



WHOLE OF SYRIA PROTECTION SECTOR Including MINE ACTION, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND CHILD PROTECTION AoRs

KEY ADVOCACY MESSAGES FOR BRUSSELS V March 2021

Current protection environment, challenges and needs in Syria

- A decade of conflict has contributed to a pervasive protection crisis where people's rights to safety, security and well-being are regularly at risk.
- Millions of civilians in Syria continue to face diverse and interlinked protection needs. Needs are driven by a range of situations including the impact of active hostilities, new displacements, and dynamics linked to return, all of which increase the stress on already overburdened communities and add to the cumulative long-term consequences of the crisis.
- Active or simmering hostilities in some parts of the country, notably the north-west and north-east regions, continue to be characterized by International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations with a disproportionate impact on civilians.
- The protracted crisis has depleted assets, productivity, infrastructure, and resulted in high levels of poverty across the country.
- Lack and loss of civil documentation continues to affect the population due to displacement; the reduced functionality of Registrars' Offices and cadastre, especially in areas affected by the conflict; and the delayed or missed registration of vital events, particularly in areas that have been outside the control of the State for prolonged time. This is in turn creating an array of vulnerabilities, challenges in accessing rights and services, movement restrictions, and Housing, Land and Property (HLP)-related issues.
- The massive displacement of the population has left the social fabric distressed, with disruption of community and family safety networks. Prolonged and profound distress has left people with high levels of unmet psychosocial needs.
- The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new set of protection risks and consequences for the affected population while compounding existing vulnerabilities. Movement restrictions resulted in disruptions to ongoing protection assistance, prevented protection actors from expanding their reach, and further confined people to situations of violence and vulnerability increasing their distress and exposure to risks, especially of women and children to violence within households.
- Explosive ordnance contamination continues to present a significant risk including for populations living in areas previously or currently witnessing hostilities, for individuals returning to their communities, and for humanitarian workers providing assistance.

Focusing in on a few key protection areas:

- **Child protection** - Girls and boys of all ages continue to be exposed to multiple protection risks and violations of their rights. Continuous displacement, exposure to violence, deepening poverty and a persistent lack of access to services have taken a huge toll. Grave child rights violations also remain a critical concern with 2,388 incidents recorded through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) in 2020, including children killed and injured, recruitment and use of children by all parties to the conflict, torture, detention, abduction, sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access.
- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV) - GBV has increased in Syria** - especially intimate partner violence. Harassment, intimate partner and family violence, child and forced marriage and subsequent pregnancies, and sexual violence and exploitation are consistently reported with new trends emerging such as forced puberty of adolescent girls to marry them off earlier. We are seeing that adolescent girls make up to 30% of antenatal care and delivery services.
- Adolescent girls face a wide range of challenges that usually accompany them throughout their lives. It begins with restrictions on movement and domestic violence and progresses as the girl grows to include child and serial marriage, domestic violence, early pregnancy, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation, among others. Adolescent girls are being denied their education, which further limits their life prospects and can entrap them in an unending cycle of violence and exploitation.



- **Mine Action** - Over half of the population (1 in 2), live in areas affected by explosive ordnance. Aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the social and economic crisis will likely force more people to adopt unsafe behaviours to sustain their livelihoods. Farming land, removing rubble to generate income, and collecting metal for trade are high-risk activities when explosive remnants of war are present.

KEY ASKS

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

Urge all parties to strictly adhere to principles and standards of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the prohibition on launching of indiscriminate attacks and the respect for principles of proportionality and precaution.

ATTACKS ON AND/OR MILITARY USE OF CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

In all high-level dialogues with all parties prioritize gaining the commitment of all parties to stop attacks on and/or military use of civilian infrastructure, in particular medical facilities and transport, schools, and residential property.

CHILD RECRUITMENT, CHILD DETENTION AND DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY

Find dialogue entry points and approaches and/or enhance existing engagement with relevant parties to the conflict, towards access to/response for all children detained by armed actors in Syria, as well as alternatives to detention/deprivation of liberty and release. Similarly, engage in structured protection dialogue with all entities in the conflict whose actions have a significant impact on children.

