UN's broader commitment to the *Rights Up Front* agenda.

Each of these pillars is described below and illustrated with country-specific examples.

Overview of child protection issues

The humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, as of June 2014 there are 9.3 million people in need of assistance inside Syria, 6.5 million internally displaced including approximately 2,990,000 children², and over 2,834,976 Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, including 1,454,342 children³. Of the more than 100,000 people killed since March 2011, at least 10,000 were children with many more being injured.⁴

The ongoing grave child rights violations - killing and maiming, recruitment, detention, torture, abduction and sexual and gender-based violence have been systematically documented over the past two years.⁵ Beyond these, the Syrian conflict is continuing to erode children's protective environments and having broader child protection consequences on larger proportions of the population inside Syria and within refugee and host communities.

Continuing exposure to extreme violence, displacement and hardship are known to have immediate and long-term impacts on children's psychosocial wellbeing. Separation from their families is an issue making children most vulnerable – 8,300 separated and unaccompanied children have now been registered in host countries⁶. Other prevailing child protection risks are being exacerbated the conflict - child labour and child marriage which appear to be on the rise among refugee populations compared to pre-conflict data in Syria. Approximately 30,000 refugee children are estimated to be engaged in labour in Jordan⁷ and data on child marriages among Syrians in Jordan indicates an increasing prevalence of the practice⁸. Recruitment by armed parties is a continuing risk for children in Syria and the surrounding countries.⁹

¹ *No Lost Generation* initiative was developed in consultation with UNHCR, OCHA and INGOs. It seeks to provide a practical approach to mitigate the long-term effects of the Syrian crisis on children and youth from Syria by 1) increasing learning opportunities; 2) providing a protective environment; and 3) broadening opportunities for children and adolescents.

² OCHA Syria Crisis, Key Figures, <http://syria.unocha.org>, accessed 30 June 2014

³ Syria Regional Refugee Response, IA Information Sharing Portal, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> accessed 30 June 2014

⁴ Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict in Syrian Arab Republic, 2014

⁵ Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict in Syrian Arab Republic, 2014

⁶ Data from UNHCR as of 30 April 2014

⁷ RRP6 2014

⁸ UNICEF Study on Early Marriage Jordan, 2014

⁹ Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict in Syrian Arab Republic, 2014

Sexual and gender-based violence are being recorded as disproportionately affecting children and women inside Syria and in refugee settings – amongst these are trafficking, forced/early marriage, domestic violence and sexual harassment.

The increase in the number of children exposed to protection violations in all settings is also leaving child justice and social services seriously overstretched – both in Syria and host communities. Services providers grapple to respond to a range of new and complex protection concerns – among these are recruitment by armed groups and separated children. In parallel, socio-economic pressure and political/social unrest is undermining the protective role of families and communities leaving children exposed to mounting risks.

*Generating
Evidence*

Timely and accurate information collected through strengthened assessments, monitoring and situation analysis provides the basis for evidence-based advocacy, prevention and response activities. This includes regional monitoring of grave violations perpetrated against children in the context of the Syrian conflict as per security council resolution 1612, as well as improved country-level monitoring of

broader child protection issues exacerbated by the crisis (such as child labour, separation, early marriage).

Syria was included in the Secretary General’s annual report on children and armed conflict in June 2012. This listing automatically results in the implementation of a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the establishment of a United Nations Country Task Force as per Security Council Resolution 1612. However due to serious access and security constraints to monitor the six grave violations inside Syria a regional approach was adopted, whereby testimonies from refugees and key informants are collected in refugee hosting countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq) to complement those collected from inside Syria. After being verified, compiled and analysed information, is used for programmatic and advocacy purposes.

