



CHILD PROTECTION ASSESSMENT

REPORT

SYRIA

DECEMBER 2015

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Acronyms

AoO	Area of Origin
CPRA	Child Protection Rapid Assessment Tool
DO	Direct Observation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WOSA	Whole of Syria Assessment

Introduction

The situation in Syria has significantly deteriorated in 2015 and it is estimated that upwards of 250,000 people have been killed since the conflict began. An estimated 13.5 million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, including 4.49 million in hard to reach areas and some 360,000 in besieged areas. A significant proportion of those in need are children now estimated at 6 million (2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview). Life for children in Syria is unpredictable and extremely dangerous with indiscriminate attacks on densely populated areas becoming, more and more, a defining feature of this conflict with basic infrastructure such as schools, playgrounds, hospitals markets being attacked. In this context children are increasingly exposed to a growing number of grave violations and protection concerns such as killing and maiming, recruitment and use by armed groups, child labor, child marriage, domestic violence, family separation, explosive threats, and lack of birth registration. Daily exposure to violence, displacement and lack or inadequate access to basic services and commodities continue to expose children to high levels of psychosocial distress of which the consequences are likely to be long term.

In order to better understand the main child protection concerns and issues affecting children in Syria, the Child Protection Sub Cluster in Turkey agreed on the need to implement an assessment to inform responses, planning, advocacy and resource mobilization. An interagency steering committee was formed to oversee the design and implementation of the assessment. A number of agencies contributed to the realization of this report, including through expertise and staff contributions for data collection, analysis, interpretation and the review of reports.

This report, issued by the Child Protection Sub-cluster in Turkey, presents the main findings of a series of Child Protection data collection initiatives undertaken in the second half of 2015. Graphs within the report present primary information gathered through Key Informants Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) in selected affected communities. Qualitative information presented in the report is a synthesis of findings from two phases of data collection. Quotes are from FDGs implemented as part of the 2015 Whole of Syria Assessment and have been included in order to give a voice to children and their caregivers on the protection issues they face in their daily lives inside Syria.

Assessment Background

Purpose of the Assessment

This report was commissioned by UNICEF Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Office to synthesize a series of child protection data collective initiatives undertaken in the second half of 2015, namely a comprehensive Child Protection assessment in Northern Syria led by an independent researcher which was subsequently complemented with data collected through an established network of key informants across the country. These initiatives had the aim of improving the understanding of child protection issues inside Syria, and informing programming, advocacy, and resource mobilization efforts among child protection actors involved in the humanitarian response inside Syria.

Specific objectives of the assessment included:

- To determine the scale of the needs and protection risks for children affected by conflict in Syria.
- Determine potential and actual capacities existing on the ground to respond to the existing risks and needs.

This work was spearheaded by UNICEF MENA Regional Office in close consultation with the Child Protection Sub-cluster in southern Turkey. Furthermore, REACH supported the design of the methodology, data collection and analysis at different stages of the data collection processes due to their expertise in conducting humanitarian assessments, not only inside Syria, but also in the wider MENA region.

Scope of the Assessment

UNICEF, international NGOs and Syrian NGOs with child protection expertise working in Northern Syria, formed an Interagency Steering Committee to oversee the design and implementation of this assessment. Based on their understanding of the situation, and informed by secondary data review, the Steering Committee focused on specific thematic areas: separation of children from their caregivers, physical danger and violence against children, worst forms of child labor, association of children with armed groups, sexual violence, child marriage, psychosocial distress and mental disorders, and access to information and services from the communities.

Taking into account the operational challenges in Syria, mainly access, security and safety constraints, data collection was undertaken in selected accessible locations only. Notwithstanding this limitation, complementary data collection in additional areas was undertaken at a subsequent phase of the assessment, as a way to expand the geographical coverage and enrich the overall analysis.

Overview of Methodology

The assessment is primarily of a qualitative nature. Non-probability methods were used in designing the sample and determining the sampling quota. The assessment applied a purposive sampling criteria. This assessment was divided in two phases, for which different methodologies were used:

Phase I: Child Protection Rapid Assessment (CPRA) Tool and Focus Group Discussions

For this initial phase, the assessment made use of the Child Protection Rapid Assessment (CPRA) Tool in combination with Focus Group Discussions (FGD) in selected accessible locations inside Syria. The tool was reviewed and modified to assure it was context-specific.

The CPRA tool included two types of assessment tools - Direct Observation (DO) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) - that were compiled at the field level into Site Reports (SR) by the team leaders. These SRs provided an initial field-level analysis that was later analyzed together with the information of all sites assessed.

A total number of 56 sites¹ were assessed by using the CPRA tool in the selected locations in Northern Syria. These locations were purposely sampled based on accessibility and reach of operational partners. To complement information gathered through the CPRA tool, 48 Focus Group Discussions took place in Al-Hasakeh, Aleppo, Idleb, and Lattakia governorates, with young male and females aged between 12 and 18 years old.

Table 1 : Number of communities assessed in Phase I

Geographical coverage	Number of communities assessed ²	Number of Focus Group Discussions
Al Hasakeh	13	16
Aleppo	10	8
Hama	9	n/a
Idleb	13	14
Lattakia	6	9

Phase II – Area of Origin (AoO) ³– Key Informant Questionnaire

During the second stage of the assessment, additional data collection was undertaken to address some of the information and coverage gaps identified during the first phase and enrich the analysis. Within the framework of a well-established monthly data collection process implemented by REACH inside Syria, additional information on specific child protection indicators (related still to phase I), was collected in a total of 188 communities, spread out throughout the country.

A Key Informant (KI) questionnaire at the community level was used to collect information mainly on the following child protection related issues: behavioral changes of children and caregivers, safety and dignity concerns, and coping strategies.

The key findings presented here are based on an analysis of data collected during the two phases of the assessment that is data from Phase 1 based on the CPRA tool and the FGD and data from Phase 2 based on the AoO data collection. Specific reference to the different data sets which form the basis of the analysis is made throughout the report, as relevant. For more details on the methodology and data collection, see Annex 1.

Table 2: Number of communities assessed in Phase II

Geographical coverage	Number of communities assessed
Aleppo	4
Al-Hasakeh	4
Ar-Raqqa	3
As-Sweida	6

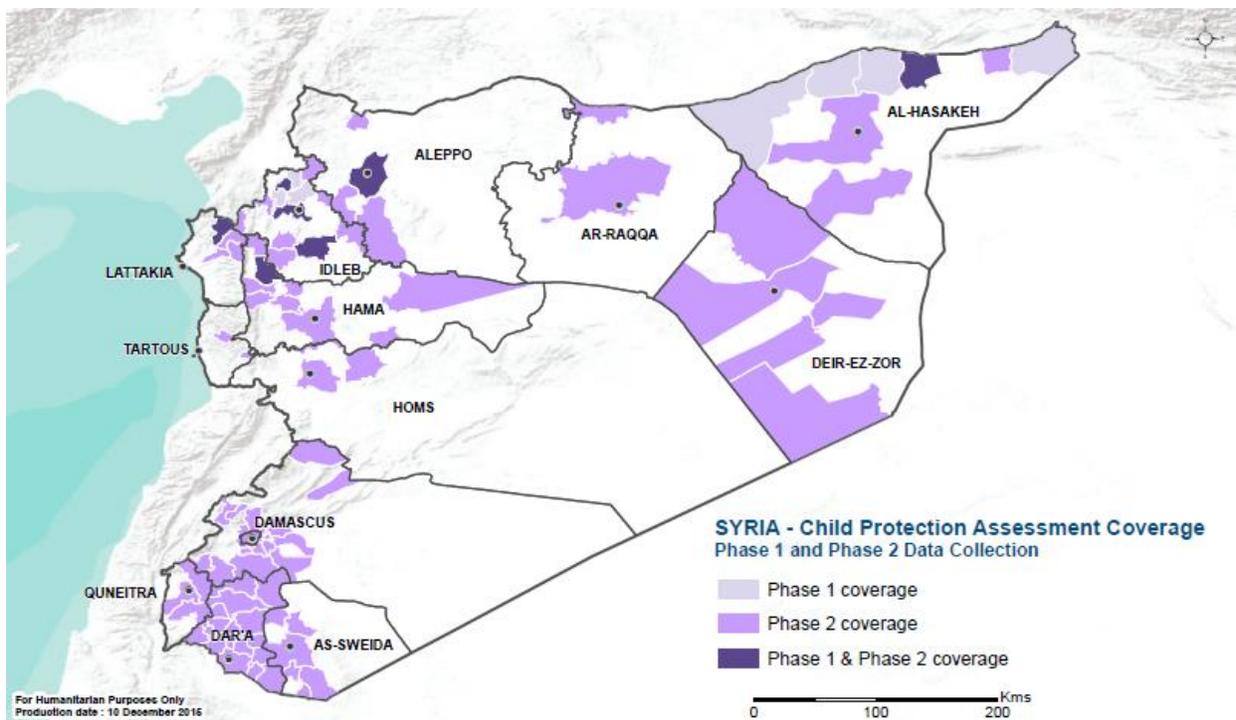
¹ The term site in this assessment is equivalent to one community assessed within one sub district.

² Some results were not received and have not been included in the subsequent analysis.

