Save the Children

# UNCERTAIN FUTURES

## The impact of displacement on Syrian refugee and Iraqi internally displaced youth in Iraq

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Author: Sarah Ireland, Humanitarian Advocacy and Policy Adviser, Save the Children Australia

Front cover photo: Mohammed, 12 years old, is displaced in an urban community in Kirkuk.
Photo: Ali Arkady/Save the Children.

## Save the Children in Iraq

Save the Children has been working in Iraq since 1991, with a brief interruption from 2007 to 2008. Save the Children has been providing emergency response to Syrian refugees since 2012 and Iraqi internally displaced persons from the latest displacement crisis since 2014. Save the Children works with vulnerable groups in the community, focusing on areas least served by other agencies, and those with the greatest need. Save the Children in Iraq promotes and protects children's rights with programs in child protection, health, education, livelihoods, child rights governance, shelter, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the conflict in Syria edges towards its sixth year and world leaders grapple with its catastrophic human consequences, much attention has focussed on the conflict itself as the driver of mass migration to Europe. In this report, we seek to highlight a related but distinct set of drivers for a particular group of young, displaced people living in Iraq, and consider the terrible personal impact that displacement has had on their lives.

### The Iraqi 'youth bulge' and its repercussions

Iraq has one of the highest youth populations in the world. Nearly 50 percent of the population is under 19-years-of-age,[1] and almost 20 percent of the population are between the ages of 15 and 24.[2] Many Iraqi and Syrian youths have been forced to flee from their homes and are living in camps or in host communities in Iraq due to the conflict caused by the Islamic State (IS) insurgency in Iraq and the conflict in Syria.

Our report reveals that the experience of conflict and displacement has had a devastating impact on these youths.

Through discussions with 138 13 – 24-year-old Syrian refugee and Iraqi internally displaced youths living in Iraq, complemented by interviews with members of non-government organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies and the Iraqi and Kurdish Government, we reveal that:

- Feelings of hopelessness and persistent discrimination were pervasive among the group, including discrimination experienced at the hands of NGO workers and regional governments.
- Extended disruption to education, heightened concerns about violence and abuse, and a lack of job opportunities are among the biggest challenges that youths are facing.
- The majority of youths said they saw no future as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees in Iraq, and many Syrians felt that if there was a future for them it was in Europe, including through facilitation by people smugglers.
- Some male youths are attracted to the possibility of joining armed groups, not for ideological reasons, but rather in order to receive a salary and provide for their family.

The dangers of ignoring this displaced youth population in Iraq are stark. With poor access to safe and quality support and services, many of these youths face a variety of hardships such as isolation, insecurity, psychological distress, extended disruption of education, heighted protection risks, exploitative working conditions, desperation and hopelessness.[3] This presents a worrying situation for the future of Iraq. Indeed, the 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) states that community leaders are worried that disaffected youth, with few positive options, will fuel tensions and violence for decades to come.[4]

### Feelings of hopelessness, unfairness and injustice

Feelings of hopelessness, unfairness or injustice underscored nearly all of the discussions by youths. Such feelings were particularly linked to the discrimination youths felt perpetrated against them by all other groups including host communities, NGO workers and the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Nearly all of the groups listed some form of discrimination as one of the most significant challenges they were facing in their daily lives. Youths linked discrimination to their ability to gain employment and access to education, be treated fairly at school, and the perceived unfairness in the distribution of aid and services. Many of the IDP and refugee youths highlighted discrimination as a key reason they would like to either go back to their places of origin in Iraq or Syria or travel to Europe, saying that there was no future for them in a country where they were so regularly discriminated against.

Discrimination by NGO and UN workers was also perceived by Syrian and Iraqi youths of all ages, and this contributed greatly towards their feelings of anger and injustice, as they felt these employees were supposed to be helping them. Indeed, interviews with national staff from implementing agencies both in and outside camps highlighted the potential for personal feelings towards the IDPs or refugees to influence programs and their interactions with beneficiaries.

### A future in Iraq? Drivers of further displacement

Syrian refugee youths between the ages of 15 – 24 said that lack of education and job opportunities were the two primary issues that were causing their families to consider the journey to Europe. While both male and female Syrian youths expressed their desire to travel to Europe, many youths said that if there was not enough money for all family members to travel, it would be the male youths who would be sent as they had the most potential to earn money. Some of these youths even went so far as to proclaim that once they got to Europe they would no longer experience discrimination and they would feel happy again.

Conversely, very few Iraqi IDP youths of any age expressed a desire to travel to Europe. While the majority were unhappy with life as an IDP, most saw their future as being back in their places of origin in Iraq.

### Inequality in the distribution of aid

Perceptions of inequality in the distribution of aid manifested throughout different discussions, and between all groups. Both IDPs and refugees also felt that aid was distributed based on a person's relationship with either camp management or NGO staff.

