

SYRIA: A CHILD PROTECTION CRISIS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM A 2013 INTERAGENCY ASSESSMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION TRENDS INSIDE SYRIA.

OVERVIEW OF THE CRISIS

The conflict in Syria has resulted in the deaths of 100,000 men, women and children¹, and the displacement of up to six million. More than 3.1 million children inside Syria need urgent assistance². Boys and girls of all ages have been victims of, or exposed to extreme violence, including armed violence, sexual violence and torture in detention. Over 6,500 children have been killed and many more injured³. Many children have been separated from their families, displaced from their homes and are showing signs of emotional distress.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Restricted humanitarian access inside Syria has resulted in a lack of information on children's protection needs and communities' capacities to respond to them. At the request of the international humanitarian organisations working in the child protection sector, the global-level Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) initiated an assessment to inform responses, planning, advocacy and fundraising.

An interagency steering committee, comprised of international humanitarian organisations, oversaw the assessment. Remote methodologies were used to interview newly arriving refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq and this data was triangulated with a desk review and interviews with humanitarian workers.

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

| PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

- 98% of respondents reported the psychosocial wellbeing of boys and girls had deteriorated substantially.
- Boys and girls appear to be equally affected, prone to unusual crying/screaming, disruption in sleep patterns, sadness, bedwetting and unwillingness to go to school.
- Caregivers' behaviour towards their children has changed, with many keeping children at home and even taking them out of school. The main sources of stress are reported to be: deteriorating security limited access to basic services (water, food, electricity, and livelihoods), children's safety and constrained access to healthcare.

| PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

- Civil/political/armed violence, explosive remnants of war, and torture in detention are considered the main threats to children's physical safety.
- Half of respondents believed children to be specifically targeted in the conflict as a means of pressuring and threatening others, including parents.
- Looting and/or pillage and children recruiting other children into armed groups and forces were the most common examples of children's participation in violence given by over 60% of respondents.
- Almost 80% of respondents believe the detention of children is increasing, with boys at greater risk than girls.

| CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED FORCES AND ARMED GROUPS

- 71% of respondents believe the use of children by armed forces and armed groups is increasing.
- Some families have sent children outside of Syria to avoid recruitment.
- Recruitment is often of a 'voluntary' nature and happens through family links, as well as via children recruiting other children.
- Recruitment mainly affects teenage boys, who may be perceived to be young adults motivated by a sense of obligation to their families and communities.

| SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- 74% of respondents believe sexual violence has increased.
- Boys and girls of all ages are believed to be at risk, however girls older than 14 years are considered more vulnerable.
- More than 80% of respondents said they did not know where survivors could get professional help.

| CHILD MARRIAGE

- Two-thirds of respondents said there has been no change in the age boys marry since the onset of the conflict.
- Overall data for girls is inconclusive with some governorates reporting an increase in the number of girls marrying before age 18.

¹ UN News Centre, UN chief, United States Secretary of State, urge political solution to Syrian crisis, 25 July 2013

² OCHA Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview, 26 April 2013

³ OHCHR, Updated Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic, 2013

SYRIA: A CHILD PROTECTION CRISIS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM A 2013 INTERAGENCY ASSESSMENT OF CHILD PROTECTION TRENDS INSIDE SYRIA.

| CHILD LABOUR

- More than two-thirds of respondents said there are more children working outside of the home since the onset of the conflict, with strong indications of an increase in the worst forms of child labour.
- Many children working outside of the home are believed to be doing so to pay off accumulated debt as families are under considerable financial pressure.

| UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

- 74% of respondents reported that children are being separated from the usual caregivers and 40% reported that they are aware of unaccompanied children as a result of the conflict.
- Separation is usually accidental due to death of parents or during movements to safer locations.
- Deliberate separation is also prevalent with families sending children to work or to stay with relatives.
- There are strong indications that families are sending their children out of Syria for safety, due to economic hardship and to avoid their use by armed forces or groups.
- Separated children are most commonly cared for within their extended family; however there are indications that the deteriorating economic situation may adversely affect this positive practice.

| ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES:

- 75% of respondents believe there are no basic services designed specifically for children.
- Some groups of children have less access to services than others due to a range of factors, including gender, age, disability, separation, displacement and children from specific religious/cultural groups.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1.Undertake strategic advocacy for the immediate cessation of violence against children perpetrated by armed forces and groups. Parties must ensure the immediate cessation of violence against children, including killing and maiming of children; recruitment and use of children; sexual violence against children; and the detention and torture of children.

2.Integrate child protection considerations into all sectors of the response in Syria. Such as engaging child protection staff into humanitarian programmes to maximise child protection outcomes in other sectors. This includes work with education colleagues to ensure routes to school are safe, removing barriers to retain girls in school to delay marriage, training teachers to provide basic psychosocial support and rolling out education packages on physical safety in hostile environments and mine-risk education.

3.Expand specialist child protection programming inside Syria. Wherever possible build on and strengthen existing child protection systems, for example, to address causes of stress for children through activities that seek to restore normality (such as access to school and community-based psychosocial activities); and train personnel to detect and support children experiencing psychosocial distress.

4.Ensure effective coordination of child protection responses inside Syria. This will help facilitate the most efficient collective response possible; allow for common advocacy; and for a coherent interface with other sectors of the response.

5.Monitor and further investigate child protection issues inside Syria. This includes deepening understandings of critical issues in the assessment; and establishing a simple system to monitor the nature, volume and patterns of child protection issues.