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1.3.6. Children

For detailed information on children in Syria, see section 1.4. Children of the EUAA COI report Syria: Country Focus (October 2023).

☐ (a) Impact of violence on children

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), some 25 500 violations against children were recorded during the 13 years of the conflict, including killing and maiming of children and child recruitment.281 SNHR stated that 30 293 children were killed in the period of March 2011-10 November 2024, and as of 20 November 2024, 5 298 children were arrested, detained, or forcibly disappeared.282 In the period from 1 January to 27 December 2024, OHCHR documented incidents killing 212 children across Syria.283 Following the change of regime, reports on killing of children by armed actors persisted.284 Children also continued to be harmed by unexploded ordnance that killed or injured at least 116 in December285 and 136 in the period of 1 January to 17 February.286 In January 2025, UNOCHA warned that ‘grave violations against children remain a major concern, including the risk of being killed, injured, recruited, and used in hostilities.’287

As of December 2024, an estimated 7.5 million children in Syria were in need of humanitarian assistance288and around 6.4 million in need of psychological help.289 The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported that food insecurity and malnutrition among children increased health risks.290 Some 506 000 children younger than five years old in Idlib and Aleppo were suffering from acute malnutrition and over 609 000 from stunting..291 The WHO found that in some governorates, stunting has reached ‘alarmingly high levels’.292 UNOCHA reported that hospitals were overcrowded and that psychological distress among children was widespread.293

☐ (b) Negative coping mechanisms

According to UNOCHA, child labour and child marriage remained ‘widely accepted’ coping mechanisms for Syrian families and their scope remains underreported. Children in street situations were exposed to exploitation and were ‘in contact with the law for petty and grave crimes’.294

An UNOCHA report released in January 2025 indicated that the economic crisis in Syria has further increased risks of GBV among vulnerable population, including among adolescent girls, as well as risks of child labour, child marriage, and sexual exploitation. 295

A report by the international NGO Welthungerhilfe about the Aleppo and Idlib governorates assessing the protection needs, based on data collected in August 2024, found that instances of sexual violence against children, particularly adolescent girls, occurred in various settings including at home, at school, at workplace, and in IDP camps. The report found that child marriages remained ‘prevalent’ both in IDP camps and host communities, the main reasons being primarily poverty in Aleppo and customs and traditions in Idlib.296

According to the USDOS, under the Assad government, there were shelters for orphaned children.297 There were 1.2 million orphans estimated in Syria, and according to a governmental decree, children were assumed ‘Muslim unless proven otherwise’ and they could be adopted only ‘if the couple and the child share the same religion.’298 A report by the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), a network of NGOs, international organisations and UN agencies, released in December 2024 found that children were particularly affected by a lack of civil documentation.299

☐ (c) Forced recruitment by armed groups

In a report published on 20 November 2024, SNHR stated that 2 395 children were forcibly conscripted in Syria in the period of March 2011-10 November 2024.300 In June

2024, the United Nations Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict signed an action plan to ‘to end and prevent the recruitment and use and the killing and maiming of children’ with the SNA and aligned factions.[301] Additionally, a road map to implement a 2019 action plan between the UN, SDF, and the administrations in northern and eastern Syria, prohibiting recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, was adopted.[302] Nevertheless, instances of recruitment of children continued to be reported, including by SDF[303] and by a Kurdish youth movement in the north-eastern Syria.[304] At the end of November 2024, SNHR documented operations by the former regime aimed at conscripting young men and boys with a goal of deploying them to northern Syria.[305]

☐ (d) Access to education

As of January 2025, there were some 2.4 million children out of school in Syria and an additional million at a risk of dropping out.[306] Since the end of November 2024, schooling for around 230 000 children was interrupted in northeast Syria due to ongoing conflict.[307] Out of school children were at increased risk of child labour and child marriage,[308] as well as trafficking and recruitment.[309] A report by UNOCHA of January 2025 states that over 5 200 schools are damaged and lack equipment. While the education is free, some families have prioritised negative coping mechanism affecting children’s school attendance.[310] In December 2024, the UN reported that while schools have reopened across Syria, ‘volatile security situation’ affected school attendance in some areas.[311] Access to schools was hindered by unexploded remnants of war.[312] Some schools have become shelters for newly displaced people after the offensive that defeated the president Bashar al-Assad on 8 December 2024.[313] Approximately 68 000 children in Aleppo and other governorates were unable to attend school, as many schools were being used as collective shelters for displaced persons.[314]

According to International Crisis Group, ‘interim officials rushed through changes to the Islamic education curriculum.’[315] In January 2025, sources indicated that the authorities introduced changes in the school curriculum without involving the society in the process, replacing references to the Assad regime with religious texts in some instances.[316]

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