Turkey: Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) are operated by Youth Workers from the Turkish Red Crescent with backgrounds in psychology and education, with the support of Syrian volunteers aged 14-18. Over 500 volunteers are mentored by the Youth Workers and are given opportunities to complete a range of short courses related to the CFS. This approach gives older children the opportunity to meaningfully engage in activities in their communities while developing their skills in decision making and leadership. Progress is tracked through an online monitoring system that links Youth Workers to Turkish Red Crescent and UNICEF. While initially intended as a basic reporting system, it has extended to allow for regular and dynamic engagement where agencies can monitor trends and support youth workers to identify and solve problems, as well as to ensure higher-level action is taken in a timely manner on issues that cannot be resolved by the Youth Workers alone.



Jordan: *ActivityInfo*, a web-based software for activity tracking, was introduced in mid-2013 to meet expanding information management needs following the standardization of the monitoring framework among UNICEF partners. *ActivityInfo* allows child protection partners to input their results online and provides, among other features, an immediate overview of achievements and analysis of trends. In 2014 the roll-out was expanded to all Child Protection actors in the RRP6 managed by UNHCR. *ActivityInfo* has brought about a unified understanding of what the sector is measuring, contributed to the overall quality of programming while also reducing the time spent on monitoring.

Jordan: A recent study on child marriage analysed trends using data from Sharia Court and proposed mitigation strategies aligned to the national legal and child protection frameworks. One of the study's recommendations is the establishment of a panel to assess best interests of the child for marriages involving a boy or girl under the age of 18. In parallel, the establishment of an office of the Sharia Court in Za'atari Refugee Camp has increased the opportunity to direct services to children at risk of early marriage.

**Strengthen
Child Protection
Systems**

Building national child protection systems involves a continuum of interventions from service delivery to policy and legislative reform. More specifically, it involves fostering increased capacity of service providers, ensuring multi-sectoral preventive and response strategies for a broad range of protection issues through standard operating procedures for referral and case management, improving justice for children through police child and family protection units, justice procedures and alternatives to detention, as well as reforming and developing laws and policies related to child protection.

Jordan: *Interagency Standard Operating Procedures for Child Protection and Gender-based Violence (SOPs)* are the result of extensive consultation with national and international stakeholders, including government ministries, UN agencies, international and national NGOs. The SOPs detail the minimum procedures for prevention and response to child protection concerns and are aligned with the national child protection framework. They present comprehensive prevention and response interventions, while indicating which organisations and/or institutions are responsible for actions in the four main response sectors – health, psychosocial support, law/justice and security. National coverage has been ensured through the delegation of roles and responsibilities for all geographical areas, and complemented with the development of local service directories. The SOPs are accompanied by awareness and training programmes for both child protection and non-child protection actors to ensure wide adherence to the SOPs. The SOPs have established a unified approach and understanding among actors on 'what to do' when a child experiences violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Egypt applies a two-pronged approach to support children in detention. This involves a package of individualized support for children in detention, including legal representation, material assistance and regular detention monitoring. At the same time high-level advocacy in partnership with other UN agencies to reform the government's approach to the irregular migration of children.

Lebanon: a systematic and strategic approach has been taken towards strengthening the national child protection system by supporting the establishment of a decentralized national case management system – including the development SOPs, referral pathways, service directories and information management system. To complement and reinforce these tools, a 60 hour child protection training programme for practitioners has been developed and tested with over 150 social workers to date. The course aims to establish a minimum training standard and is mandatory for all practitioners working with government-appointed service providers. This curriculum represents the first dedicated tertiary-level child protection course in Lebanon and has also been incorporated into the Masters level Social Work programme at Saint Joseph University. Phase two of this programme will see the roll-out of a 30 hour course for non-specialised child protection actors, as well as an 8-10 hour course for other sectors involved in child protection. Training will be supported by a mentoring and coaching programme.

Lebanon is piloting a programme for the rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration of children formerly associated with armed parties to the conflict in Syria. Over one year the programme will target 630 high-risk Syrian and Lebanese boys and girls, of which 200 will be children associated with armed parties from Syria. A case management approach will be used to provide an integrated package of services such as psychosocial support, lifeskills (conflict resolution, peacebuilding, vocational training and support finding employment), individual and group counselling, as well as access to specialized services (including health, legal, protection services). The pilot is being implemented by a national NGO with previous experience of working on radicalization, and will document and evaluate experiences to inform the next phase of the programme and possible replication in other settings.