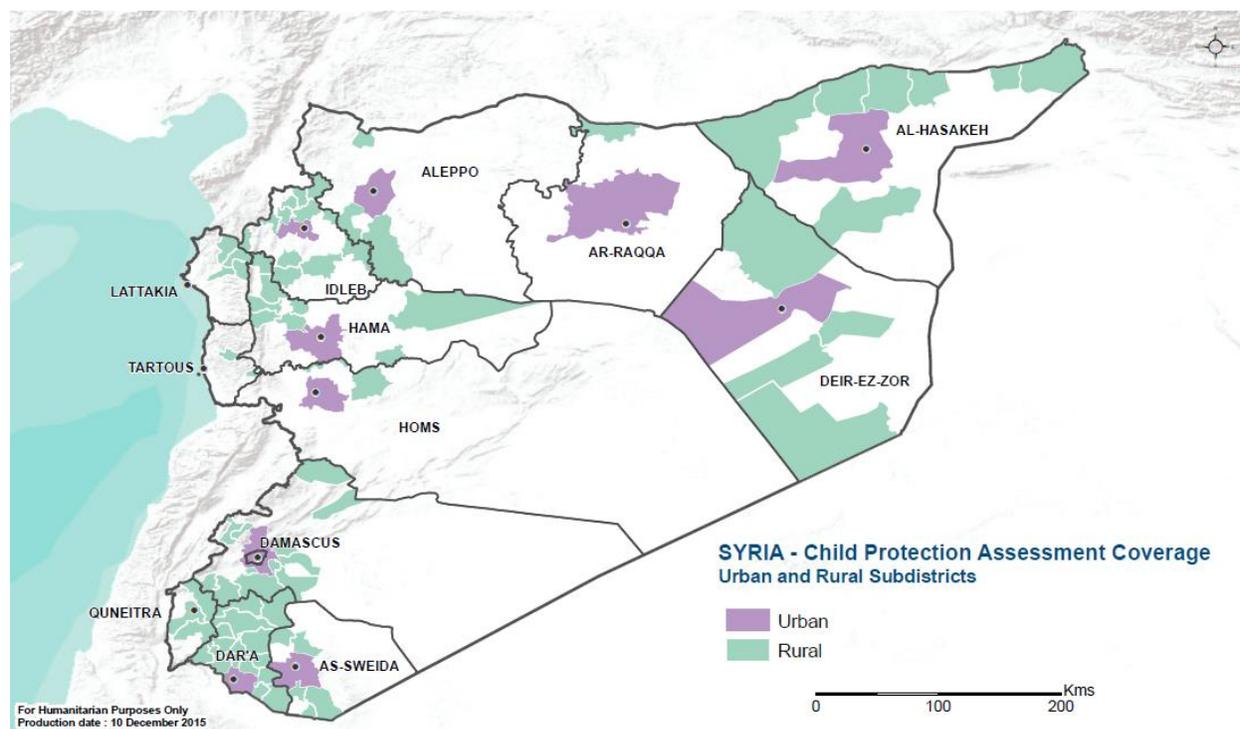
³ Area of Origin (AoO) is a project that is used on a monthly basis to collect data on humanitarian needs inside Syria. This project has been implemented by REACH since 2012 and collects information on a village level of specific communities inside Syria.

Damascus	6
Dar'a	57
Deir-ez-Zor	15
Hama	12
Homs	4
Idleb	10
Lattakia	12
Quneitra	10
Rural Damascus	43
Tartous	2

Map 1: Location of assessed sub districts



Map 2 : Assessed locations by urban and rural



Secondary Data Review

A comprehensive secondary data review was conducted during April 2015. The desk review was built upon an existent humanitarian literature focused on child protection issues in Syria, periodically updated between February 2013 and May 2014. The updated document finalized in April outlined the main protection risks and concerns before and after the conflict, and contributed to the identification of information gaps that were later addressed through the use of the CPRA, FGDs, and AoO data collection techniques. The desk review report is available upon request and forms an integral part of this assessment.

Challenges and Limitations

The findings of the assessment are primarily based on KI interviews, therefore it is important to bear in mind that the information collected is based on the perceptions of those who have been identified by the community and the enumerators to be the best placed to provide the relevant information. In addition, some specific potential biases should be considered, such as, cultural perceptions of childhood, and gender roles around issues like child recruitment, child labour or child marriage in Syria. There are additional limitations based on the use of the CPRA methodology - a tool that was initially designed to be used for a rapid assessment at the onset of a crisis. In this respect, FGD questionnaires were designed to complement the data collected by the KI and the SR tools.

Security constraints also posed challenges throughout the whole assessment process, mainly with regards to: restricting access to initially intended assessment sites due to flare-ups in the conflict; gathering protection sensitive information in which respondents and communities could potentially be identified; and changes on data collection plans to adjust to the ongoing conflict in particularly conflict active areas at the time of the assessment, such as Idlib and Aleppo city. Periodic closures of the border between Turkey and Syria added logistical constraints that negatively

impacted on the original plans to train assessors inside Turkey. As a result, the roll out training of enumerators was eventually conducted inside Syria under more limited supervision. An inability to ensure a gender balance in the assessment teams, to promote full representation of the views of women and girls, as well as resistance in some locations (particularly in Hama) to having outsiders conduct discussion groups with girls – most likely had an impact on this assessment.

The overall assessment methodology aimed to limit potential biases through, for instance, the development of a carefully planned sampling strategy, the use of a well-structured questionnaire, the training of surveyors on interviewing techniques, and the use of the FGDs and secondary data review to triangulate as much as possible data and fill information gaps.

The aim of this qualitative assessment was to provide information that was sufficiently robust to inform planning, programming, and advocacy on child protection issues. This assessment is based on qualitative information on targeted locations, and therefore it is not possible to use this data to speak on behalf of the entire affected population inside Syria in any statistically significant terms.

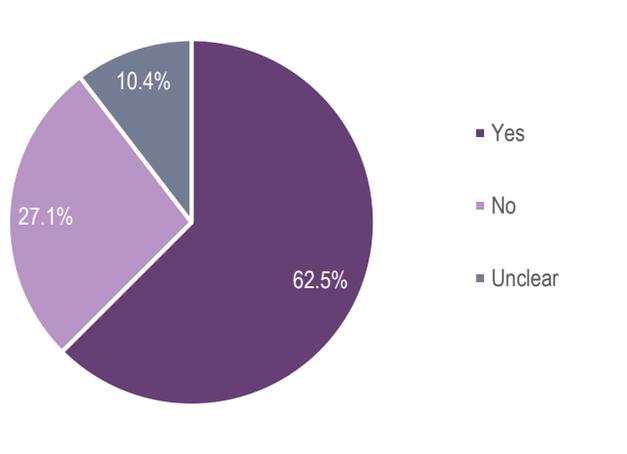
Key Assessment Findings

Perceptions of childhood

- There was considerable diversity among respondents regarding the age that marks the end of childhood, with differences found between and even within communities.
- Girls were generally believed to have reached maturity at a younger age than boys.
- More than twice as many focus groups of adolescents said they felt there was a difference in the ages at which boys and girls reached adulthood.

For most key informants childhood ends before the age of 18. Some Key informants said childhood ends as early as age 12. **A large cluster said it ends between ages 14 and 16 years with very few stating that childhood extends to 17 or 18 years. In focus group discussions 62.5% of participants believed there is a difference between the ages when boys and girls reach adulthood, with a larger majority of male groups than female making the distinction on when boys and girls reach adulthood.** 64%, (21 of 33 boys' groups), mentioned there is a difference, compared with 57%, (eight of 14 girls' groups). Almost half of the male focus groups, ten out of 21 (48%), reported that girls growing up faster was the main reason for such a difference. The remaining 11 groups attributed the difference to family traditions linked to either girls' responsibilities at home (seven groups) or child marriage (three groups). There were no significant trends noted in the reasons offered by girls' groups as each group (with one exception) suggested different reasons.

Figure 1 : Focus Group Perceptions on whether there is a difference between the ages when boys and girls reach adulthood



Physical safety

Overall, key informants reported that child labour – and particularly engagement of children in harsh or dangerous work – increased in the past year in the assessed locations.

- Bombardment was overwhelmingly the most-mentioned cause of injury or death of children, followed by (in decreasing order): worst forms of child work-related accident; hard work; car accidents; landmines and unexploded ordnance, and “environmental risks” external to the home.

- Adolescents, particularly boys, viewed recruitment by armed groups as one of the most significant threats they faced. Half of all sites reported that children from their communities had been working with armed groups.
- Where information on schools was available, there was a correlation between arrest/detention as a threat and a lack of functioning education services.

Arbitrary detention and abduction

Arbitrary detention was assessed as a cause of separation, as a cause of death or injury among children, and as a potential stressor for girls and boys, mainly in al-Hasakeh, where 46% of the assessed sites⁴ showed it as one of the main causes of death or injury to children, and 13% of sites listed it as one of the causes of separation of children from caregivers in the previous 12 months.⁵

Kidnapping or abduction was also mentioned as a source of stress for children. **14% of all sites indicated detention/kidnapping as a source of stress for girls⁶ while less than 10% of all sites mentioned it for boys.** Data points to a strong relationship between sites reporting arbitrary detention or abduction and recruitment by armed groups for boys, although this was not the case for girls.⁷ Al-Hasakeh was the only governorate where sites assessed listed arbitrary detention among the main causes of stress for children.⁸ Adolescents themselves only mentioned arrest, arbitrary detention, or kidnapping among the threats they faced infrequently.

Detention was mentioned more frequently – and with a broader representation of governorates – by respondents in the Phase II (Area of Origin) research. It was the second most-frequently mentioned threat facing children’s safety and dignity, named by almost a quarter of all communities assessed (five communities in Hama, four in Idleb and one in Lattakia, accounting for 24% of all 188 surveyed communities).

Closely related to arbitrary detention by armed groups, is their harassment of children and other civilians. **Of the five communities that listed harassment among the main threats to children, four were located in Idleb (three of these four had also listed arrest as a threat) and one in Hama. Taken together, these two threats were identified by a total of 12 communities.**⁹ It is notable that only one of those 12 locations had all schools functioning in the previous month of the assessment, and primary schools were reported as functioning in only three locations. No conclusions on cause and effect can be drawn from what is a relatively small sample, however this still may indicate a significant risk factor that by no longer spending a large part of each day in a protective school environment, children may face greater exposure to the risk of arrest/detention and harassment.

As shown below, concerns such as arrest and detention, as well as presence of landmines and unexploded ordnances (discussed below), are two of the main safety and dignity concerns reported during Phase I of this research.

⁴ Five of the 11 sites in al-Hasakeh that responded to the question listed arbitrary detention. Other than that, it was only listed by one site, in Idleb, making the total number of mentions six (from a possible 53 sites, that is, 11% of the total).

⁵ That is, it was reported by four sites. Aleppo was the only other governorate to report this at all, with just three of 10 sites mentioning it. Arbitrary detention was mentioned seven times in all, that is, by 13% of the possible 56 sites.

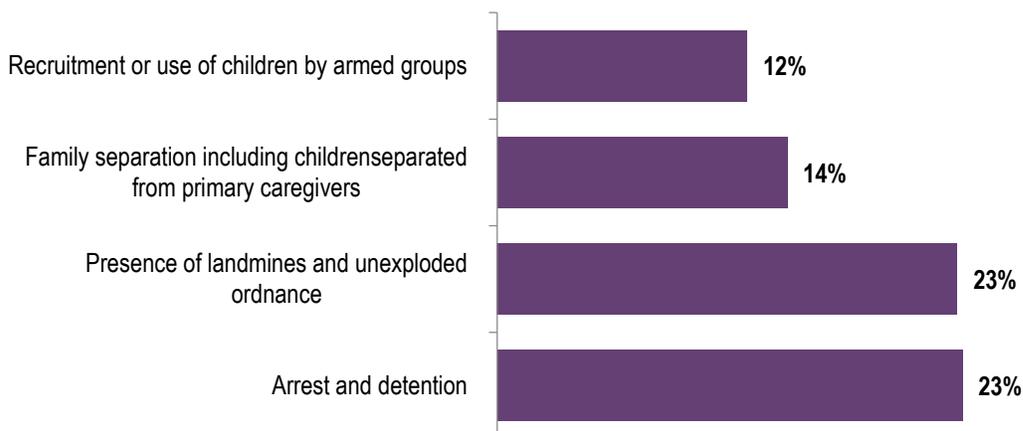
⁶ That is, by seven of 51 sites. The actual number of combined mentions is eight, but one site mentioned both arbitrary detention as well as abduction/kidnapping, so the number of sites is only seven. There was one mention of abduction from Lattakia and another from Idleb. The rest were al-Hasakeh.