This issue of inequality was raised by various members of the international community who said the separate funding streams for the refugee response and the IDP response can create problems in a mixed community when funding is based on population group (eg. refugees or IDPs) rather than need. Many UN and NGO workers also said that the different funding sources for providing assistance to refugees and IDPs made it difficult to coordinate a single system, and felt that humanitarian operation should be organised according to need, not status of beneficiaries.

### Education

Both female and male youths of all ages spoke of education as being the most important thing in their lives. However, education was consistently listed as a key challenge, with a variety of barriers inhibiting access. Key barriers for not being able to access education were not enough schools, schools were located too far away from where the youths lived, classes were not culturally appropriate, not enough Arabic language schools, and they lacked the required documents for school registration. Youths also spoke about physical punishment at school, unprofessional

**IDP girls attend a public school in Kirkuk. Photo: Ali Arkady/ Save the Children.**

or untrained teachers, and education equivalency recognition documents not being recognised outside of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Many youths spoke of their lack of educational opportunities as being a major barrier to being happy and feeling positive about the future. Both youths and their parents identified education as one of the key drivers in their decision-making about leaving Iraq.

### Protection

Protection risks were included by many youths, particularly girls, in their top challenges and as one of the key issues inhibiting their access to school and restricting their general freedom. Issues such as sexual abuse and harassment, rumours of kidnapping and killing of children, early marriage, physical punishment and child labour were key issues highlighted by both youths and their parents.

IDP and refugee girls of all ages spoke of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) with many saying that verbal and physical abuse both inside camps and in the host communities had caused their parents to prohibit them from leaving their homes and attending school, and imposed isolation. Worryingly, nearly all the girls who mentioned SGBV incidents expressed a lack of options to report such behaviour without negative consequences for themselves.

### Livelihoods

All groups consistently ranked poor economic situation and lack of job opportunities as a top challenge being faced by their families. The main challenges within this were lack of jobs for either fathers or older male youths, lack of regular financial support from aid agencies, not getting paid by the employers on time or at all, low salaries, and the perception that jobs were being awarded based on relationship to employer or ethnicity rather than merit. Both IDPs and refugees listed not having a legal right to work as a key challenge.

Discussions also highlighted the link between unemployment and social tensions amongst the displaced population and the host community, with both Syrian and Iraqis giving examples of being accused of taking jobs from the host community.

Child labour was also discussed widely, with many 13 – 18-year-old refugee and IDP males giving examples of working during the day, either begging or in informal employment. Most of these youths agreed that this work impacted negatively on their schooling.

Both male and female youths also discussed vocational training as being a key source of frustration. Camp-based refugee youths between the ages of 15 – 25 explained how undertaking vocational trainings with the knowledge that there would be no job opportunities at the completion of the training exacerbated feelings of hopelessness and anger.

### Armed Groups

Discussions between the youths around armed groups largely centred on the potential to earn a regular salary or on the fear of forced recruitment for those IDP and refugee families who were considering returning to their places of origin in either Syria or Iraq. Many of the younger girls in particular expressed fear of their older brothers being recruited. However one group of camp-based refugee youths spoke of the potential to join armed groups as an outlet for their feelings of injustice.

### What can be done?

On December 9th 2015, the UN Security Council adopted an historic resolution on youth, peace and security, which focused entirely on the role of young men and women in peacebuilding and countering violent extremism. This resolution represents an unprecedented acknowledgement of the urgent need to engage young peacebuilders in promoting peace and countering extremism, and firmly positions youth and youth-led organisations as important partners in the global efforts to counter violent extremism and promote lasting peace.

This report seeks to shine a light on the challenges faced by refugee and IDP youths in Iraq and potential drivers of further displacement, so humanitarian actors, donors and the GoI and the KRG can have positive engagement with displaced youths in Iraq. Such positive engagement will work towards the promotion of peace through both Iraq and Syria that this historic youth, peace and security resolution sets forth. Such engagement is an investment in the futures of Iraq and Syria as an educated, productive and engaged young population represents one of the most promising chances for Iraq and Syria to rebuild and prosper with lasting peace.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Humanitarian actors

- Review programming approaches and attitudes of staff to ensure values are aligned and humanitarian principles are upheld at all times. Such an approach should include conducting internal awareness-raising to ensure all INGO staff are reflecting views and objectives of the organisation.
- Identify what is and is not working – analyse how successes can be replicated in other programming in order to overcome inhibitive or unsafe environments for youths.
- Embed youth programming in host communities so they have the potential to transform attitudes, enhance linkages between ethnic groups, and ease social tensions.
- Support youth-led and locally owned programmes, and ensure youths have hope for the future through links between programs such as vocational trainings and job opportunities in their communities.
- Ensure youths are protected, particularly those most at risk including girls. Investigate how protection risks can be mitigated through supporting community based options.
- Ensure youths of all ages are not missing out on education, including tertiary education. Ensure culturally appropriate schooling options are available, and investigate multiple, blended approaches are taken to tackle barriers, particularly for marginalised youths who face multiple disadvantages to accessing education.
- Integrate social cohesion programming throughout other programming.

