



IRC Syria Country Programme

Overview of Child Protection (CP) Programme in the Whole of Syria

1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

More than 12 years on since the onset of the Syria crisis in 2011, Syria faces a variety of extreme challenges, making the situation “one of the world’s most complex humanitarian and protection emergencies”¹. Protracted humanitarian and ongoing economic crises continue to deteriorate the situation of everyday lives of the Syrian people. Basic services and infrastructures (civil services, health, education, etc.) are on the brink of collapsing. Diseases outbreaks (Covid-19 and Cholera since late 2022) and ongoing armed conflicts (including, escalated Turkish incursion in northern parts of Syria) in several parts of the country left people extremely vulnerable and at risk of new displacements, compounding an already dire situation.

Children are one of the most affected groups by the Syrian conflict. Between January and September 2022 alone, **1,895 grave violations against children** were filed in Syria (including 1,291 cases of recruitment and use of children and 236 cases of killing), indicating that children across Syria remain extremely vulnerable and exposed to violations of basic human rights due to the ongoing hostilities². **2.6 million school-going children are estimated to be out of school** across Syria. **Adolescent boys are extremely vulnerable to being killed, injured, separated from their families, detained with no legal grounds, and recruited by armed groups or to be involved in child labour**³. On the other hand, **adolescent girls are more likely to be at risk of forced early marriage, and many different forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)**.⁴

Children’s situation in Syria

After more than a decade of protracted conflict, children’s situations are nowhere near safe. Girls and boys are vulnerable and affected differently; girls are prone to be married off early regardless of their wills, while boys are more likely to be engaged in hazardous child labour inappropriate for their developmental stages.

Child protection risks are likely to worsen in 2023, with rights violations (child recruitment, detention, neglect, exploitation, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access) continuously on the rise. Particularly after the earthquake occurred in northwest Syria on the 6th of February, some 2.4 million children need child

protection support. The CP Area of Responsibility is targeting 500,000 children and adults with awareness sessions on Child Protection and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) issues including specific earthquake and family tracing related messages. At least 800 unaccompanied and separated children need family tracing and reunification services, or family based alternative care. Gaps in terms of lack of specialized mental health services for children have been identified by partners on non-specialized MHPSS services (level 3 of the IASC pyramid). There is a need to implement more inter-cluster and gender-disaggregated interventions focused on adolescents to address issues related to child labor and child marriage.⁵

2. CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAMME

IRC has been operational since 2012 and its Child Protection (CP) programs aim to protect children from any form of violence, abuse, exploitation and/or neglect through:

- Building capacities and preparedness among local communities (including children themselves), relevant external stakeholders and IRC’s/partners’ staff to prevent children from – and respond to – any form of CP risks/concerns and child rights violation.
- Providing immediate and critical responses (both personalized and group) to children at risk of – who are experiencing/have experienced – CP risks/concerns.
- Establishing effective and functional referrals and coordination mechanisms with external agencies and local stakeholders; and
- Exploring new types of CP programming to serve the most marginalized children (e.g. Children Associated with Armed Conflict (CAAC), Unaccompanied and Separated Children, children in rehabilitation/detention centers, etc.).

IRC’s CP programmes across Syria are currently ongoing in different IDP camps, implementing activities directly or together with local partners. IRC also hosts the NES Protection Working Group (WG), Child Protection Sub-WG (CP AoR) and the Children Associated with Armed Conflict (CAAC) Taskforce.

IRC, in partnership with local implementing partners, is currently implementing the below interventions to effectively address CP concerns and risks happening at both the household and the community levels.

