

#NOLOST GENERATION

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THE SYRIA CRISIS

NO LOST GENERATION ADVOCACY BRIEF

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In 2020, nine years after the start of the conflict in Syria, the situation remains dire for millions of children, adolescents and youth. As of end 2019,



more than
**7.5 MILLION SYRIAN
CHILDREN ARE IN NEED**



2.6 MILLION CHILDREN
internally displaced in Syria



2.5 MILLION CHILDREN
registered as refugees in Turkey,
Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt

More recently, the economic shock, the COVID19 pandemic and country measures adopted to contain the spread of the virus, while necessary from a public health perspective, have greatly exacerbated the vulnerabilities these children and young people face in terms of their access to education, health and protection, including civil documentation.

The immediate impact on their wellbeing is already evident, with most education and protection facilities, as well as youth/community centres, including child friendly spaces, closed. Lockdowns, closures and curfews are likely to have far reaching psychosocial and socio-economic impact on Syrian families and host communities now and in the future, including a higher burden for adolescent girls and young women on domestic and caretaking responsibilities, increase of negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and a heightened risk of gender based violence, exclusion from sexual and reproductive services and disparities in access to technology and connectivity.

The “No Lost Generation” (NLG) partners are working through integrated responses to reach Syrian and host communities’ children, adolescents and youth to remain engaged in learning, protected from violence and exploitation and empowered to be agents for positive change in their communities. This approach is anchored on the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and aims to amplify its focus on children, adolescents and youth. While some progress has been made, immense challenges remain and a sustained response to the plight of Syrian children, as well as Palestinian refugee children from Syria, is more necessary than ever. The conflict continues to claim lives, many of whom are children or young people, compromising the future of next generations of children.



INVESTING IN EDUCATION AND LEARNING, MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Thanks to the generosity of host countries, donors and partners, and the unwavering commitment from teachers, parents and students themselves, over 5 million Syrian children remain in learning opportunities on an annual basis inside and outside of Syria, primarily in public schools. However, every year, over one third or nearly 3 million school-aged Syrian children do not attend neither formal nor non-formal education for a combination of reasons, but primarily related to protection concerns or the need to support family income.

The emergence of COVID-19 and the need for remote learning has added an additional layer of complexity to the education system, with a risk that some children, particularly the most vulnerable, will not come back once schools reopen. Refugee and stateless children, adolescents and youth, as well as those from internally displaced and returnee communities, are at great risk of exclusion and miss out on distance/home-based education, in particular children with disabilities and children from families challenged by extreme vulnerabilities, including poverty.

If we remain true to our commitment to “No Lost Generation” we, the international community, need to continue supporting national systems:

- In the host countries, education systems are over-stretched and face their own challenges to ensure equitable access and quality for improved learning outcomes. At the same time, options for graduates to continue their education at higher levels or transit into decent jobs are limited.
- Inside Syria, two thirds of children are in public schools. However, the quality of education is affected by a lack of basic teaching and learning materials, unsafe spaces and teachers who are not trained in addressing learning challenges of children affected by psycho-emotional stress or trauma. If we are to provide Syrian children with the skills to have a better future, we need to reinvest in schools and teachers to rebuild the education system.



PROTECTING CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH FROM VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Within Syria, the crisis has a dramatic impact on children, adolescents and youth. At least 3.3 million children live in areas contaminated by explosive remnants of war. In 2019, the UN verified 2,638 grave violations across 12 of Syria’s governorates. These numbers are not indicative of the overall scale or scope of grave violations against children in Syria in 2019, but rather of the number of grave violations it was possible for the UN to capture and verify through primary sources. Between January 2019 and March 2020 the UN verified: 1,102 children killed and 737 maimed, of which 155 children killed and 205 children maimed as a result of explosive remnants of war; 1,019 children recruited and used by armed actors (17% of them were below age 15 and 98% were in a combat role); 218 children detained for alleged association with opposing parties to the conflict; 198 attacks on schools, 122 attacks on hospitals and 50 attacks on WASH facilities.

The situation of foreign and Syrian children in North East Syria with alleged affiliation to armed groups including Da’esh/ ISIL remains a major concern. There are 27,500 foreign children living in closed camps managed by the de facto Self-Administration in North East Syria (19,500 Iraqi children and 8,000 children from an estimated 60 nationalities – 90 per cent of those children are under 12). According to recent information, around 800 of the concerned children were successfully repatriated to their countries of origin, further stressing the need for joint efforts of Member States to explore repatriation of these children.

In neighbouring countries, social and economic insecurity and lack of documentation continue to exacerbate the protection risks for Syrian refugees. Child marriage rates have more than doubled among Syrian refugee adolescent girls since the onset of the conflict (for example, child marriage increased from 12 per cent to 37 per cent in Jordan between 2012 and 2019). In some countries, nearly half of refugee households reportedly relied on the income generated by a child to meet basic needs. Without documents, refugee children, adolescents and youth may be at increased risk of family separation, trafficking and illegal adoption, as well as risk of statelessness. Female-headed households face additional vulnerabilities and rely on child labour at twice the rate of male-headed households, while families with children with disabilities live in isolation exposed to additional risks like stigma, exploitation and abuse. Gender-based violence continues to impact the lives of Syrian girls, especially adolescent girls, throughout the country, while boys are also affected. Nearly 80 per cent of Syrian refugee households in Jordan and nearly all in Lebanon rely on some form of negative coping mechanism including early marriage and child labor.