### UN and Donors

- Enforce a 'do no harm' and 'conflict-sensitive' approach to avoid the current dual planning process for supporting displaced people that produces two separate appeals for refugees and IDPs.
- Promote the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism through supporting Government-led programs encouraging social cohesion and harmony.
- Ensure youth programmes that encourage social cohesion and resilience are fully funded.
- Ensure coordination mechanisms are established for all youth actors and foster dialogue between government, UN and local and international NGOs on youth focused programming, and with youths themselves.
- Provide support to the KRG and GoI to develop and implement policies and practices that allow refugees and IDPs to work legally, without negatively affecting the economies of the host communities.

### Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government

- Show leadership to encourage social cohesion and explore programs such as disseminating anti-discrimination messaging through public awareness campaigns, and positive use of media.
- Standardise processes for Syrian refugees to gain the residency permits across all governorates of KRG. Procedures to maintain valid documentation and registration must be clear, accessible, and affordable.
- Investigate legal options that allow refugees and IDPs to work legally in Iraq.

# 2. INTRODUCTION

Young people between the ages of 15 and 25 constitute a fifth of the world's population and given the right opportunities, youths can be highly engaged in transforming conflict, countering violence and building peace. The choices youths make regarding their education, work and relationships greatly influence their adult life. If youths have opportunities to positively engage socially and economically, they will have a greater chance of leading secure and productive lives where they are able to drive lasting, positive change.

The impact the conflicts in Syria and Iraq have had on IDP and refugee youths has not been comprehensively documented, however many humanitarian agencies working in Iraq have identified both refugee and IDP youths as being a significantly vulnerable population group.

Iraq is the only country in the world dealing with two simultaneous Inter-Agency Standing Committee-classified Level 3[5] emergencies, as conflict in Iraq and Syria has led to successive waves of mass displacement and humanitarian crisis inside Iraq. The country is now host to around 250,000 refugees fleeing the war in Syria,[6] while coping with the impact of its own brutal internal conflict. Since January 2014, more than 3.2 million people have been displaced inside Iraq,[7] out of a total population of around 34 million.

There are around 8.7 million people in need of assistance in Iraq and both civilians and the government are increasingly unable to cope with the consequences of the crisis.[8] Movement restrictions inside the country have exacerbated the crisis with affected populations being unable to access, or face challenges in accessing, safe areas. Humanitarian actors also struggle to reach people who are most in need. These restrictions of movement and legal issues particularly for IDPs have significant implications for employability and ability to integrate into the local job market. The GoI and KRG are operationally and financially overwhelmed in implementing the response.[9] Compounding this, by the end of 2015 the 2015 Humanitarian Response Appeal was just 43 percent funded[10] and the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) of which Iraq is a component was just 59 percent funded.

Humanitarian access to areas beyond GoI or KRG control remains limited. In areas accessible to humanitarian organisations, assistance has been complicated by lack of documentation and administrative challenges.[11]

Through focused discussions with 13 – 24-year-old Syrian refugee and Iraqi IDP youths living in Iraq, complimented by interviews with members of NGOs, UN agencies and the Government, this study highlights the challenges being faced by refugee and IDP youths in Iraq. The issues raised in focus group discussions (FGDs) differed between IDPs and refugees, youths in different governorates, and youths inside camps or in host communities. However, while the actual barrier they discussed may have been different, many of the challenges youths described were similar, such as a lack of job opportunities, limited access to education, discrimination and protection risks. As such, this report seeks to shine a light on the challenges youths voiced during these FGDs in order to advance policy and programmatic decisions to deliver improved outcomes for youth in Iraq.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

The information in this report comes from 18 FGDs with 138 youths segmented by sex and age group (13 – 15 / 16 – 19 / 20 – 24-years-old). On average there were 7 – 10 youths in each FGD. These discussions included Syrian and IDP youths living in camps and host communities across Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) in Dohuk and Erbil Governorates, and in Kirkuk. Save the Children defines 'youth' as encompassing the stage of social development between childhood and adulthood, a time of life stretching from puberty to the acceptance of the responsibilities such as employment, marriage, family, and community engagement. It is a loose concept that varies from context to context, and is different for boys and for girls, those living in urban and rural areas, and displaced populations. For this study we have included youth from 13 to 24-years-old.

