

Every Day Counts

An outlook on child protection for the most vulnerable children in Syria

UNICEF partners provided **integrated child protection services including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) to over 10 million children during the last five years of conflict** in all areas of Syria including the north-east (NE) and north-west (NW). In the absence of a national child protection system, UNICEF built the capacities of civil society to provide **life-saving child protection services** to the most affected children. However, these critical child protection services are by nature long-term and best provided professionally in a formal and integrated child protection and social protection system. As such, UNICEF will begin a shift towards early recovery efforts, reaching children at scale and accelerating a **national child protection system** with the norms, laws, and structures to protect the most vulnerable children.

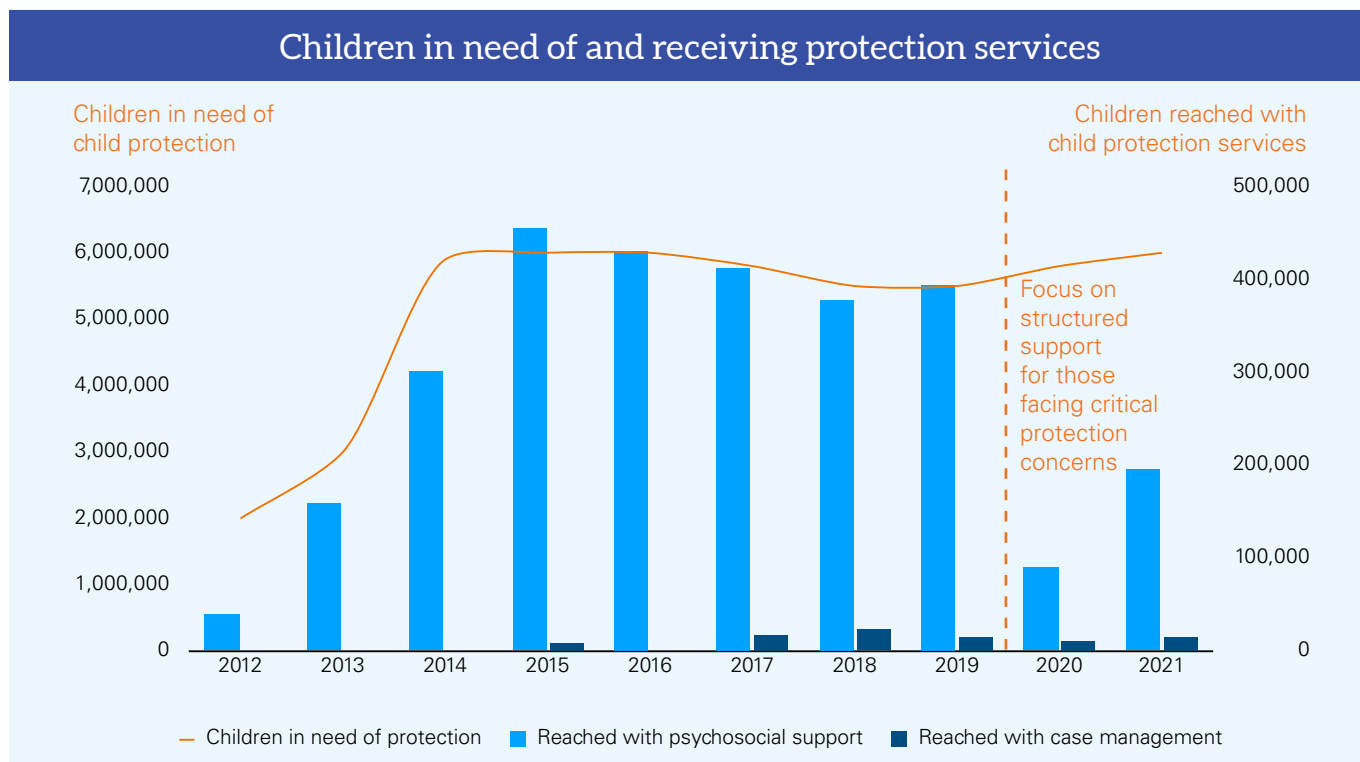


What has UNICEF done for Syrian children during the past 10 years of conflict?