⁷ All but one of the five sites listing arbitrary detention or abduction as a stressor for boys also mentioned recruitment by armed groups. This was only the case for one site in relation to girls.

⁸ The response was the same when asked about girls and boys: mentioned each time by three sites (two of which said it was a cause of stress for both boys and girls – so the total number of sites listing this at least once is four, or 31% of sites in al-Hasakeh, and just 7% of the overall total 56 sites).

⁹ Twelve of a possible 42 communities, or 29%. Ten (24% of the total) mentioned arrest or detention, and five (12%) mentioned harassment. There are three communities that mentioned both.

Figure 2: Reported Safety concerns faced by children during Phase I



Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War

Landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) were the most frequently mentioned category of threat in the Phase II research, especially in the governorate of Hama.¹⁰ In Phase I, landmines and explosive remnants of war were less frequently mentioned (by about one fifth of sites), and the strongest representation also came also from Hama.¹¹ However, this category of threat was not mentioned in any of the discussion groups staged with adolescents.

*“They exploded in the hands of children many times”
(WOSA FGD: Aleppo)*

The risk of death or injury to children from these weapons is high

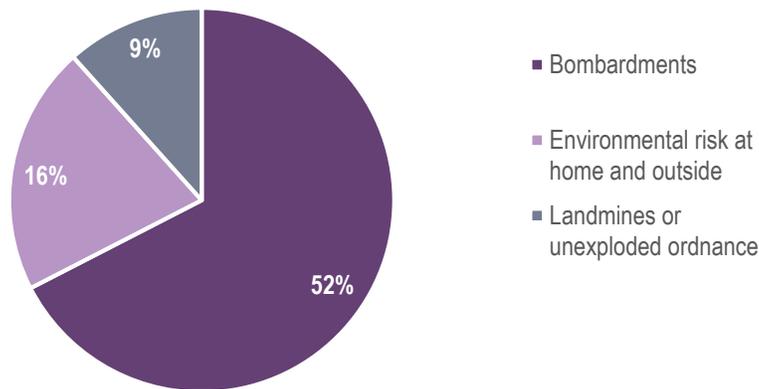
and will persist long after the conflict ends. The risk of the appeal of intriguing shapes and colors for children is well documented. In addition, hazardous materials hidden under collapsed buildings pose a significant risk to children and communities at large as they clear away rubble, and displaced persons returning to their homes may have no way of knowing that their travel routes and/or neighborhoods are littered with lethal unexposed ordnance. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas can not only present a significant risk of killing and maiming but can also prevent children from accessing healthcare and education.

*“Children play with bullets and remnants of shelling instead of children’s games”
(WOSA FGD: Aleppo)*

¹⁰ In Hama, mines/UXO were mentioned by five out of 12 communities (42%); in Idleb and Lattakia three each (30% and 25%, respectively); and in al-Hasakeh, in one (25%). The combined total of 12 mentions represents 29% of the possible total.

¹¹ This threat was mentioned by 11 of the 53 sites that provided a list of existing risks to children’s lives and safety (21%). Five of 10 sites in Hama (with strong frequency per site) listed this; three (of 16) in Idleb and two (of six) in Lattakia and one in Aleppo.

Figure 3 : Communities perception of the existing risks that can lead to death or injury of children in this community



Traffic accidents

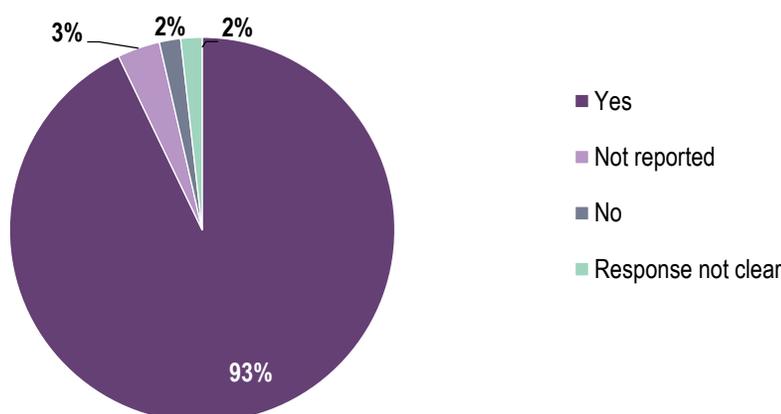
Not all of the threats facing children, in locations covered in the assessment, are a direct consequence of the conflict. **In fact, the second most-often mentioned cause of physical injury or death to children was car accidents.** This was mentioned in a quarter of all sites and in Lattakia it was mentioned by an overwhelming 13 of 16 sites (83 % of the total for the governorate). Unintentional injuries (e.g. road traffic injuries, drowning and fire-related burns) are a leading cause of death among children. In an emergency, these “ordinary risks” can pose greater threats of long-term or permanent injury due to the disruption of basic health and rehabilitation services.

Psychosocial impact of the conflict

- Unwillingness to go to school is the first main reported behavior change in children in all areas assessed. This is a symptom of the stress and physical danger they face, and also results in disrupted and potentially incomplete education, higher likelihood of early marriage, recruitment by armed groups, and reduced future opportunities among others.
- The vast majority of responses indicate that there are changes in the behaviors and attitudes of girls, boys and the adults responsible for their care, which suggests that the harm experienced by the affected population in this protracted armed conflict is ongoing and cumulative.
- Key informants reported that children had committed acts of violence against other children in nearly half the sites assessed.
- Caregivers are not immune to the stresses of living in an armed conflict. Key Informants in almost two thirds of sites reported that over the past year, parents and caregivers had become less attentive to the needs of children in their care.

Key informants reported that the conflict itself, as well as its related consequences in daily life, have had significant psychological and emotional impacts on children ties, manifesting as changes in behavior. **The response rate to this series of questions was extremely strong at 96 %, with a clear 52 of 56 sites (93 %) reporting that changes in children’s behavior had been observed in the past year.** Results from the Phase II research, which asked about changes since the start of the conflict, rather than the past year, add weight to this conclusion. Only Key informants from four communities out of the 42 that were included in Phase I, reported that there had been no observable change in children’s behavior.

Figure 4: Households reporting that they have notices a change in children’s behavior in the previous 12 months



Causes of stress – girls

The first main cause of stress among girls in the past 12 months reported by key informants were attacks and feeling unsafe, mentioned in 27 sites each (53% of all sites that were asked the question). Apart from these two responses mentioned in all five governorates other frequently reported causes of stress were a **lack of food** and **not being able to return home**.

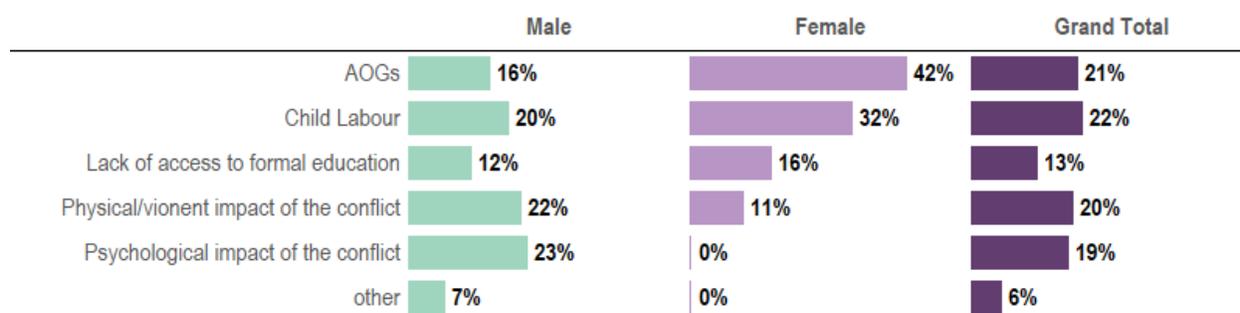
Additional causes of stress for girls included separation from family and friends (two and five mentions respectively), tensions within the family (in eight sites), lack of shelter and loss of belongings (six mentions each), not being able to return to school and a lack of prospects for the future (five and two mentions, respectively). In al-Hasakeh alone, arbitrary detention was mentioned three times, where kidnappings and abductions were also mentioned in four sites. Other causes of stress, such as demands of work, having to travel far from home for work, and recruitment were mentioned less frequently.

Causes of stress - boys

The main causes of stress for boys in the past 12 months were found to be diverse. But only three causes of stress were mentioned in every governorate assessed, despite more than 20 different causes being reported overall. **Three out of the four most-frequently mentioned causes of stress identified were: attacks (mentioned in 37 out of 56 sites, or 66 %), feeling unsafe (mentioned in 30 sites, or 54 %) and lack of food (16 sites, or 29 %)**. Not being able to return home was mentioned as frequently as lack of food (16 sites, 29 %) across all sites, except for key informants interviewed in Hama governorate.

Additionally, key informants reported less common causes of stress, such as: separation from friends (nine sites, 16%), separation from family (seven sites, 13%); lack of shelter (seven sites); recruitment by armed groups (six sites, or 11%); loss of possessions (five sites, or 9%); not being able to return to school, and arbitrary detention (each mentioned by three sites, 5%); having to go far from home for work, the threat of kidnapping or abduction, nightmares or distressing memories (each mentioned by two sites, accounting for 4 % each).

Figure 5: The worst reported risks for boys



Sources of support

Key informants reported overall that a girl's mother was her best source of support in times of stress (46 of 56 sites, (82 % of mentions). The father role was reported in second place, mentioned in 14 sites, (a quarter of the total sites) followed by a girl's peer group (15 mentions). The fourth most reported were siblings and school teachers (10 and nine mentions, respectively) followed by other relatives (four mentions). Local authorities, religious leaders and social workers were mentioned only in a few cases.

Overall, key informants also reported that boys would turn to both their parents for support when stress arises in the current context. In comparison to girls, there was a relatively small difference in the number of sites that specified fathers instead of mothers as the best providers of support for their sons.