Approximately half of the participants were male and half were female. Around half of the participating youths were involved in Save the Children or partner organisation programs, and the remainder had no current affiliation to Save the Children. A desk review was also conducted to support the primary research, and to provide contextual information for Iraq.

The FGD methodology used a participatory ranking model which asked youths to identify the challenges they were facing and then rank them from the most severe challenge down to the least severe. This process was then repeated to identify the support the youths felt they needed to overcome these challenges. The youths decided the ranking order as a group, either unanimously agreeing on the ranking or putting the decision to a majority vote. Once the order of issues was in place, participants were again given an opportunity to voice concern over the order and re-rank if necessary. After the ranking, the group discussed why they decided on that particular order.

Interviews were also held with parents; camp coordinators; youth committees; cluster and sub-cluster[12] representatives from education, protection, child protection, and livelihoods and social cohesion clusters; national and international NGOs; and government ministries and departments.

## 3.1. LIMITATIONS

The data collected through the FGDs and the interviews represent just a small universe of informants. The report does not claim to be comprehensive but rather documents themes and issues that arose during the course of the research. The research did not include host community youths due to time and logistical reasons. However it is recommended that similar research be undertaken with host community youths, who in many cases are as vulnerable as refugee or IDP youths and are integral in increasing the social cohesion across communities.[13] Indeed, the relationship between Syrian refugees, IDPs and the host community is incredibly complex and cannot be measured sufficiently through the limited scope of this study. As such, the analysis of social cohesion and tensions presented here should be interpreted as indicative of overarching trends as measured by perceived hospitality levels, quality of public services, impact on the job market and other proxy metrics.

Finally, the research was restricted geographically and covered just three governorates. Thus it is recognised that refugees and IDPs living in other governorates in Iraq and KRI may face different challenges.

# GIVING YOUTH A VOICE

The outbreak of war in Syria forced over 4 million people out of the country to find refuge elsewhere. Over half of the Syrian refugees are children under 18-years-old, whose lives and education have been disrupted by the conflict.

Nadia is one of those children. She used to be enthusiastic about school in Syria, and eager to complete her studies to live her dream of becoming a journalist.

At the start of the conflict 16-year-old Nadia and her family were forced to escape their hometown in Qamishli in Syria. The escalating violence was putting them in great danger. The family of eight, first fled to Turkey to rebuild their life after the war but soon left to the KRI.

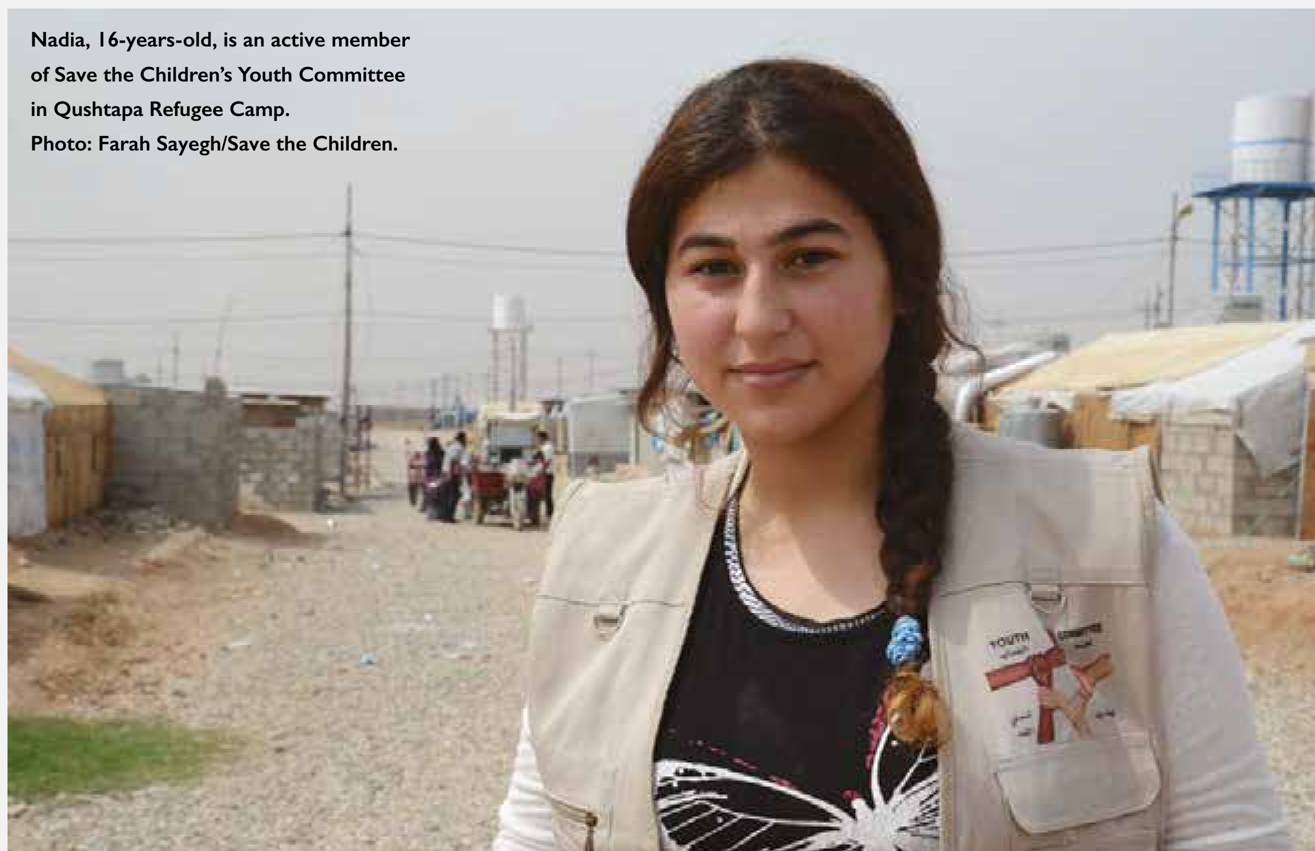
For the past seven months Nadia, her parents and siblings have been residing in Qushtapa Refugee Camp in KRI.