The conflict in Syria has placed millions of children under profound psychosocial distress with possible lifelong impact on their mental wellbeing. An entire generation has grown up surrounded by fighting, displacement and deprivation. Forty-seven per cent have lost family or friends¹. UNICEF partners have provided an average of 285,000 children with psychosocial support per year since 2012, strengthening connections and positive relationships within their communities and guiding them to develop personal skills to cope with stress and emotional distress in the face of the now-pervasive impacts of conflict². Fifty-six per cent of children showed improvements in their well-being after participating in psychosocial support programming.

1 OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2021.

2 The drop in children reached from 2019 to 2020 relates in part to the increasingly structured, targeted support as well as the significant constraints imposed by COVID-19 precautions.



Among the children most severely affected by the conflict are the survivors of grave violations of children’s rights. In the annual report on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) published in 2012, the Secretary General reported the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. As a result, the Syria Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) was established. Since the beginning of the conflict in

March 2011 until September 2021³, 22,375 cases of grave violations have been verified along with 1,899 related violations of concern by all parties to the conflict. Eighty per cent of reported cases have been verified. Additionally, a third of communities in Syria are contaminated by unexploded ordnance, posing a huge risk for the continued killing and maiming of children⁴.

³ Of the total verified cases from January to September 2021, 69 per cent took place in NW Syria.

⁴ OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2021.



Grave violations verified from 2013 to September 2021



12,611 cases of killing and maiming of children



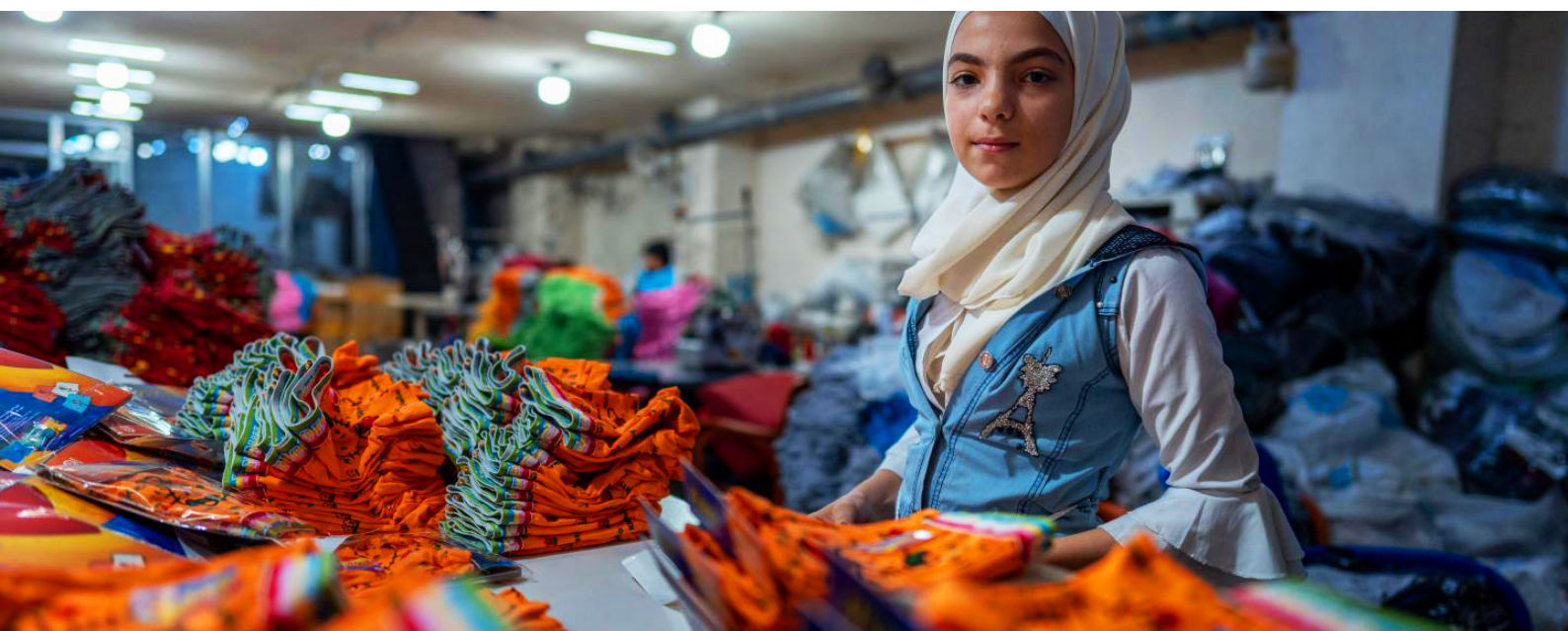
6,474 cases of recruitment and use of children