Urge all parties to stop all recruitment and use of children in the conflict. Any Syria peace talk or negotiation/discussion on cessation of hostilities must include agreements around specific measures to protect children from being recruited and used, detained and/or deprived of liberty in the conflict. Such measures should include a commitment to: i) prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, through issuing command orders that no boys or girls under the age of 18 should be involved in conflict in any combat or support role and put in place age assessment mechanisms: ii) expedite their release to civilian child protection actors for reintegration and return to civilian life; and facilitate safe access to the services required in their reintegration.

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

Recognize and adequately fund the additional needs of women and girls created by the COVID-19 pandemic, including support to adapt GBV programs and respond to increased rates of IPV and other forms of GBV.

Increase support to multi-sectoral GBV response services to meet the multifaceted needs of women and girls at risk and GBV survivors, including case management, psychosocial support, CVA, and referrals to specialized services. Extend reach and accessibility of GBV programs for all women and girls, including the most marginalized, through a combination of in-person and remote service provision. Increased funding is needed to sustain what is in place and expand to meet all the needs.

Invest in and support accountability mechanisms to ensure that all humanitarian actors take responsibility for mitigating the risks of GBV and eliminating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in the region.

IMPLEMENTATION OF HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION

Urge all parties to support humanitarian mine action and advocate for unhindered and meaningful access to all areas in need of humanitarian mine action interventions, particularly survey and clearance. Flexible and sustained funding across all humanitarian mine action activities is paramount to support existing programming and allow rapid scale-up into new areas.

UNHINDERED HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Urge all parties to respect the principle of humanity and ensure unimpeded, regular and sustained humanitarian access for humanitarian actors in all parts of Syria to be able to provide quality protection interventions using all necessary modalities, including to: women and children allegedly affiliated with designated armed groups and deprived of their liberty for purported security reasons, and persons living in areas reporting explosive



hazard contamination; Respect independent protection needs assessments and protection monitoring; Commit to the protection of aid workers, local and international personnel alike, and guaranteeing that they will not be penalized or targeted for having provided assistance, especially as lines of control change.

ACCESS TO CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

Support access to civil documentation, including in areas under the control of non-state armed groups, as well as the non-retaliation and non-discrimination of individuals based on the sole possession of documents they are able to obtain.

HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

Commit to continuous advocacy surrounding the specific needs and current situation of Syrian IDPs and Syrian Refugees in all matters pertaining to enacting or amending legislation affecting Housing, Land and Property rights, also in relation to the pursuit of durable solutions.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Urge all parties to ensure freedom of movement. Persons who have lost their personal documentation or who could not renew it because of the crisis should not be arbitrarily detained, or discriminated against, and the unity of their families should be protected. Charges should not be imposed at crossing points. Women and girls must not be limited in their freedom of movement due to restrictive conservative rules or societal customs.

ENSURE VOLUNTARINESS IN RETURNS AND RELOCATIONS

Urge all authorities to ensure that returns of IDPs and Refugees are voluntary and based on their informed consent. Any relocations initiated by authorities must also ensure informed consent of concerned people. Authorities must ensure that humanitarian partners are duly informed and consulted in relation to all such endeavours to ensure humanitarian partners can support authorities in identifying and mitigating protection risks, and adherence to relevant principles.

KEY ASKS FOR DONORS

- Predictability and sustainability of funding (flexible and multi-year funding) for the full range of protection activities in all parts of Syria. This is vital to support approaches that are holistic and responsive to the needs of communities.
- Provision of funding driven by severity of needs and not areas of control, with clarity in donor strategies and priorities.
- Increase attention and commitment at all levels for the collective responsibility to address and mitigate the risks of gender-based violence.
- Scale-up support to specialised child protection initiatives including for children formerly associated with armed groups/forces and vulnerable children/families unable to access safe livelihood opportunities due to disability or other factors.
- Advocate with the humanitarian leadership to support the Protection Sector in maintaining the integrity and non-interference by parties in control in any dialogue on protection assessments.
- Give due consideration to qualitative information when evaluating protection activities as they cannot be viewed simply through numbers.
- Continued funding and advocacy support for coordination based on the most effective mechanisms.
- Advocate with all relevant authorities for unfettered humanitarian access across Syria through all necessary modalities.