"It is not comfortable living in a camp, but at the beginning it was worse," said Nadia, "I refused to see people and used to cry every night because of the situation we are in. We had a beautiful life back home."

Qushtapa Camp is home to nearly 1,800 Syrian families. Save the Children established and runs a Child Friendly Space (CFS) in the camp, where children and youth are provided with psychosocial support, recreational and educational activities and sports. It's a safe space that aims at re-introducing a sense of routine and normalcy to the lives of children affected by the conflict.

"I wish I could study journalism. Journalism and photography are my passion, but now it's nearly impossible to achieve that," Nadia shared, "I feel tied down because it's out of my control."

To engage the youth in the camp, Save the Children established a Youth Committee. The establishment of youth groups is based on the assumption that young people of all ages can make valuable contributions in emergency response and recovery with their individual experience,



**Nadia, 16-years-old, is an active member of Save the Children's Youth Committee in Qushtapa Refugee Camp. Photo: Farah Sayegh/Save the Children.**

**The Youth Committee leads on various initiatives around the camp to make a positive impact on the community and children. Photo: Farah Sayegh/Save the Children.**

knowledge and skills. It is also an opportunity to empower young people, encouraging them to become pro-active members of their communities, instead of being passive beneficiaries of assistance. As an active member of the committee, Nadia organises initiatives around the camp and with her camera she can capture photos and practice the feeling of being a journalist.

"Journalism lets you document change. When I hold this camera, I feel I'm holding the whole world in my hands. It gives me freedom," she shared.

"One month ago I joined the Youth Committee, because I felt it would help me forget and would make me feel better if I made friends."

Since its establishment, the Youth Committee has led on different initiatives in the camp like cleaning campaigns, awareness raising, helping children get back into school and establishing literacy groups for children.

"I'm very happy to be part of the committee. It gives me something to look forward to, because we are always working on projects in the camp. We speak to parents by making home visits and encourage them to send their children to school," said Nadia.

Save the Children conducts workshops on various topics to build the capacity of the youth and the committee holds regular meetings to discuss new initiatives that benefit the camp community. Save the Children has already conducted a series of "Youth Leadership Trainings" that target youth and help rebuild their self-confidence through practical activities.

"A journalist must be brave and confident. Education teaches us right from wrong, respect, and gives us confidence too. I am getting this from the Youth Committee, because we treat each other with respect, and are confident to be making a positive change for the people and children in the camp," Nadia explained.

# 4. FINDINGS

All of the youths who participated in this research spoke about the challenges they experience on a daily basis, but also about how these challenges have impacted on their ability to plan for a productive future. Challenges ranged from the practical such as tents falling over in the wind, to the more complex such as economic barriers, lack of access to education, SGBV and discrimination. Youths also spoke passionately about how these challenges caused deep feelings, particularly of anger or sadness.

Many of the youths who participated in the FGDs expressed their willingness to be part of the discussion; with many emphasising that the only time they felt they had a voice outside their families was in their discussions with NGOs. However a minority of youths, particularly camp-based boys aged between 15 – 24-years-old, spoke of many NGO staff asking them what they need but few seeming to listen or act on their information.

When discussing their ideas of programs that were needed to address the challenges they were facing, the youths outlined both practical responses and creative strategies that would allow them to reclaim their education, overcome feelings of hopelessness and inability to participate in any meaningful future, and ensure the health and wellbeing of their families.