1,401 cases of attacks on schools and hospitals

In response to these verified grave violations, the UN has advocated with different armed actors, member states and others and explored ways to minimize the impact of the ongoing conflict on children. This included the establishment of a dialogue with the Syrian Democratic Forces, which culminated in a signed (June 2019) Security Council-mandated action plan to halt and prevent child use and recruitment. The framework of this dialogue was also utilized to address other child protection issues, including the use of schools for military purposes and the deprivation of liberty of children on security grounds. Similar efforts were initiated with the Government of Syria, which resulted in the re-activation of the inter-ministerial committee to act as a platform for interaction with the UN on CAAC issues.

Child survivors experience life-threatening situations and profound psychological distress, as do other children directly impacted by violence, in conflict with the law, engaged in hazardous labour or forced into marriage. UNICEF through its implementing partners has provided dedicated one-on-one **case management**, individualized planning and follow up to close to 13,000 children each year since 2015. UNICEF has also operated an **Integrated Programme for Children with Disabilities** which combines cash transfers and case management. Since the programme began in Aleppo Governorate in 2016, it has reached over 25,000 children in seven governorates across the country.



The protective environment in Syria in 2022

While active conflict in Syria has significantly receded, it remains a very real threat for children living in NW and NE Syria. Across the country, the architecture of humanitarian assistance is extremely politicized, resulting in major barriers to delivering aid and protection to populations in need in an equitable manner. Other child protection concerns include:

- ▶ Girls and boys of all ages are affected by **violence at home, in schools and the communities**: family violence figures indicate high prevalence for girls 12-17 years (47 per cent), boys 12-17 years (44 per cent), boys below 12 (45 per cent) and girls below 12 (44 per cent)⁵.
- ▶ The cumulated impact of war, displacement and multiple deprivations on the **mental health of Syrian children** which children needs to be addressed at a large, national, replicable and sustainable scale.
- ▶ **Children need to work to survive** and to help their families. In 84 per cent of assessed communities, respondents reported that child labour is an issue of concern, with boys more likely to be involved in hazardous

forms of labour and girls in domestic work.

- ▶ **Child marriage** was reported in 72 per cent of assessed communities, with 26 per cent of communities reporting it as common or very common.
- ▶ Tens of thousands of **children of Third Country Nationals (TCNs)** including unaccompanied children are stranded in camps or in detention centres in NE Syria with dire living circumstances, continuous security risks and scarce services with limited opportunities for repatriation and reintegration.
- ▶ Children deprived of their liberty or in **contact with the law** is a significant issue; child-friendly and gender-sensitive justice procedures anchored in community-based solutions are needed.
- ▶ The lack of **birth registration and civil documentation** limits access to assistance and services provided by authorities, as expressed by 76 per cent of communities⁶.
- ▶ **Halting grave violations** and the reintegration of children associated/affiliated with armed groups/forces needs clear engagement strategies and a strong programme for their reintegration with all parties to the conflict.