Behavior changes observed in children

A wide range of behavioral changes were reported among girls, ranging in frequency from unwillingness to go to school (17 sites, or 30 % of all sites), girls becoming withdrawn and isolating themselves (16 sites, or 29 %), and unusual crying or screaming (15 sites, or 27 %). Anti-social behavior, reduced willingness to help with family, nightmares and disturbed sleep, and a desire to join armed groups were also reported, but to a lesser extent. Overall, the results emerging here are best seen as an indication of the breadth of behavior changes observed rather than as a concrete indication of what kinds of behaviors became more common.

A wider range of behavioral changes were identified among boys. **The most mentioned behavioral change among boys was unwillingness to go to school (mentioned by 18 of 52 sites, or 35% of the total), and the only response recorded in every governorate assessed.** This was followed by **more aggressive behavior**, reported in all governorates except Hama, in 14 sites out of 52 (27%). Other behavioral changes, such as antisocial behavior, criminal activity, becoming withdrawn and isolated, sleep disturbances, self-harm, substance abuse, crying and screaming were all mentioned, but in a smaller number of sites. Violence against younger children than themselves and a desire to join armed groups were mentioned in relatively small numbers of sites, but in each case were concentrated in al-Hasakeh, Aleppo and Idlib governorates. As it was reported among girls, there were also positive changes reported by key informants in a small numbers of sites, such as regular attendance at school (four sites) and being more helpful to parents (eight sites).

Although changes reported in the Phase II data collection were not disaggregated by sex, the general pattern strongly reflects the combined picture obtained through the overall key informant interviews, with the most frequently reported changes since the start of the conflict being: unusual crying or screaming (mentioned by 24 of the 38 communities, or 75%); sadness, or more aggressive behavior (each mentioned by 19 of 32 communities, or 59%), an unwillingness to go to school (15 communities, or 40%) or bed-wetting (12 communities, or 32%). Less frequently noted changes

included wanting to join armed groups (mentioned in eight communities, or 21%), social isolation/withdrawal (seven communities, 18%) and self-harm (five communities, 13%)

Asked whether there were children in the community who committed acts of violence, almost half of all sites (26 sites, or 46 % of the total) indicated that this either had happened in the past or was currently the case. In al-Hasakeh, nine of 13 sites (69 %) responded affirmatively to this question. In Aleppo, Hama and Lattakia governorates, at least 50 % of sites (numbering nine, five and three, respectively in each governorate) also reported children engaging in violent acts. The lowest rate of affirmative responses were recorded in Idlib, where just three of 17 sites (or 18 %) reported violence committed by children. Despite a strong response rate to this question, less than 50 % of sites responded to a follow-up question about the kind of violence being observed. While respondents were not directly asked to propose possible explanations for children’s participation in acts of violence, responses to other questions suggest a range of possible explanations, including psychosocial distress and lack of access to basic services (e.g. education) and other age and gender appropriate activities and services.

Figure 6: Are there any children in your area who have been or who are committing acts of violence?

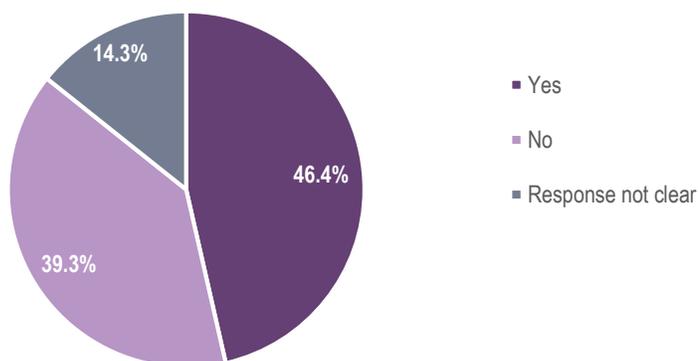
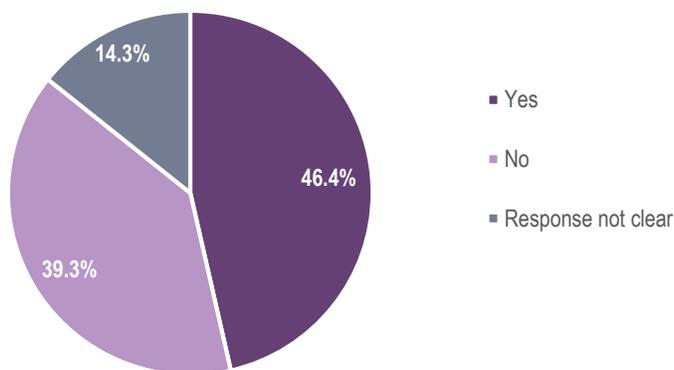


Figure 7 : Have children been or are committing acts of violence against other children?



Sources of stress – caregivers

The ongoing conflict and the threat of attack was the single most reported source of stress for parents and caregivers, mentioned in 32 of the 51 sites, or 63 %. Sites assessed in Aleppo and Hama governorates registered a high number of mentions, with eight and nine of the 10 sites in each of those governorates.

73% of sites assessed (37 of 51 sites) indicated **loss or disruption of livelihoods** as one of the main sources of stress for parents and caregivers. Other less frequent mention concerns mentioned among responses were lack of food (16 of 51 sites, or 31%), loss of property (13 sites, or 26%) and lack of shelter (nine sites, or 18%).

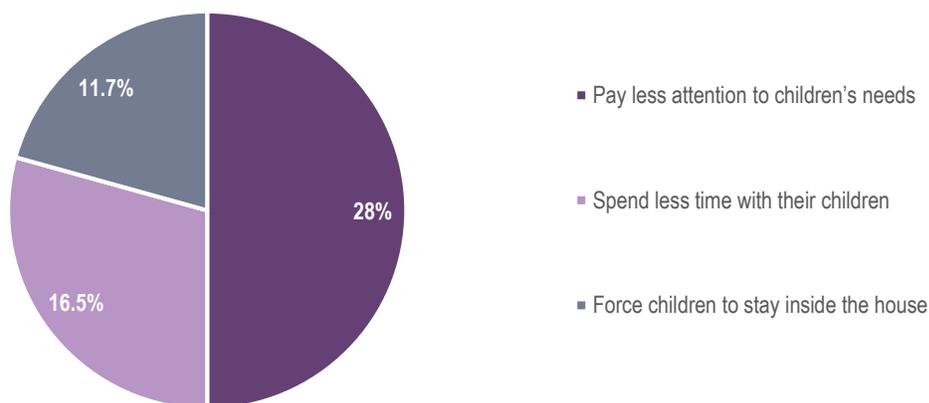
Lastly key informants reported violence within the community in five of 13 sites (39 %) in al-Hasakeh as a significant stressor for caregivers, and was also mentioned in one site in Aleppo and two in Hama governorates (10 and 20 % of those governorates' total sites, respectively).

Changes in caregivers' behaviors and attitudes

91% of key informants (51 of 26 sites) reported observing changes in attitudes of caregivers towards their children in the past 12 months. **Overall, parents and caregivers were paying less attention to children's needs (29 of 46 sites, or 63 %) and spending less time with children (17 sites, or 37 %) than if compared to before the conflict started.** A smaller but still significant number of sites distributed across all governorate (11 of 46, or 24 %), reported that parents and caregivers had become less loving and more aggressive toward children in their care in the past year.

Based on key informants answers, parents and caregivers were more likely to keep children from going to school (10 of 46 sites, or 22 %) or to restrict children's movements more generally by keeping them at home (12 of 46 sites, or 26 %), presumably meaning that the children were unable to attend school. A total of 18 sites (39 %) indicated observing restrictions likely to interfere with children's ability to maintain their education.

Figure 8: What are noticed changes in parents or caregivers attitudes towards their children?



Child labour

- The vast majority of respondents acknowledged that there were children in their communities engaging in harsh or dangerous types of work.
- There were reports of recruitment and use of children by armed groups continues, particularly boys, and these are believed to be increasing, especially in al-Hasakeh governorate.

Work performed by children and child labor (including the worst forms of child labor) are not necessarily the same concern. However, in emergency contexts, with the possible loss of livelihoods, death of household members and loss of access to education, children engaged in productive activities outside the home may become more vulnerable to work characterized as child labor (and especially the worst forms).

Key informants reported that the child labor situation in Syria has deteriorated in the past year. **80% of the 46 sites consulted (37 sites, distributed across all five governorates) reported that more children were engaged in harsh or dangerous work now than a year ago.** However, a three-quarters majority of sites said there were no new forms of harsh or dangerous work being undertaken by children.¹²

*“Smuggling is the most dangerous job. A child died 15 days ago (trying to) cross the border”
(WOSA FGD: Idleb)*

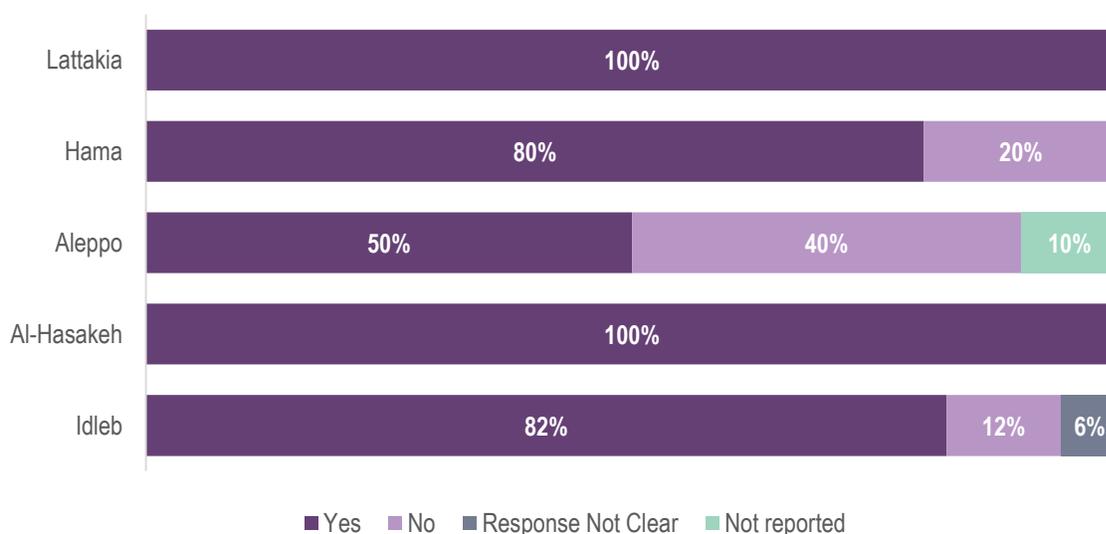
80% of the 46 sites consulted (37 sites, distributed across all five governorates) reported that more children were engaged in harsh or dangerous work now than a year ago.