The table on page 10 provides an overview of the themes that emerged from the FGDs. This table is not meant to be prescriptive or comprehensive but to highlight broad areas of concern and provide direction for further exploration. Issues may vary for adolescents not included in the discussion. Although the FGDs were broken into three age categories (13 – 14 / 15 – 19 / 20 – 24) there were only minor differences between the 15 – 19 and 20 – 24 year old groups. As such, these two groups have been combined in the table below. Any differences are discussed in the text in key findings.

## 4.1. OVERARCHING CHALLENGES

### 4.1.1. "I don't like to think about the future"

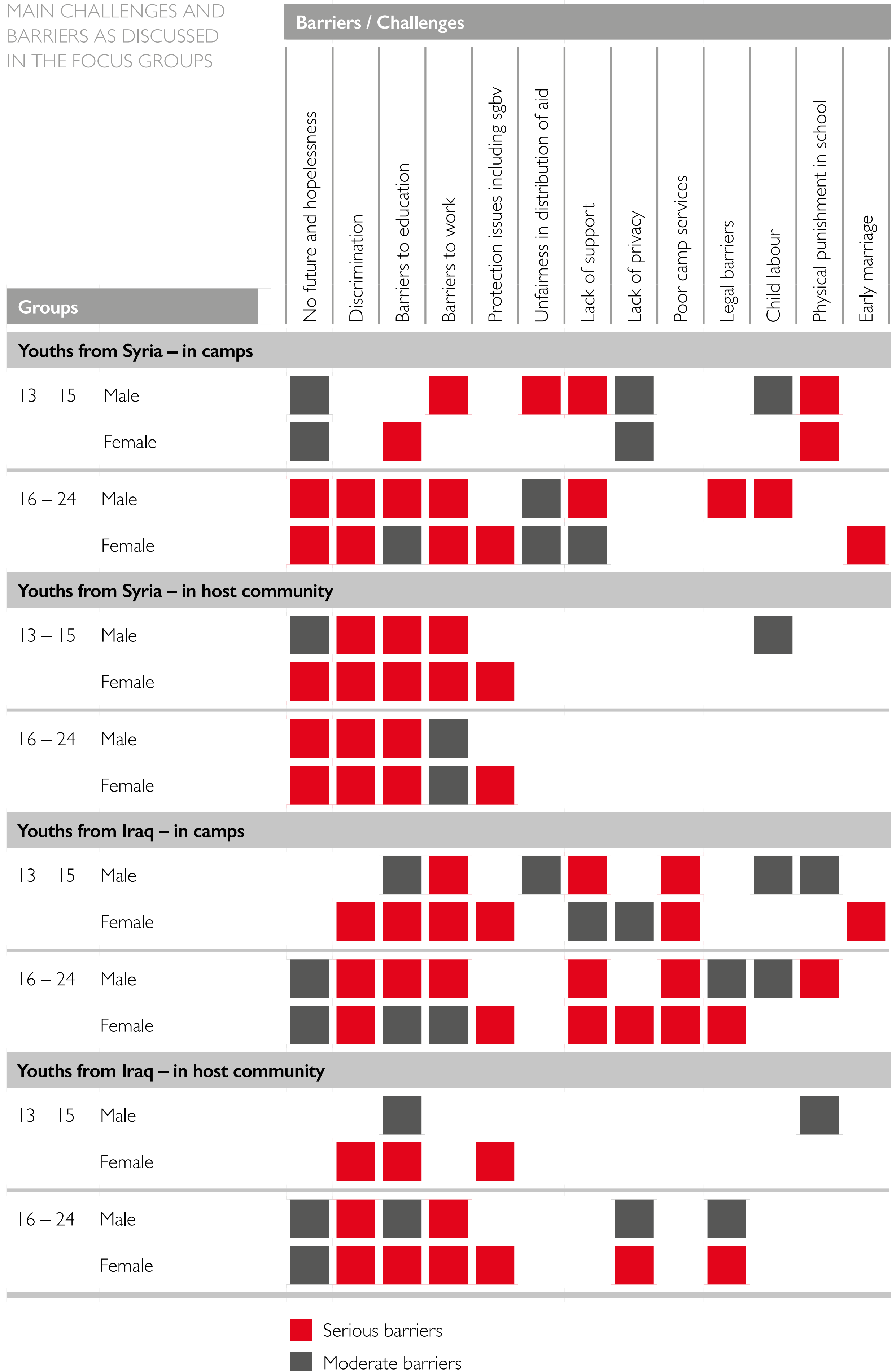
FGDs all commenced with a question about the future – where participants would be, what they would be doing, and who they would be with. The majority of Syrian youths between the ages of 15 – 24, both in and out of camps, said they saw no future in Iraq. Of this group, most said they would like to go, or are already planning to go to Europe to study and/or search for employment. The majority added that Europe was the only place where they saw themselves as having a future, and some youths even went so far as to say that once they got to Europe they would no longer experience discrimination and they would feel happy again.