5 Children situation analysis, Syria 2018, UNICEF (unpublished).

6 OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2022.



What can UNICEF do for children in the next 10 years?

In an environment of limited fiscal space and competing priorities, **UNICEF will focus on protection system strengthening towards early recovery to ensure that much-needed child protection services are at scale and sustainable, reaching all children in Syria.** UNICEF will need to increasingly influence norms and behaviours to meet the scale of child protection needs in Syria. Responding to immediate, humanitarian child protection needs will continue in highly affected areas, especially NE and NW Syria, as will working with and strengthening community structures. However, child protection system-building will be brought to the fore throughout the country. UNICEF will support the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) to build child protection, welfare and legal systems, using lessons learned from the past decade of emergency response. Evidence-based advocacy and programming with the government is also required to increase government spending on these most vulnerable children: Allocation to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour represents only 0.05 per cent of the entire 2021 State Budget. Comparing 2020 and 2021, planned expenditures to the sector shows a sharp decrease of 55 per cent in real terms.

UNICEF Syria has three objectives

01 Universal Prevention: UNICEF will tackle the **behavioural, social and cultural determinants** of child protection violations at scale with the aim of addressing harmful social and gender norms. This will include delivering an integrated package of **MHPSS, violence prevention, including gender-based violence (GBV), parenting and EORE.** The package will be delivered through the school and health systems and other multi-service platforms to improve coverage and mainstream child protection in existing systems and community platforms. UNICEF will engage children, adolescents and youth, parents, caregivers and families, local leaders and influencers, and more broadly communities and societies to promote protective behaviours and norms through community-based programmes.

02 Leaving No One Behind: UNICEF will support inclusive and effective **child protection systems** in preventing and responding to child protection violations, support strengthened systems that are adaptable and resilient. This will include the **amendment, adoption and enforcement of laws and policies for the protection of children** to ensure that legis-



lative framework, systems and institutions have the capacity to promote the protection of children and to plan, budget and implement prevention and response programmes. It will also **require a strong social service workforce with the resources to provide integrated child protection and social services for children.** Social work-based case management is a systematic process, with qualified social workers who assess the needs of the child and his/her family and then provide, coordinate, monitor, evaluate and advocate for a package of multiple services to meet the specific child's needs⁷. A strong multi-sectoral, evidence-based, integrated case management system with a gender dimension will support child survivors of violence, including GBV, children in conflict with the law, child laborers, child marriage and children deprived of parental care.