The worst forms of child labour comprise:

- (a) All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- (b) The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- (c) The use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;
- (d) Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Source: 1999 ILO Convention 182, www.ilo.org

Figure 9 : Are there children in your community who are involved in work that is harsh or dangerous for them?

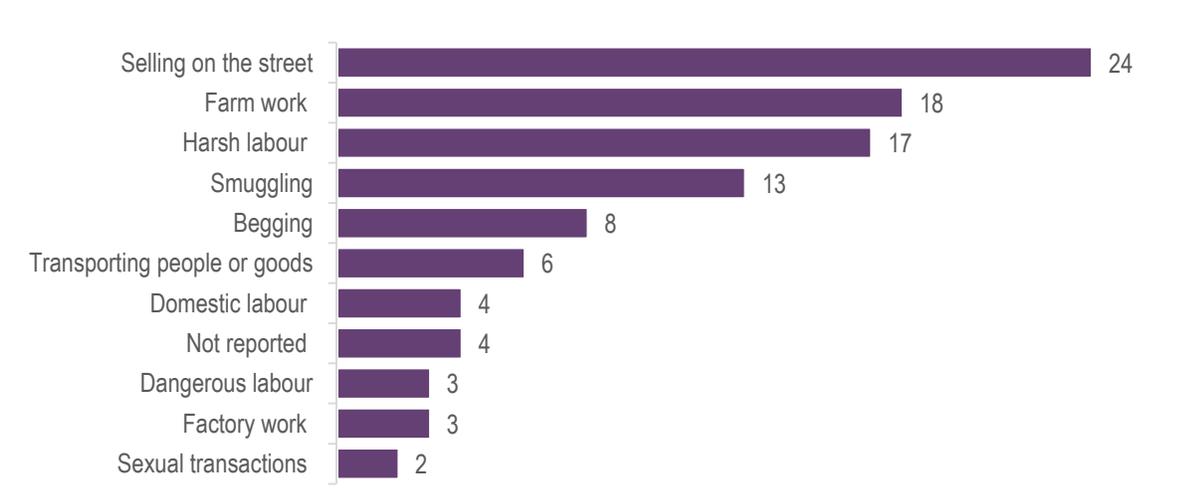


¹² Twenty-seven sites (59 % of the 46 sites that responded to the question) reported no new forms of child labour, compared to nine sites that reported children engaging in new forms of labour in the past year.

The responses in 46 of 56 sites (82%) reported that children in their communities were involved in harsh and/or dangerous work. **The most frequently reported types of work were¹³ street vending (selling goods such as fuel),¹⁴ followed by farm work,¹⁵ harsh labor¹⁶ and smuggling, and illegal cross-border activities¹⁷.** Other types of work included domestic labor (four sites, or 10%), dangerous labor, and factory work (three mentions, or 7%). Sexual transactions were mentioned only twice, but in light of the social and cultural taboos around discussing such matters, this category of work should be further explored as it is considered to be significantly under-reported. The second most-frequently mentioned threat to the life and physical safety of children in key informant interviews were (when combined): worst forms of child labor, work-related accidents and hard work,¹⁸ (15 sites).¹⁹

*“My son is working. I am very sad, but he is our (only) provider.”
(WOSA FGD: Idleb)*

Figure 10 : Types of work that children are involved in- number of mentions in sites assessed



Both adult key informants and adolescents reported begging as a practice harmful for children. However it was not ranked among the most serious or frequently encountered threats. In Phase II, 10 out of 42 communities listed sending children out to beg as being one of the main coping strategies seen for dealing with a lack of livelihoods and resources. Children take part in this kind of work prompted by desire to support themselves or their families (33 sites, or 77%) and often at the instigation of parents/caregivers.²⁰

¹³ A reasonably sizeable number of sites (10 sites, combined) either gave a response that was not clear (eight) or did not answer (two).

¹⁴ Mentioned by 24 of 41 sites, or 47 %.

¹⁵ Mentioned by 18 sites, or 44 %.

¹⁶ Mentioned by 17 sites, or 42 %.

¹⁷ Mentioned by 13 sites, or 32 %.

¹⁸ While “hard work” arduous enough to be listed as a cause of injury or death to children would seem automatically to qualify as among the worst forms of child labour, this response was registered separately in the data.

¹⁹ After filtering out instances where sites gave more than one of those responses.

²⁰ Several sites selected both options, making the sum of these two responses greater than the total number of sites.

Child recruitment

→ Recruitment was likely to take place mostly at school, or the route between home and school; more than half of all sites overall mentioned these two as the main places where it takes place.

In 28 of 56 sites (50% of the sites), key informants reported children in the community were known to be working or had worked with armed groups.²¹ In contrast, adults mentioned recruitment by armed groups as a

“Financial factors are the main motivation. If the living situation does not improve, the percentage (of children working with/used by armed groups) will increase.”
(WOSA FGD: Idleb)

threat to children on a lower level. (11 % in relation to boys; 3% in relation to girls). During focus group discussions, adolescents rated recruitment as significant, but not the most pressing threat facing girls, except in al-Hasakeh, where the

number of times this was mentioned is notable.²² However, recruitment by armed groups was at, or near, the top of the list of threats for boys, with al-Hasakeh again featuring prominently.

Adding weight to concerns about recruitment of children in al-Hasakeh governorate, key informants reported that separated children were likely

“(Children) join military factions to revenge a killed father or brother”
(WOSA FGD: Aleppo)

to be living in armed group bases in 10 of 13 sites (77%).²³ In Hama, only 30% of sites reflected this, but it should be noted that this represents only three sites of the total number assessed.

Children associated with armed forces or armed groups

Children associated with armed forces or groups are those – boys or girls – who have been recruited or used by government armed forces or other security forces or armed opposition groups in any capacity, including but not limited to roles such as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes.

It does not include children who show support for either the opposition or government forces without any instruction from or agreement from members of armed groups (e.g. through participation in demonstrations, throwing stones or writing slogans on walls).

Sources: Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups (2007)

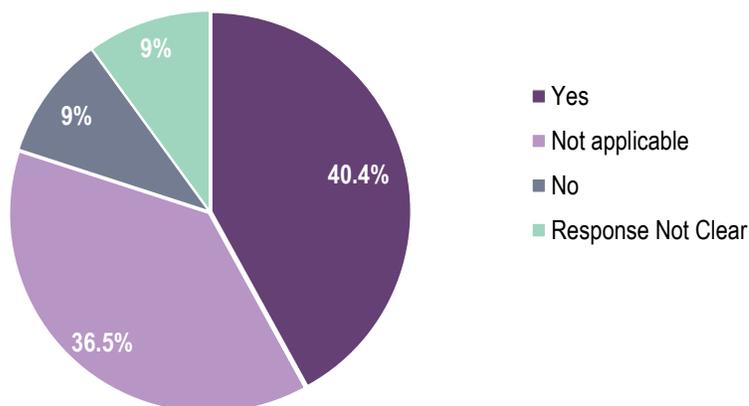
Valid estimates of the number of children involved with armed groups were too few to analyze, however responses on whether numbers of such children had increased in the past year were clearer: 21 sites reported an increase (representing 75% of 28 sites reporting the presence of children associated with armed groups) and five sites reported no increase (18% of 28 sites).

²¹ Twenty-three sites responded that this was not the case. Responses from three sites were not clear, and two sites did not answer.

²² Whether rating it as the “biggest” or “worst” threat, recruitment by armed groups was not mentioned in more than 10 % of responses, behind disruption to education, child marriage and the direct threat and insecurity of the armed conflict.

²³ Not only was this reported in a significant majority of sites; it was also reported very strongly (three out of three key informants) by each of those 10 sites.

Figure 11: Responses on whether the number of children associated with armed groups increased in the last 12 months



Overall, 40.4% of the respondents indicated that the number of children associated with armed groups increased in the last 12 months. Of the sites in which respondents affirmed they knew of the existence of children with armed groups, 32% of those sites (9 sites) said only boys, were affected. Six sites (21 % of sites reporting the recruitment by armed groups) said that there was no significant difference in the involvement of boys compared with girls in armed groups.

“Most of the boys join the jihad and their friends encourage them to do so.”
 (WOSA FGD: Idleb)

Results on the key informant knowledge on children involvement with armed groups, were not statistically meaningful. However, the responses given offer interesting anecdotal evidence. In al Hasakeh, Idleb and Lattakia, key informants reported an increase in recruitment events in the past 12 months. In al-Hasakeh respondents also concluded that the disappearance of children from the community was an indication that they had joined armed groups, while in Lattakia, a number of respondents had indicated they personally knew of children who had done so.

“My nephew is 15 and is involved. There is a camp to train boys on using weapons. I won’t allow my son to go, they (children) are still too young.”
 (FGD WOSA: Idleb)

Based on the same limitations, the information provided about where recruitment takes place is also anecdotal. **However, it is of significant concern that more than half of the sites in al-Hasakeh (seven of 13 sites, 54%) found that recruitment takes place in schools, while nine sites (69% of the 13 sites in al-Hasakeh) found that it was “on the road”,** for example, en route to school was one of the main locations for recruitment to take place (two sites in Hama and one in Lattakia also gave this response).

Less frequently, places mentioned were in homes, religious buildings, and in camps.

Child marriage and other sexual violence

Child marriage and other forms of sexual violence against children can be sensitive topics, and therefore, there was a greater willingness among informants to discuss child marriage, which was not uncommon in Syria. Before the conflict in Syria started, child marriage estimates were 13% among girls before age 18, and only 3.4 % of these girls marrying

before they reached 15 years old. These percentages were higher outside the main areas and declined as educational attainment increased.²⁴

- Awareness of cases of child marriage, mostly affecting girls. Adolescents reported this as linked to family and community traditions. The age range for these marriages is between 12 and 18 years old, with only anecdotal reference to marriages under 12 years old.
- Adolescents mentioned child marriage more often than any other threat faced by girls.
- Awareness of sexual violence was limited and underreported among all sites assessed.