Although the number of children with COVID-19 remains very small, there is no question that the pandemic is having a serious impact on children. It is safe to say that every single child in the region has been impacted one way or another by the strict measures to control the spread of the virus. The impact has been double for vulnerable children including Syrian. This is manifested in emotional

distress, particularly during prolonged periods of school closure and restricted movement, with increased parental anxieties and frustrations caused by social isolation and fears around livelihoods and financial difficulties, which exacerbate and increase protection risks within the family.

In host countries, NLG partners continue to support governments to enhance child protection by increasing access to civil status documentation and preventing statelessness, reducing the percentage of Syrian refugee children born in the region each year without any form of

identity documents (either a birth certificate or medical birth notification), from approximately 35 per cent in 2012 to 3.3 per cent in 2019. Continued support to strengthen quality, inclusiveness and accessibility of national child protection systems and legal frameworks in host countries is ongoing, while maintaining specialized case management that put the best interests of the child at the helm. Cash-based activities continue to expand to support livelihoods and access to basic services, psychosocial support as well as specialized services to the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.



CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH'S MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING (MHPSS)

The NLG-MHPSS Task Force undertook a two-phased, quantitative and qualitative mapping of MHPSS programmes targeting children, adolescents and youth and their parents/caregivers in Syria and host countries. The COVID-19 outbreak has increased the levels of stress and anxiety among children and adults, and has had a great impact on adolescents who feel isolated, as they have seen their connections with peers, so important at this age of transition, even more limited and curtailed than before the pandemic. The provision of age and gender appropriate MHPSS services has become even more crucial for people/communities to adapt and cope with the situation.

Fear, worry and stress is commonplace among children, adolescents and young people. Deprived from the traditional community support they enjoyed back home, it has led to significant long-term mental health and psychosocial consequences among families. Children, adolescents and youth were identified as

particularly at risk regarding MHPSS concerns. As part of the COVID-19 response, although psychosocial group activities were interrupted, NLG partners aimed at maintaining continuity of comprehensive care for refugee children and adolescents with pre-existing mental health conditions through innovative remote modalities, including: tele-consultations with mental health experts; peer support through phone or internet calls, mobile applications and social media; training of community workers on Psychological First Aid for remote support; and cooperation with communities to include clear messaging on Psychological First Aid for children and adolescents (including adapting to feelings, positive coping strategies, parenting skills, and psychoeducation for children care givers).



ADOLESCENTS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Youth unemployment in the MENA region continues to be the highest in the world, at 29.4 per cent in Northern Africa and 24.7 per cent in the Arab States, with the unemployment rate among conflict affected youth being much higher than the average. Female youth unemployment in MENA (ages 15-24) stands at a staggering 42.8 per cent in 2019. Meaningful engagement of youth, as well as continued essential services to adolescents (in education/skills, health, protection) is key to ensure stable recovery and prevent negative coping strategies that could increase tensions or vulnerabilities and might lead to new displacement. In order to achieve durable solutions, inclusive access for refugees and host communities to decent work (jobs and self-employment/entrepreneurship) will be needed.

COVID 19 has caused a triple shock for young people, including disruption of education and training, job losses and collapse of businesses and increased obstacles to find work. This situation needs to be addressed in order to prevent progress from being reversed.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The Syria conflict continues to affect the rights of millions of children, adolescents and youth within the country and drive one of the largest refugee crises in the world. Host countries continue to demonstrate outstanding generosity to Syrian refugees as they have done for nearly 10 years now. Refugee families have however become increasingly vulnerable. Host communities have been impacted by the crisis owing to challenging social and economic conditions, particularly among youth. Therefore, NLG partners are calling upon all concerned stakeholders to:

IN THE AREA OF EDUCATION

1. Build on the COVID19 experience towards inclusive and flexible education systems that provide quality and relevance for all, and that yield better learning results. Allow the integration of refugee, internally displaced and returnee populations within the formal systems, better crisis planning for a potential second wave, expansion of multiple pathways to education that ensure all vulnerable children and youth are reached and develop foundation, life and technical skills for further learning, employment, active citizenship and empowerment. Invest in different modalities of education content dissemination (distance education, education TV, radio and online/offline platforms) to ensure that all children have continued access to quality education content anywhere, anytime.
2. Have an inclusive school return. Following respective in-country announcements in host countries and inside Syria to re-open schools, support should target Syrian refugees and vulnerable children from communities, and remove socio-economic barriers to participation at household level, by expanding social protection schemes linked to national systems (including school-feeding programmes and transportation support) to provide access to education, training and decent livelihoods opportunities and alleviate the direct, indirect and opportunity costs of education for children, youth and families. More needs to be done to reach the most vulnerable amongst them—particularly adolescent boys and girls, children with disabilities, girls who married under the age of 18 and adolescent mothers. Enrolment and retention help to mitigate risks such as child labour and child marriage, while providing children, adolescents and young people with a stronger foundation for economic security and empowerment over the long term.
3. Amplifying the protective value of education, guarantee safe and protective learning spaces by:
 - a. Inside Syria, continue to engage with parties to the conflict and those who have influence over them to halt all attacks on education and learning facilities and implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict. Engage with all parties to the conflict to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration;
 - b. Learning spaces in formal and non-formal settings to be safe for children (including rehabilitation of school infrastructure), eliminating violence, including SGBV and bullying, and the use of corporal violence, inter alia, through 'zero tolerance' policies and the training of education personnel to promote positive pathways to discipline and learning. Explore lessons learnt from Lebanon and Jordan to replicate in other countries;
 - c. Leverage schools as platforms to provide education support and/or school feeding programmes to improve school attendance and retention.
 - d. Continue to integrate mental health and psychosocial support programmes as part of the formal and non-formal education processes to benefit affected children and parents;
 - e. Prepare teachers to address the diversified learning and socio-emotional needs of Syrian children, particularly in light of COVID19. Use also the Global Guidance for the global framework for reopening schools, including concerns regarding safety of physical space.
4. Early childhood development: Policymakers, partners, donors and other stakeholders to support and promote ECD initiatives at home, in schools, health clinics, and communities and address ECD as a humanitarian need but with a long-term development mindset that fosters innovative policy, strategy and action plans. If we continue to ignore the needs of the youngest children now, we risk a generation unprepared to enter school, off track for meeting important milestones, and that will achieve lower health outcomes.

IN CHILD PROTECTION

5. Protect access to safety in countries of asylum for children and families in need of international protection, and support refugees' access to a sustainable solution to their displacement, including the right to return to their home country voluntarily, in safety and dignity, and be always guided by the best interest principle in all decisions affecting children, including family reunification and non-separation.
6. Continue to support crisis affected and refugee-hosting countries so that children enjoy their right to a legal identity, which includes the right to be registered at birth and to have a name, a nationality and family relations.
7. Governments and humanitarian partners to ensure sustained, multi-sectoral, age and gender-sensitive programmes, including access to basic needs for vulnerable families through livelihoods, food assistance, cash and / or social protection measures in order to eliminate negative coping mechanisms in the face of poverty, in particular, child marriage and child labour. Support awareness raising initiatives with parents and children, including adolescents, on the risks associated with child marriage and the negative long-term impact it has on the lives of both the adolescent wife and the children resulting from early pregnancy. Strengthen GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response at the country-level and bring national legal frameworks in line with international law.
8. Engage with Member States in the safe and voluntary repatriation of children and their mothers/ recognized caregivers from North East Syria to their countries of origin, keeping their best interest at the center of any decision.
9. Step up efforts to conduct Explosive Ordnance Risk Education within Syria, reaching all population at risk and strengthening victim assistance.
10. All parties to the conflict involved in child recruitment put an end to this grave violation of their rights. Listed parties should work with the UN in developing action plans for the release of children associate to those armed forces and groups and plan their reintegration while committing to actions to prevent new recruitments.
11. Strengthen systems for the protection of children from violence, exploitation and abuse, including access to effective prevention, response and referral systems

IN MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

12. Promote holistic, multi-layered, MHPSS interventions focusing on children, youth and adolescents, including parents/care givers' relationships and psychosocial wellbeing. Generate more age and gender disaggregated data to help identify specific needs of adolescents and youth, and provide age and gender-sensitive interventions to their mental health and psychosocial well-being.

13. Integrate psychosocial support in formal and non-formal education services - especially as governments prepare to re-open schools and other learning sites that have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic- by building capacities of teachers, counsellors, and care-workers to deliver PSS as an integral component of the curriculum.
14. Advocate for longer-term investments to undertake research, as well as longer-term capacity development plans. These two areas can contribute to improving the quality of service delivery and at the same time, contribute to developing more sustainable interventions.

IN ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

15. Create space for the active engagement and involvement of children and young people, facilitating their participation in decision-making through mechanisms and platforms that give them a voice and allow them to influence discussions on barriers, challenges and solutions.
16. Invest in an enabling environment, partnerships and collaborations to increase employment opportunities and life skills development for both refugee and host community youth and to create pathways to link young people with decent work (jobs and self-employment/entrepreneurship, including investments in digital jobs and digital skills).

FINALLY, WE CALL FOR:

17. An end to the conflict in Syria, for as long as there is no peace, the suffering of children will continue, and no lasting solutions will be in place. Urge all parties to protect not only children, but the civilian infrastructure that children and their families need — schools, hospitals and water systems.
18. The international community to bolster its support to children, adolescents and youth, including more predictable and flexible funding to protect and secure durable solutions for Syrian children in their country and in host countries, whether they stay or exercise their right to return, including investments in strengthening national education, child protection and social protection systems.

For more information

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To find out more about No Lost Generation, please visit: www.nolostgeneration.org.