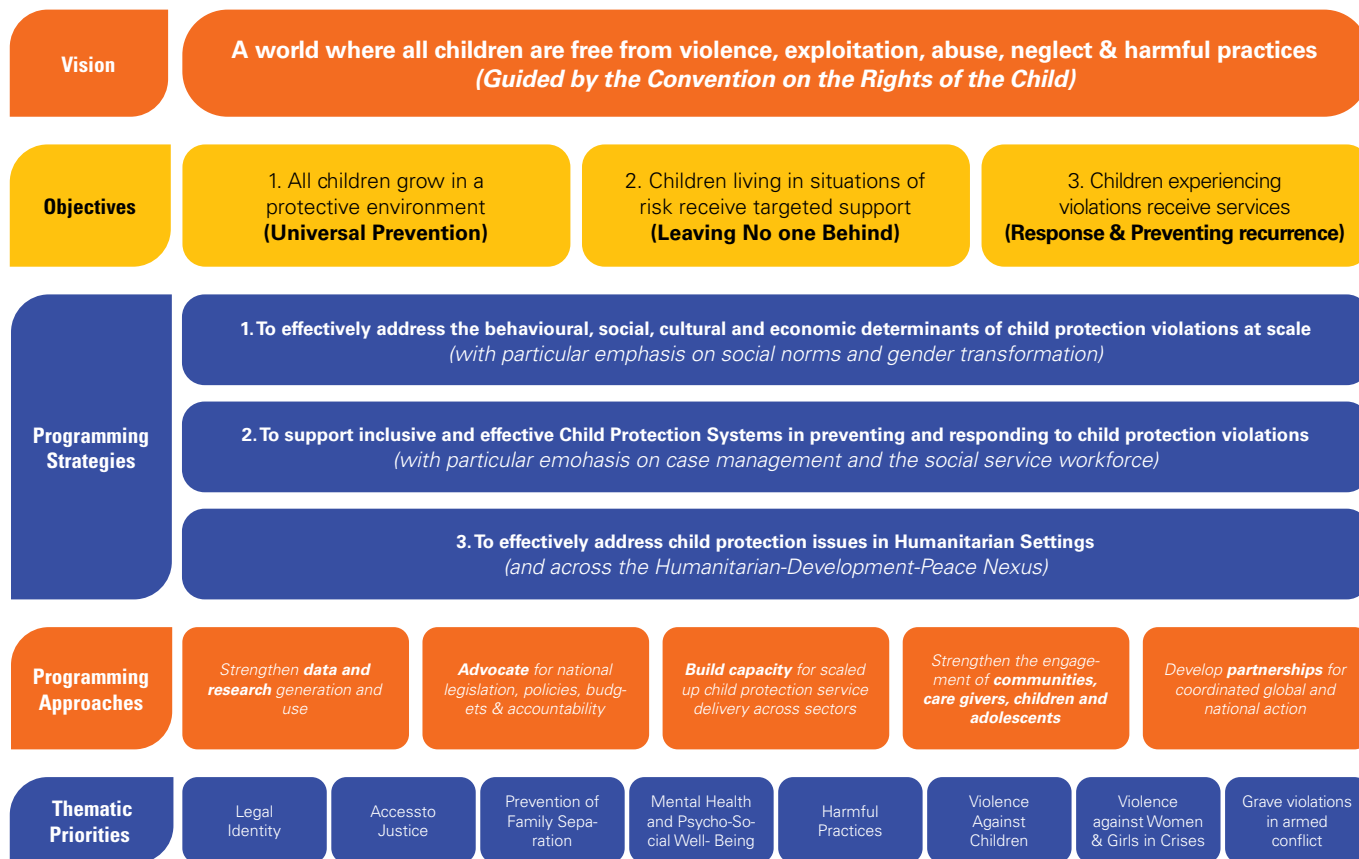
03 Prevention of recurrence of grave violations against children: Children experiencing violations will receive services aimed at saving lives, alleviating suffering and

effectively addressing child protection issues in humanitarian settings. Special attention will be given to **children deprived of parental care and unaccompanied and separated children** whether third country national or Syrian. This will require strong advocacy with the authorities and member states to ensure their repatriation where relevant and reunification with their families or placement in community and family-based solutions. Tackling the issue of children affiliated/ associated with armed groups/forces requires the development of a **contextualized reintegration programme** for children under the Government of Syria, NE Syria and NW Syria. **One urgent humanitarian priority will be working with state and non-state armed actors to bring grave violations to a halt.** The CTFMR will keep advocating for dialogue with influencers and armed actors to remind them of their obligation under international humanitarian law. In addition, UNICEF will aim to forge new agreements with other parties to the conflict committing grave violations against children and other violations of concern.

7 National Association of Social Workers, 2013.



UNICEF Child Protection Strategic Framework



Estimated budget requirements for 2022-2024

Pillar 1: Universal prevention	\$39,500,000
Pillar 2: Child protection system and services	\$28,500,000
Pillar 3: Prevention of recurrence of grave violations against children	\$50,000,000
Total	\$118,000,000



UNICEF Syria

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Syria Country Office

March 2022

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