Child marriage

Child marriage was the single most-mentioned problem faced by girls in focus group discussions with adolescents²⁵, raised by almost three quarters of all groups (boys and girls), distributed across all four governorates.^{26,27} By contrast, only three groups mentioned child marriage as a threat for boys, and it was never mentioned as among the “worst” threats facing boys.²⁸

Reported cases of child marriage appeared in a majority of sites (35 of 56 sites, or 63 %); only seven sites reported no knowledge of such cases

*“(Child) marriage has become common as a result of poverty and fear of shame”
(WOSA FGD: Aleppo)*

(representing 13 % of all sites). Asked whether boys or girls were more affected by child marriage, **30 of the 35 sites that had**

indicated an awareness of child marriage (that is, 86 %) reported girls being more affected than boys.²⁹

There were three sites in which key informants mentioned marriages involving children aged 12-14 years: one urban community in Aleppo governorate, and two rural communities in Hama and Idleb governorates. The remaining 24 sites (69 % of the total) reported marriages involving a child/children aged from 15-18 years. Of particular concern are marriages involving girls aged below 12 years, although respondents in only three sites reported these: one in Aleppo, one in the rural community in Hama, and one urban site in Idleb governorate. The identified age for the end of childhood by these communities, varied between 12 years (in Aleppo) up to 18 years (Hama).

Definition

Sexual violence comprises any sexual activities imposed by an adult on a child against which the child is entitled to protection by criminal law. This includes: (a) the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful or psychologically harmful sexual activity; (b) the use of children in commercial sexual exploitation; (c) the use of children in audio or visual images of child sexual abuse; and (d) child prostitution, sexual slavery, sexual exploitation in travel and tourism, trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation (within and between countries), sale of children for sexual purposes and forced marriage.

Source: UNICEF, *Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, 2014*

²⁴ Source: MICS results in UNICEF & SCFA, Situation Analysis of Childhood Status in Syria, 2008

²⁵ Discussion groups were asked to mention the “biggest”, “worst” and most frequent threats. In each of these categories child marriage scored highest, regardless of whether participants were boys or girls (65 % of groups counted child marriage as the biggest threat; 38 % considered it the worst threat and 35 % rated it as the most frequent threat facing girls)

²⁶ Early marriage was mentioned by 31 of 42 sites (74 %)

²⁷ Thirty-five % of girls' groups (eight groups) mentioned child marriage, and 26 % (six groups) mentioned lack of access to education.

²⁸ Three groups listed child marriage as among both the biggest and the most frequent threats facing boys.

²⁹ Two sites reported that there was no clear difference in how boys and girls were affected. Two sites did not answer and one site provided an answer that was not clear.

Other forms of sexual violence and abuse

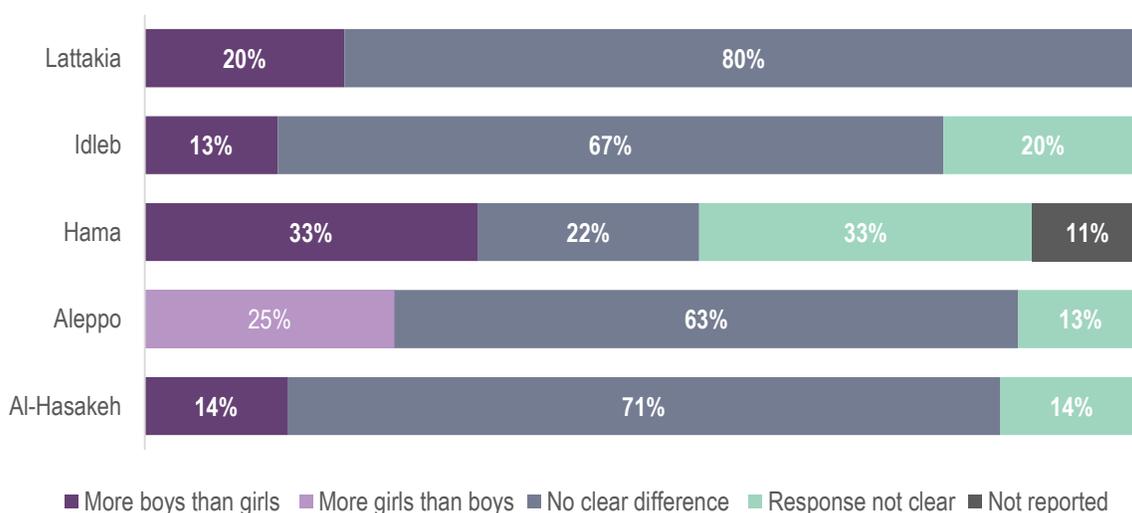
Social and cultural taboos against discussing, or even acknowledging sexual violence in Syrian society are well known, and it seems likely that they have influenced the results of questions on the topic posed during key informant interviews. An unawareness of sexual violence was reported in more than two thirds of all sites reported (39 of 56 sites, or 70 %), and only 12 sites (21 %) acknowledged its existence. In light of the previous responses, two of every three key informants who answered the question reported that sexual violence had not increased in their communities in the past 12 months: seven sites reflected an increase, compared with 26 with no increase; 18 sites lacked response and five sites reported unclear.

Most of the sites whose respondents had declared no knowledge of sexual violence in their communities did not provide additional details in follow up questions. Key informants in only eight, of those 39 sites, responded as to what they would do if they were to encounter a child who had been subjected to sexual violence. The 17 sites that gave an answer³⁰ very heavily favored taking the child to her/his parents or caregiver(s) (15 sites of the 17 offering a response). The next most frequently answer was reporting the incident to local authorities (mentioned by eight sites). Only one site mentioned taking the child to a healthcare provider.

Separation of children from parents or caregivers

- Separation of children from their parents or caregivers continues to be widely reported and adolescents mentioned it as one of the main threats they faced.
- Reasons for separation were most commonly estimated to be death of parents or caregivers.
- The lack of a system in most sites for responding to children separated from their parents/caregivers, or adults trying to locate children normally in their care constitutes a significant gap.

Figure 12 : Reported children separated from parents or usual caregivers



³⁰ Of 52 sites, 24 did not respond at all, and 11 gave the response "sexual violence never happens here", leaving 17 sites.

Scale and extent of separation

Key informants in 44 sites, out of 55, indicated that in the past 12 months there had been new cases of separation in their communities.

When asked to estimate the extent of separation,³¹ records from two sites in Aleppo and one from Idleb – all urban sites - mentioned more than 100 cases in the preceding 12 months.³² Additional data from Phase II indicate that in the communities assessed, separation of children from caregivers continued to be a significant concern as recently as the past month.³³ When looking at the reasons underlying separations, responses provide some additional details.³⁴ It should be noted that responses from key informant interviews may reflect the phenomenon of separation generally and not necessarily related to the conditions prevailing only in the immediate past.

The most frequently listed cause for separation was the death of a child's parents or caregivers. Key informants in a total of 23 of 56 sites listed this as one of the main causes of separation, mainly in Aleppo (eight out of 10 sites) and Lattakia (five out of six sites) governorates. Almost every governorate, with the exception of al-Hasakeh, listed medical evacuation as a cause of separation, with a total of eight mentions.

Other causes of separation also mentioned were: voluntary recruitment of children in armed forces or armed groups (10 sites), mainly in al-Hasakeh, where it was the most frequently mentioned cause (five mentions) and Lattakia (where at four reports, it was only the third most frequently mentioned cause, after the death of parents/caregivers and parents sending children away to work). Separation during relocation was listed in nine sites, eight of them in Idleb, and one in Lattakia.

Separation was mentioned relatively often during Phase II: a quarter of the 32 communities that reported the existence of threats to children's safety or dignity over the previous month. Five of these communities were located in Idleb governorate, two in Hama and one in Aleppo.

Asked whether boys or girls were more affected by separation from parents/caregivers, key informants in almost 60 % of sites indicated a lack of significant difference; a further 18% (eight sites) provided a response that was unclear. Key informants in seven sites in all governorates except in Aleppo, reported that boys were more affected than girls. Only respondents in two sites in Aleppo reported that girls were more affected. Group interviews with adolescents also showed a distinct division in how boys, compared to girls, perceived the risk of separation. Boys' and girls' groups viewed the risk

Definitions

Separated children are those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

Unaccompanied children are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

Source: UNICEF, *Family Separation in Emergencies*, www.unicef.org

³¹ The size of the population is significant when considering the estimates of the extent of separation. Site reports for this study represent populations ranging from 800 up to 15,000, with eight sites' population not reported. An estimate of 100 separated children within a community of 800 people clearly represents a much more serious problem than 100 children from a community of 15,000.

³² Of the remaining valid responses (one site asked did not respond to the question and 15 gave answers that were ultimately unclear, leaving 25 valid responses) the most common estimate (12 sites) was 10 or fewer cases.

³³ Separation (mentioned by eight of 48 communities) was third among the top four threats to children's safety and dignity mentioned by respondents. Landmines and unexploded ordnance ranked first (12 mentions), followed by arrest and detention (10 mentions).

³⁴ Although here it should be noted that – despite the question being framed in terms of separations that occurred in the past 12 months, responses came from more sites than just those reporting that such separations had in fact taken place

of separation as having roughly the same magnitude and seriousness, but only boys mentioned loss of caregivers as one of the main threats facing children.³⁵

Care arrangements for separated and unaccompanied children

Most cases of separated children were reported to be living with relatives of some kind. Children living with unrelated adults was reported to be the exception. Results showed some contradiction regarding the extent to which children were to be found living without any adult caregivers. This had been the case in almost a third of sites surveyed with key informants. Homelessness was presented as being an extremely isolated phenomenon.

The question of children without carers was approached from two directions during key informant interviews, producing slightly contradictory results. Only two sites (one each in Idleb and Lattakia) from 44 surveys reported that there were children in the community living without adult caregivers at all (4.6 %). However, when asked where children without adult caregivers lived, at total of 16 sites (accounting for 29 % of all sites) responded that some separated children either lived on the street (five sites) or lived with other children (11 sites).³⁶

Respondents reported children living in the streets in four of the five sites reporting (urban settings in al-Hasakeh and one in rural location in Hama). Cases of children living together without adult caregivers were reported either in urban settings (five sites in al-Hasakeh and one in Hama) or rural locations (five in Hama and one in Lattakia), but not in camps.

Absence of children living without adults was mentioned in almost three quarters of all sites (32, or 72.7 %) by KIs; key informants from additional 10 sites either did not respond (six sites) or gave answers that were unclear (four sites). Only in a minority of sites the information reported indicated that children lived with adults to whom they were not related: 29 sites, or almost 66 %, said there were no such cases, compared to nine, or 20.5 %, distributed across all five governorates, that reported such cases).

Children separated from parents/caregivers living in “alternative care houses”, was reported in a significant proportion of sites (25 of 56, or 44.6 %); a similar proportion of sites (24 of 56 sites, or 42.9 %) informed that such children had “informal alternative care” arrangements within the community. Results from all six sites assessed in Lattakia reflected that separated children lived in alternative care houses. In Idleb these options accounted for 35 % of responses (six sites) in the case of alternative care houses, and 47 % (eight sites) for informal care arrangements.