¹ Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, 2023, UN OCHA

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Voices from Syria, 2023, Assessment of Findings of Humanitarian Needs Overview, UNFPA

⁵ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/syria/>

Community-Based Child Protection (CBCP):

IRC recognizes the vital importance of functional, strengthened CBCP structures to effectively create a safer, more protective, and sustainable CP environment where children are free from any form of CP risk/concerns and child rights violations. The CBCP structures (such as CP committees (CPC), Parents Committees, and Children/Youth Committees) are informal, voluntary structures represented by key stakeholders in communities (parents, teachers, community leaders, adolescents, children themselves, etc.) who play important roles in holding duty-bearers accountable for promoting children's rights, creating a safer and more protective CP environment as well as responding to CP concerns and risks. The CBCP structures serve as a forum where community members can meet, discuss CP problems, identify action plans, and take concrete actions to find local solutions. IRC provides capacity-building initiatives on CP core concepts, safe and effective identifications, and referrals of children at risk, children's development, and many other topics upon the establishment of the CBCP structures and continues the support in capacity/knowledge-sharing and mentoring. The CBCP structures play a significant role in engaging wider community members and conducting, together with IRC's facilitators, community outreach activities and dialogues to transfer the knowledge and skills that they gained, raise awareness, and increase confidence and preparedness to respond to CP concerns and risks among wider community members.

Safe Healing and Learning Spaces (SHLS):

[SHLS](#) is a safe and caring environment for conflict- and disaster-affected children and adolescents to enjoy their childhood through informal learning, recreational and structured psychosocial support activities. In SHLSs, IRC provides structured psychosocial support (PSS) activities based on IRC's existing PSS curricula, such as Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for children aged between 6-10 years, and [Supporting Adolescents and their Families in Emergencies \(SAFE\)](#) and/or [Now I am Stronger](#) curricula for adolescent boys aged 11 years old and above⁶. In addition, unstructured and recreational PSS activities are also provided within the SHLSs and/or through outreach mobile team of facilitators using the SHLSs as a hub. SHLSs also serve as a hub to create synergy between other CP activities, such as the community-based CP structures, parenting skills, case management (identification and referrals, etc.).

Positive Parenting Skills:

Using SHLSs as a hub, IRC provides positive parenting course based on IRC's [Families Make the Difference](#) curriculum with caregivers/parents of children aged between 6 and 18 years old. These parenting sessions aim at strengthening caregivers' capacity to manage the challenges of raising children during a

crisis and help their children/adolescents cope with the traumatic events and displacements that they have experienced. These parenting interventions promote the well-being of children and adolescents through improving caregivers' stress management skills, fostering positive parenting practices and providing parents with strategies to support their children's/adolescents' psychosocial needs.

Case Management (CM):

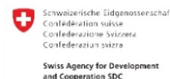
Grounded in [the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action \(CPMS\) 2019](#), relevant humanitarian principles (Do No Harm, the Best Interests of the Child, etc.), inter-agency/sectoral coordination and essential IRC's policies,⁷ IRC provides [case management](#) with, but not limited to, children at risk of – who are experiencing/have experienced – physical and emotional violence and abuse, neglect, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and exploitation (including child labour), unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), CAAC, and children in contact with the law. IRC's Case Workers are trained on case management and Best Interests Procedures.

Cash for Child Protection Outcomes

IRC provides Cash for Protection (CfP) to families/caregivers of children who are registered under CM, to mitigate various protection risks and address identified protection outcomes, such as shelter, transport, enrolment to vocational skills training, access to legal documents and access to basic items, food, etc. CWs conduct a Protection Cash Assessment (PCA) and to abide by confidentiality/data protection ethics and IRC's Cash Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). After the transfer, Case workers will continue to provide individual CM services, monitoring and assessing the direct and indirect impact of cash on the targeted children and their protection concerns.

3. DONORS

IRC's Child Protection programmes in Syria have continued with the generous support from following institutional donors.



For more information on IRC's global child protection work and the interventions used in our programs, visit <https://childprotectionpractitioners.org>

⁶ In some locations, CP team provides structured PSS activities with adolescent boys while Women Protection and Empowerment (WPE) team provides structured PSS based on IRC's Girl Shine curriculum with adolescent girls.

⁷ Child Safeguarding Policy, Adult Safeguarding Policy, Harassment-Free Workplace Policy, IRC Way – Professional Code of Conduct.