A large portion of Syrian youths said they did not like to think about the future at all. Only a very small number of Syrian youths between the ages of 15 – 24 said they thought they had a future back in Syria, with many doubting that the conflict would finish soon and even if it did they had nothing to return to.

Syrian refugees between the ages of 13 – 15-years-old were much more likely to say they would like to return to Syria. Many spoke about the friends and families they had left behind, and this, combined with a lack of safe educational opportunities (perceived or otherwise) and unhappiness of living in Iraq, made them hope to return to Syria to attend school and be with their friends and relatives again. Most wanted to return to the life they remembered before fighting forced them to flee their homes, with few seeming to understand that this life may no longer exist.

"I don't like to think about the future"

Syrian girl, 20 yrs, Domiz Refugee Camp.


MAIN CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS AS DISCUSSED IN THE FOCUS GROUPS
Barriers / Challenges
No future and hopelessness
Discrimination
Barriers to education
Barriers to work
Protection issues including sgbv
Unfairness in distribution of aid
Lack of support
Lack of privacy
Poor camp services
Legal barriers
Child labour
Physical punishment in school
Early marriage
Groups
Youths from Syria – in camps
13 – 15
Male
Female
16 – 24
Male
Female
Youths from Syria – in host community
13 – 15
Male
Female
16 – 24
Male
Female
Youths from Iraq – in camps
13 – 15
Male
Female
16 – 24
Male
Female
Youths from Iraq – in host community
13 – 15
Male
Female
16 – 24
Male
Female
Serious barriers
Moderate barriers

Conversely, very few Iraqi IDP youths of any age spoke of their plans to travel to Europe. While the majority were unhappy with life as an IDP, most said they saw their future as being back in Iraq. Nearly all 13 – 15-year-old IDPs described their future as finishing their study back in Iraq and being reunited with friends and family; many believed the friends or families they had been separated from when they fled were still in their home locations. Despite many youths experiencing limited access to education and expressing fears that they would continue to be without quality education while they were IDPs, the majority of these young males and females hoped to eventually become a doctor, teacher or engineer.

While the 15 – 24-year-old IDPs were less likely to be so explicit in their idea of a future in Iraq, the majority spoke of their desire to return rather than looking to flee elsewhere. IDP boys aged 20 – 24 years in Kirkuk were most vocal of all IDPs in their wish to seek asylum in Europe, however this appeared to be mainly due to their understanding that refugees have more rights and access to services than IDPs, and as such they wished to move to another country to become a refugee rather than stay an IDP.

In conversations on future planning, Syrian youths aged 15 – 24 were more likely than IDP youths of the same age to speak about the complexity of the Syrian crisis, the lack of hope they had for the fighting to stop, and their increasingly difficult life in Iraq. It is these reasons which seemed to prompt them to only see a future in Europe. This was in contrast to the majority of 15 – 24-year-old Iraqi youths who saw IS as the primary impediment to their return to their homes. While very few of these IDPs thought the removal of IS would be soon, the majority of them thought this would happen in the near future which would allow them to return home. Iraqi IDPs had also been displaced for a shorter period of time than most Syrian refugees, and many spoke about the displacement their parents and older siblings had experienced during previous times of insecurity or conflict. This appeared to give them hope that this current displacement was also temporary.

Despite this difference, the constant between both IDP and refugee youths of all ages was their unhappiness about the future, with many saying that thinking about the future made them angry and sad. These feelings of anger were also linked to discrimination from the host community, worry about their future, and feelings of hopelessness due to a perceived complete lack of opportunities. As one 20-year-old Syrian girl said: "I'm staying at home all day with nothing to do. I'm always feeling angry".

Many of those who spoke of travelling to Europe mentioned the wide availability of people smugglers. If their parents could afford the cost of paying smugglers, the whole family would travel to Europe. However if the family did not have enough money they would generally send the oldest son as they were viewed as more likely to gain employment and eventually the family would be able to join them. While some acknowledged the risk of not surviving the dangerous journey via sea, most said that the risk was worth it considering the potential for a better life in Europe.

Almost none of the youths who spoke about travelling to Europe spoke about the possibility for being resettled through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Those who did, spoke about the experience negatively and often linked to examples of discrimination and unfairness.

### 4.1.2. "Why are we treated differently?": social tension and discrimination

Nearly all of the groups listed some form of discrimination as one of the most significant challenges they were facing in their daily lives. Youths linked discrimination to their inability to gain employment and education, be treated fairly at school, and the perceived unfairness in the distribution of aid and services. Many of the youths, both IDPs and refugees, highlighted discrimination as a key reason they would like to either go back to their places of origin in Iraq or Syria or travel to Europe, saying that there was no future for them in Iraq where they were so regularly discriminated against. Solutions to the discrimination from the youths ranged from simply seeing the only option as staying away from the host community, to raising community awareness of the benefits of having displaced people living in a host community. Many of the youths felt that there was nothing that could be done to tackle what they felt was pervasive discrimination.