The majority of the sites assessed in most governorates indicated to have official care institutions or orphanages. However, these were only accessible to less than a quarter of all sites assessed. In terms of access to such institutions, five and six sites assessed in Idleb and Aleppo respectively indicated having access to these services, and only one site in each Hama and al-Hasakeh.

Only one site indicated the presence of someone unknown to the community to take children away to provide work, care, or protection; key informants in four sites (9 %) reported that community members had either taken or wanted to take children away from the community.

³⁵ The constraints in conducting focus group discussions mean that a statistical analysis of their results should be viewed with some caution. For information, however, eight boys' groups (of a total 48 groups) mentioned loss of caregivers as one of the biggest risks for boys and nine groups listed it as a main risk for girls. Ten groups ranked loss of caregivers among the worst risks facing boys; nine for girls.

³⁶ Four of the five sites reporting children living on the street were in al-Hasakeh (the other was in Hama). Four additional sites in al-Hasakeh reported children living together in groups without adult carers, six in Hama and one in Lattakia. There was no overlap between reports of children on the street and those living in child-only group situations.

As mentioned above, in al-Hasakeh governorate, 10 of 13 sites (77 %) reported that separated children were likely to be living on areas shared with armed groups. Three of 10 sites in Hama also reported this.

Key informants were also asked to predict how community members would respond upon encountering an unaccompanied child. Overall, the main answer was "to take the child home while I search for the parents/caregivers" (14 sites, or 25 % of all sites of which seven were out of the 10 sites assessed in Aleppo); followed by to inform the local authority about the child's situation (13 sites, or 23 %). A little over a quarter of all sites reported that people would likely care for the child themselves (just under half of those responses coming from Idleb and half from Lattakia). Only a few very rare cases – one site in Aleppo and another in Hama – reported that people would do nothing.

Protection resources and services

- The communities assessed relied mainly on their own resources to provide protection resources and services, mainly in the form of people with the capacity to organize recreational or educational activities for children (48 of 56 sites, 86 %)
- Out of 43 sites, 39 of them (91 %) indicated the presence of people who could teach, while 32 (74 %) reported people who could organize collective activities for children.

The questionnaire was not designed to inform about the number of available protection service providers within each community, what proportion of them are women or older girls, and whether they are already engaged in such activities. Of the overall number of sites for which answers were recorded for this question, all sites assessed indicated having someone in the community who could perform at least one of these two roles (recreational or educational).

However, people with the capacity to support children with physical disabilities were less well represented in the communities assessed with only five sites reporting having access to someone who was able to provide support for children living with physical disabilities.

The availability of care or protection services was discussed in adolescents discussion groups (held in 33 locations, 31 of which had also been included in the key informant interviews exercise). **Nine out of the 14 girls groups (64 %) reported the availability of options for care or protection in their locations, while five groups reported a lack of availability.** Boys groups responded in similar proportion³⁷ on the availability of services, however, approximately 10 % of boys' groups, responded that they did not know whether resources were present or not, reducing the lack of availability to 29 %.

Communities assessed during Phase II showed only relatively limited knowledge of the presence of organizations providing child-focused services in their area.³⁸ These services were: medical and referral services for children (eight mentions) safe/child-friendly spaces (four mentions); child protection training for parents and community leaders (four mentions); informal education activities for unaccompanied children (four mentions); training for children on avoiding high-risk behaviors (three mentions).

³⁷ That is, 61 % of boys' groups, compared with 64 % of girls' groups.

³⁸ One third of the 42 communities consulted reported that some form of child protection services were available. The rest responded that they did not know whether such services were available or not. In Lattakia, this was the case for 11 of the 12 communities represented, and in Aleppo, neither of the two communities consulted there knew whether child-protection services existed in the area.

Risk factors

- The strongest consensus around risk factors was found in relation to the territory and ultimately, to the location of where children are living.
- School – and the journey between school and home – is perceived as one of the most dangerous places for children.
- Places like public markets and places of work were also considered to be significantly dangerous.

Age and sex

Respondents were asked to identify the main threats identified by children in their communities, as well as which age groups are most affected by these threats. **Key informants in more than half of those sites³⁹ reported that children aged between six and 14 years were the most affected.** However, a quarter of the 53 sites showed that key informants did not know which age groups were most affected, and a further five sites (9 % of the total for this question) did not provide answers.

Results on gender difference on who was more affected by these threats are unclear. A little under half of the 53 sites did not respond or reported that they did not know whether boys or girls were more affected. A total of 23 sites (43 %) showed that boys were more affected, while just one site in al-Hasakeh, reported that girls were more severely impacted. Six sites (11 % of the total) indicated there was no real difference.

Location

Activities which are regarded to be central to normal daily life are reported as being those carrying the greatest risk of injury or death for children.

For example, attending school, was mentioned 25 times in site reports of areas assessed, and being at or en route to/from the market was mentioned 31 times. It was notable that school was reported in eight out of 10 sites in Aleppo, and only in al-Hasakeh were schools listed as an area of risk in less than 25 % of sites. Sites in Lattakia and al-Hasakeh were more likely to indicate the journey to school as the source of threat to children (five out of six sites, or 83 %, for Lattakia; seven out of 13 sites, or 54 % for al-Hasakeh). This represents a significant factor that could negatively impact children's likelihood of continuing regular attendance at school.

In Aleppo, the market was mentioned even more often (nine out of 10 sites), a significantly higher rate than in other governorates (no reports in Lattakia, seven out of 17 sites, in Idleb). Additionally, the workplace was listed as being particularly risky for children in five out of six sites in Lattakia (83 %); in camp settings, this was mentioned in four out of six (67 %) sites. In al-Hasakeh, the journey to work was more often listed as presenting threats (eight of 13 sites mentioned this, or 62 %)

Information channels

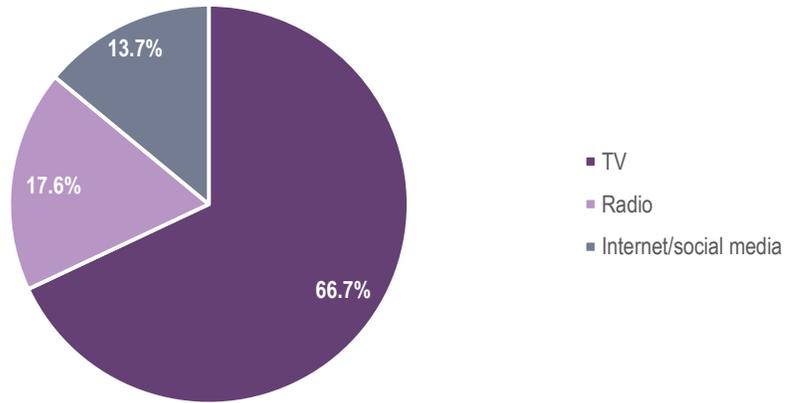
- Overall, Television was reported as the most important source of (general) information in communities, ranking in second place – behind the internet and social media- when looking specifically at information about child protection(21 out of 51 sites, or 41 %).

Friends, neighbors and family, followed by schools, were listed as the next two most important information sources on child protection (mentioned in 18 and 16 sites, respectively, or 37 % and 31 % of all sites that answered this question). Military officials together with religious leaders shared the lowest ranking place, each

³⁹ That is, 28 of 53 sites, or 53 %.

mentioned only once, by different sites in Lattakia. Community leaders, local authorities and the use of telephones were each mentioned twice, while noticeboards/posters and radios were each mentioned five times in the areas assessed.

Figure 13: Reported most important sources of general information for the community



Recommendations

These recommendations are based largely on the key findings highlighted in this report. They also draw significantly, though, from a much broader set of information, data and knowledge on child protection issues that was generated during the preparation of the Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO, 2015). This includes specifically data from the Whole of Syria Assessment (WOSA, 2015) and information generated through a series of Protection Focus Groups Discussions that also fed into the HNO. It was deemed useful to ground these recommendations on a wider evidence-base to ensure child protection actors working inside Syria have a more comprehensive foundation to build their programming decisions on.

The recommendations listed here are organized according to specific headings that capture the key strategies around which child protection programming is usually conceptualized. This includes: i) service delivery; ii) capacity building and child protection mainstreaming; iii) advocacy; iv) coordination; and v) evidence generation. This classification is not prescriptive and is only meant to offer a conceptual framework that can inform concrete action planning around some of the key findings included in the report.

The recommendations are addressed first and foremost to child protection actors with operational capacity inside Syria and the Child Protection sub-cluster in Gaziantep that led the assessment. They can also be useful to inform discussions with donors and other stakeholders on the needs and priorities of the sector moving forward. Lastly, these recommendations are to be considered in conjunction with the more extensive guidance provided in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS).

Service delivery

- ❖ **To date Child Protection programming has been largely focused on psychosocial support interventions, delivered primarily through static centers. Available data clearly points to the need for expanding and diversifying programming in order to address specific child protection vulnerabilities.** Building upon their existing programming, child protection actors should make deliberate efforts to diversify their programs and support interventions that can prevent, mitigate risks and address specific child protection issues, such as child labor, child recruitment, child marriage and family separation as identified in the assessment.
- ❖ **Psychosocial support interventions have thus far largely focused on children. The evidence clearly suggests that the psychosocial distress adults are facing has a direct impact on their capacity to care and protect children within the family and community at large.** Child protection actors should invest much more in programs that can also reach parents and caregivers. Such programs are also critical to address the specific needs of younger children (0-5 years) who have been neglected, to a large extent, in current psychosocial programming.
- ❖ **Child protection programming has, to date, been largely focused on the age group 6-13 years. Older children aged 14 and above face heightened protection risks, as identified in the report** (e.g. child labor, child recruitment). Child protection actors should invest in targeted age appropriate and gender sensitive adolescents' programming in 2016 as a matter of priority.
- ❖ **Child protection actors should explore ways to mobilize young people and other community members in the delivery of child protection services. This is essential not only as a preventive measure but also as an entry point to raise awareness around the protection risks children face in the communities where they live.** More specifically, child protection actors should explore strategies to empower and mobilize youth and ensure their meaningful community engagement in the delivery of child protection services. This will also serve the purpose of preventing their engagement in violence.