**Child and
Community
Resilience**

Strengthening child, family and community coping mechanisms and self-protection capacities to enable communities to better assess and respond to risks and protect children. This includes psychosocial support for children and care-givers, awareness-raising and social mobilization efforts to reduce distress and combat risks such as early marriage and child recruitment.

Syria is supporting mobile psychosocial support activities for children in areas where it is difficult to establish permanent child friendly spaces due to the prevailing access and security constraints. Mobile teams of animators, comprised of local volunteers, move between IDP shelters and community centres to run activities for 2 hours, 2 times per week over a 2 month period. This approach helps to ensure that children who would otherwise miss out receive regular support.

Lebanon is moving services closer to communities to improve access and responsiveness to local needs. 70% of child friendly spaces are now mobile and offer a continuum of services from awareness raising through to referral to specialized services. This approach gives the flexibility needed to support large and dispersed populations through a broad range of interventions.



Jordan is investing in creating demand for child protection services by bringing together pillars of community resilience and systems building through “Amani” (or “My Safety” in Arabic) - an interagency communication initiative. The campaign includes a flexible menu of messages on child protection and gender-based violence aimed at children, parents and their communities on how to better protect children from different forms of violence. Messages promote protective social norms and access to specialized services. They are aligned with the national child protection and gender-based violence standard operating procedures. Partners are encouraging refugees and Jordanians to join the campaign and arrange activities in their own communities to raise awareness on how to stay safe and what to do if they or someone they know experiences violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation.

*Integrated
Programming*

Strengthening the integration of child protection into health, education, water and sanitation and livelihood strategies ensures that other aid or services support rather than undermine child protection, and harness the capacities of the overall assistance effort to take child protection efforts to scale.

Syria has developed a national school-based risk education programme aimed to mitigate the risks associated with explosive remnants of war. The curriculum is complemented with education kit that includes, among other resources, posters, comic books and a training guide. The kit has been field tested and accredited by the Ministry of Education, and is currently being rolled out in selected public schools.

Syria is introducing a unified basic psychosocial support package that aims to establish a minimum training standard across different sectors. To date master trainers from NGOs, social services and education sectors have been trained, and the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs are committed to rolling out the package in their respective sectors.



Lebanon conducts trainings for healthcare providers (doctors, nurses and midwives) on the clinical management of rape. Close coordination with the health sector is essential for ensuring a survivor-centred and multi-sectoral responses are taken towards sexual violence.

Jordan is jointly implementing a pilot with Education section to address child labour through a small conditional cash transfer programme. Children are required to enroll in education and maintain an 80% attendance record, in return families receive 30JD (based on average earning capacity) and receive transportation to and from school, which was identified as significant barrier to education. In addition, Jordan Country Office has embedded child protection and education skillsets in respective sections to further advance responses.

*Protection
Advocacy*

Protection advocacy involves deliberate efforts, based on demonstrated evidence, to persuade decision makers to adopt policies and take actions to increase the protection and minimise the impact of the crisis on children and women in both Syria and refugee contexts. Given the sensitivity and complexity of issues, the focus is on private advocacy using the MRM as the main platform to advance the protection agenda.

Syria: An Inter-ministerial Committee (IMC) was set up by the government as a coordination mechanism to prevent and respond to grave violations against children and to facilitate the sharing of information on grave violations within the Government and with the UN. The UN Country Taskforce has raised its concerns with the government regarding the scale of violations and the need for prevention mechanisms. This has included advocacy on arbitrary detention of children seen to be associated with armed opposition groups and the recruitment and use of children by armed parties. Advocacy has also been directed at the Syrian Council of Family Affairs to initiate a campaign to prevent violations against children's rights, including the development of a strategy to prevent and end the association of children with armed forces and armed groups and other grave violations against children.