

4.12.3. Child labour and child trafficking

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

COI summary

The growing inability to meet basic needs and the widespread poverty induce households across the country to rely on negative coping mechanisms, with several sources reporting that child labour was generally used to alleviate financial constraints. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39; [Damascus 2022](#), 3.2.2, p. 40]

The UNFPA noted an escalation in the exploitation of women and girls and a growing incidence of child labour among adolescent girls due to the deteriorating levels of poverty and food insecurity across the country. Child labour is particularly common among IDP living out of camps [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 36]. It was also stated that in northwest Syria households experiencing multiple displacement became exposed to an increased threat of resorting to child labour. A report also indicated that child labour was occurring in communities across northern Idlib, likely exposing children there to abuse and exploitation. Boys are reportedly at greater risk of becoming subject to child labour than girls [[Targeting 2020](#), 12.2, p. 94]. On the other hand, young girls are forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as prostitution or survival sex, because they are in need of money and goods [[Situation of women](#), 1.1.3, p. 26]. A higher reliance on child labour of children aged 15-17 years old (7 %) in female-headed households compared to male-headed households (2 %) has been reported [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, p. 39].

Child labour has a devastating impact on children, including on their level of school attendance. Around 48 % of families surveyed by UNOCHA stated that the main reason their child was not attending school was to support the household. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.4, pp. 39, 42-43]

Child labour also exposed children to exploitation, sexual and psychological violence. Working outside of their homes and not residing together with their family also exposes children to exploitation by gangs, or to joining gangs, to smoking and drug abuse, and to health hazards stemming from handling dangerous equipment. Spending most of their day outside their home, many working children returned home alone after dark, further exposing them to harassment, including sexual harassment. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36; [Targeting 2020](#), 12.2, p. 94]

The human trafficking market in Syria has been defined as 'flourishing' with forced labour and sexual exploitation as being 'pervasive' across the country. Trafficking in persons occurred all across the country, although Deir Ez-Zor and Al Qaim, an Iraqi town on the border with Syria, have been identified as the major trafficking hubs. USDOS observed that no measure has been taken by the GoS either to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute traffickers. The same source highlighted the complicity of the state in human

trafficking, as most criminal markets in Syria are run by actors affiliated with the GoS, including the NDF and the Tiger Forces. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36]

Girls, boys and women were subjected to exploitation by armed groups, community members and criminal gangs. Moreover, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 exacerbated the vulnerability to sex trafficking, forced labour, and recruitment or use of children by armed groups. Children, divorced and widowed women, and displaced persons were more exposed to exploitation. Out of school children are more likely to be exposed to child labour and trafficking. Unaccompanied minors were also more likely to be involved in forced child labour to access basic needs when compared to other children with caregivers. Displaced children were particularly exposed to forced labour, especially by organized begging rings. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 36, 1.4, pp. 39-40]

In areas where the ISIL exerted control, girls and women were forced into marriage with fighters, subjected to domestic servitude, sexual slavery and early marriage. An estimated 6 000 women and children, mainly Yazidis, who had been previously abducted and transferred to Syria by ISIL, have been sold into sex trafficking. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 37]

Children who have been victims of trafficking continued to be detained by the GoS, NDF, SDF, and SNA on the basis of their alleged association with armed or terrorist groups. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.3, p. 37]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Child trafficking amounts to persecution.

Not all forms of child labour would amount to persecution. An assessment should be made in light of the nature and conditions of the work and the age of the child. Work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children could be considered to reach the severity of persecution.¹⁴ The impact of child labour on access to education should also be taken into account (see the subsection [4.12.5. Access to education](#)). Other risks, such as involvement in criminal activities should also be considered.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: age, gender, socio-economic situation, being in an IDP situation, region of origin or residence, etc. Children without a male relative, who is willing and able to provide support, would particularly be at risk.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

The risk of child labour as such may not generally imply a nexus to a reason for persecution. However, the individual circumstances of the applicant need to be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated.

See other topics concerning children:

- [4.12.1. Violence against children: overview](#)
- [4.12.2. Child recruitment](#)
- [4.12.3. Child labour and child trafficking](#)
- [4.12.4. Child marriage](#)
- [4.12.5. Access to education](#)
- [4.12.6. Lack of documentation](#)

¹⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO), Minimum Age Convention, C138, 26 June 1973, available at http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C138; Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, C182, 17 June 1999, available at http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182.