- ❖ **Child protection and psychosocial interventions need to be designed within a broader community-based strategy that should also involve more systematic engagement with local stakeholders** (e.g. Local Councils) in order to ensure more acceptance and greater reach.
- ❖ **Child protection actors should invest more in joint awareness raising and social mobilization initiatives** to increase reach, address information gaps in targeted communities in terms of where and how to access services and promote behavioral changes around key child protection issues of concern.
- ❖ **Education activities of the risk of mine/Explosive remnants of war have been limited in focus and scale in most of the areas covered in the assessment. There is an urgent need to scale up these activities** in terms of reach while at the same time widening the content to include broader safety messages to address additional risks of physical harm that have been identified as most prevalent in the surveyed communities (including, for instance, bombardments, snipers activities, and other prevalent physical hazards such as traffic accidents).
- ❖ **Child protection actors should develop a strategy on how to undertake case management work in their respective areas of operation inside Syria. This should entail having clear benchmarks on what needs to be put in place to ensure that the preconditions for undertaking case management work are met**, including: detailed service mapping; simple and clear standard operating procedure for referrals; information sharing protocols among case management agencies; establishing a safe and confidential information management system; map the case managers work force in each operational area; prepare detailed job descriptions for case workers and supervisors; and developing standardized case management training for frontline service providers;
- ❖ **The Child Protection sub-cluster should consider the possibility of identifying “lead” agencies on specific thematic issues, based on demonstrated operational capacity**, current reach, global expertise and ability to mobilize resources, among others. The “lead agency” would be in charge of operationalizing the recommendations related to specific programmatic areas identified as priorities based on the findings presented in this report, such as birth registration, child recruitment, child labor, etc.
- ❖ The No Lost Generation framework should be widely promoted as the common strategic programming framework among all child protection actors operating inside Syria.
- ❖ **Child Protection actors should invest more in quality programming including through the development of beneficiaries’ feedback mechanisms** (in line with the fundamental principle of accountability to affected populations). This should be explicitly budgeted in their projects.
- ❖ **Given the very volatile and fast changing operating environment, child protection actors should invest in emergency preparedness and contingency planning in order to be able to respond to rapid escalations of violence**, sudden population displacement or access opportunities resulting from localized ceasefire agreements. Agencies should agree on a basic “child protection response package”, including deployment of mobile teams, to ensure agile and rapid interventions in the above situations.

Capacity building and child protection mainstreaming

- ❖ **The Child Protection sub-cluster, in close consultation with the Whole of Syria Child Protection sub-sector, should take the lead in the development of a comprehensive 2016 capacity building strategy with clear milestones.** The strategy should be budgeted and inform strategic discussions with donors.
- ❖ **Strategic engagement with the Livelihood and Education clusters is critical to address issues such as child labor and child recruitment.** The Child protection sub-cluster should identify entry points to engage with those other clusters and spur their commitment to include child protection considerations in their strategies and programs, including cash programs, if/as relevant. The CPMS provide specific examples of how to make those strategic links and set benchmarks accordingly.

Child protection mainstreaming trainings should be regularly rolled out based on the extensive guidance provided in the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS).

Advocacy

- ❖ **Identify key common priorities for advocacy based on the evidence generated through this assessment, including key advocacy messages, specific actions and responsible lead agencies to take them forward in 2016.**
- ❖ **Organize regular joint briefings for donors on specific child protection themes** in support of both the advocacy and programming agendas.
- ❖ Map key stakeholders/duty bearers in areas of operation and engage with them in advocacy dialogue to address specific child protection concerns as identified in the assessment.

Evidence generation

- ❖ **Deepen the understanding of critical child protection issues identified in this report including through the use of more participatory community appraisal techniques.** This is critical to ensure programming is continuously adapted to emerging trends.
- ❖ Involve children in the design and implementation of any future assessment/study on child protection issues.
- ❖ **Ensure a core set of child protection indicators is mainstreamed and used in all relevant multi sector or sector specific assessments and/or ongoing situation monitoring.**
- ❖ **Engage with the Education and Health clusters to determine opportunities for their systematic contribution to the collection of data on attacks on schools and hospitals and education and health personnel.**
- ❖ **Identify partners with expertise to conduct action-oriented research on birth registration practices in non-government controlled areas** with a view to determine what specific actions could be taken to ensure that children's basic right to a legal identify is guaranteed.

Coordination

- ❖ **Within the frame of the Whole of Syria approach, strengthen dialogue with other operational hubs to ensure greater consistency in the design of child protection programs** across the board, more systematic adherence to CPMS and more effective cross-learning.
- ❖ **Commit resources to actively participate in Whole of Syria-led coordination events and technical workshops to advance learning on specific programming areas.**
- ❖ **Renew commitment to more systematic and accurate reporting in line with the Whole of Syria 4Ws requirements.**
- ❖ **Agree on standards and benchmarks for monitoring quality of child protection programs beyond outputs including through systematic collection of beneficiaries' feedbacks.**

Annex 1: Assessment Methodology

Desk Review

The desk review was the first step in the research process and relied upon the collection of secondary data from a previous Child Protection assessment implemented in the region, in addition to contextual data from Syria before and since the beginning of the conflict. Also, child protection partners shared reports, articles and materials that referred to Child Protection issues in Syria that helped identifying the existent information gaps. A draft version of the desk review was submitted to UNICEF and shared with the partners on the Child Protection Assessment Steering Committee (SC) for feedback and critical input. The issues identified were engaged, concerns incorporated and the content modified accordingly and re-submitted as a revised desk review.

Data Collection

Data collection for each of the phases took place at different stages, between May and October 2015.

Phase one

The CPRA tool was adjusted to the Syrian context with the support of the Steering Committee members. The FGD tool was also developed by the assessment team to complement the CPRA tool, which allowed to obtain data via the use of the following tools: Key Informant Interviews (KII), Direct Observation (DO) and Urgent Action Referrals (UAR), all of which channeled into the Site Report (SR). One SR was filed for each of the communities assessed inside Syria. The tools developed and used for this assessment can be found [here](#).

During Phase I of the assessment, paper data collection tools were implemented, for both the CPRA tools and the FGD. The tools were drafted in English, to be adapted to later being adjusted to fit the assessment context and cultural sensitivity in Arabic. The support offered by local implementing partners in translating these was essential for the process.

During this phase, data was collected over a period of two weeks in June 2015. During the first week, each enumerator collected data in KI questionnaires from at least three KIs located in one community/site to be assessed, as well as one Direct Observation (DO) questionnaire per community/site, based on the perception of the enumerators. The assessors conducted interviews with adult KIs in locations across five governorates. The information gathered through both KI questionnaires and DO forms were synthesized to create one single report for each community assessed. The final list of sites comprised: 17 communities in Idleb, 13 in al-Hasakeh, 10 in Aleppo, 10 in Hama governorates, and six in Lattakia.

Purposive sampling was used to choose locations for KIIs, to ensure representation of different geographical areas, such as rural and urban, areas with relatively easy access as well as those that were more difficult, and areas with varying levels of service provision and delivery of humanitarian assistance for example. Despite endeavoring to include locations where access was more challenging, it should be acknowledged that some locations could not be considered at all due to security risks such as Araqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates.

Once data was collected into the paper questionnaires, it was inserted into an excel database in English to proceed with its cleaning and posterior analysis. Multiple crosschecks of the data collected were done, to come up with a clean database that would be used for the analysis.

The next part of this first phase was a series of 48 FGDs in 33 different locations inside Syria, with groups of young adults between the ages of 14 and 17 years old⁴⁰ conducted over the space of the second of the two week period of data collection in June 2015.⁴¹ A total of 35 FGDs with young males and 13 with young females were implemented. Sites for inclusion in the FGD stage were chosen to ensure that the results reflected the same broad distribution of population characteristics as were found in the KI interviews stage (rural and urban, displaced and non-displaced, easily accessible and harder to reach etc.), as well as to ensure to as much as possible the triangulation of information with the data obtained through some of the questions included in the key informant questionnaires. 31 out of the 33 locations had been part of the initial round of data collection in Phase I.

After FGDs were implemented, the information collected was translated from Arabic into English, to then being coded for posterior analysis. Each of the answers were coded into themes and categories, to then being added into an excel database that allowed for frequency analysis.

Phase two

At the conclusion of Phase I, it was recognized that there were significant information gaps remaining, and a method was sought by which the existing data could be strengthened. For this phase, data collection was done over a period of one month, from 1st to 31st October 2015.

The REACH Area of Origin (AoO) project conducts remote data collection from areas inside Syria where access to direct regular primary data collection is not possible. The overall objective of the project is to inform aid planning and enhance the understanding of humanitarian context within Syria; improve humanitarian access to vulnerable groups; and indirectly monitor the direct outcomes and impacts of large scale humanitarian interventions. Humanitarian information is collected at the community (village/neighborhood) level across Syria, through participants in neighboring countries. Additionally, a confidence rating system was applied to each individual variable when triangulating data from several KIs reporting on the same village, based on the level of expertise that each key informant type is expected to hold within the area of investigation where they have provided information.⁴²

Data collection and analysis took place during the month of September 2015, with questionnaires distributed to all participants at the beginning of the month. Questionnaires were completed by KI inside Syria over the course of three weeks, in which they gathered information about their village/neighbourhood of origin and their sectoral area of knowledge. Once data collection was completed, the REACH regional data analysis team aggregated village/neighbourhood level questionnaires collected from Jordan, Lebanon, the KRI and Turkey, identifying averages for continuous variables and modes for categorical variables. Primary data is triangulated with secondary data from multiple sources, including the UN, (I)NGOs and national and international media, to verify accuracy of information provided.

Child Protection indicators were included into the AoO data collection round of the month of September, and a total of 188 communities were surveyed to gather additional information on these specific indicators. The set of indicators were selected after identifying gaps from Phase I that could not be addressed in previous round of data collection.

⁴⁰ Numbers of participants in each group ranged from eight to 18.

⁴¹ Specifically, June 10-16, 2015

⁴² This is in line with recommendations made by an evaluation of data management practices implemented during the 2014 Syria Multi-Sector Needs Assessment – specifically regarding the need to retain data

Table 3 : Set of Indicators and corresponding questions

Indicator	Question
Available health care services in the village during the previous month	Which of the following health care services were available in your village during the previous month?
% of communities where children reported to exhibit behavioral changes relating to stress	Have you noticed any changes in children's behavior in the village since the start of the conflict?
% of communities where children reported to face safety/dignity concern - by type of concern	What were the main safety and dignity concerns faced by children in your village during the previous month?
Reported coping strategies used in the village during the previous month to cope with lack of resources	Which of the following coping strategies did people in your village use to cope with lack of income/resources during the previous month?

Phase II results obtained from AoO are not disaggregated by sex, and for the most part, focused specifically on the preceding month (August). Nonetheless, they lend weight to the trends emerging from the Phase I exercise.

The existing – and ongoing – research project implemented by REACH presented an opportunity to expand upon data collection done to date. REACH has established a strong network of contacts inside Syria who implement this monthly data collection exercise.

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