Discrimination by NGO and UN workers was also perceived by Syrian and Iraqi youths of all ages, and this contributed greatly towards their feelings of anger and injustice, as they felt these employees were supposed to be helping them. Additionally, interviews with national staff from implementing agencies both in and outside camps highlighted the potential for personal feelings towards the IDPs or refugees to influence programs. For example, when asked about the objective of vocational studies being run at a community centre, one NGO worker said that for males the objective was to develop skills to gain employment, but for females it was gain skills so their husband accepted them as a 'good wife'. As such they were encouraged to do cooking and home skills classes, rather than classes such as computer skills or languages.

## Increasing social tension

With 62 percent of refugees[14] and 82 percent of IDPs[15] living outside camps and in close proximity with vulnerable host communities, competition for jobs, housing, land, water and other basic services is fuelling tensions between local populations, refugees and IDPs. Differences in legal status, rising unemployment, constraints on Iraq's economy and increasing social tensions have already been tested by years of political rivalry, disenfranchisement, and ethno-sectarian issues. UN Development Programme (UNDP) research in Iraq found that sectarian violence is strongly correlated to the extent of demographic closeness of diverse or opposing ethnic or religious groups. As such, communities that have strong tribal ties are much less likely to witness social conflict.[16] The research also found that displacement further complicates the pre-existing ethnicity factor, with demographics of communities being rapidly reshaped and displaced populations finding themselves in particularly tense host communities. For example, data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Displacement Tracking Matrix reveals that displacement has narrowed the Sunni-Shi'a demographic split in 86 out of 104 districts and narrowed the Arab-Kurd demographic split in 92/104 districts.[17] On the whole, the districts of Iraq have become much more socially mixed and prone to social tensions and conflict.

UNDP assessments also found that ethnic mixing, youth unemployment, urbanisation and poor service delivery in certain combinations are important factors that determine how prone a community is to conflict. Indeed UNDP found that the incidence of ethnically targeted violence was strongly related to the unemployment of males in the 20 – 30-year-old range in the lower-middle class. While this suggests that youths can be the drivers of tension or violence, they can also be the key to its resolution. For example, UNDP recommends that livelihoods support combined with conflict mediation trainings targeting males in this group could lower the incidence of violence, as well as community level programming that brings together youths from different ethnicities for a common cause.[18]

## Identifying the causes behind social tension

Social tensions can occur because of a variety of reasons, and issues such as historical enmity, levels of unemployment and other economic factors and feelings of unfairness can strain the relationship between displaced populations and host communities and result in increasing tension. UNDP assessments found that it is not necessarily the influx of IDPs or refugees alone which is creating financial hardship for some communities, but the perception that this is the primary reason which serves to exacerbate social tension.[19] UNDP's study also found that host communities that were already suffering from high unemployment or having difficulty affording basic needs were significantly more likely to have poor perceptions of IDPs. Thus while displaced groups may or may not in reality create additional economic pressures, economic grievances and problems are easily pinned upon displaced populations.

However, as UNDP states, some of these factors, if managed correctly, can also provide a reason for amicable cooperation.[20] To address issues of sectarian tension and mitigate mistrust and hostility in local communities that have witnessed large influxes of displaced people, the Livelihoods and Social Cohesion Cluster, coordinated by UNDP and DRC, is promoting an understanding between different groups through a focus on emergency livelihoods. However, as researchers writing for the Humanitarian Exchange's special feature on 'The Crisis in Iraq' point out, while the hope is that these programs can help ease tensions between sectarian groups, their restricted scope – with only 200,000 IDPs targeted for assistance in the 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan out of 3.4 million identified in need of emergency livelihoods[21] – may limit their impact.[22]

### "There is no transparency": feelings of unfairness and injustice

In the FGDs youths of all ages articulated feelings of injustice primarily due to a perceived unfairness in the delivery of services, discrimination from other population groups, and general injustice due to their overall situation. Such feelings overlaid most of the conversations regarding livelihoods, education and access to services and many said that this was one of their main causes of anger and hopelessness about the future. Some of the male IDP and refugees aged 15 – 24 spoke of expressing their feelings about this anger by getting into fights, both with other youths in the camps or in the host communities, generally on the way to and from school or while in school.

One group of camp-based refugee youths spoke of the potential to join armed groups as an outlet for this feeling of injustice. While it must be acknowledged that many youths said the primary reason to join armed groups was the opportunity to earn a regular salary, some of the youths also linked it to an outlet for the injustice they felt as refugees with limited options available to them.

### Ethnicity

Both Syrian and Iraqi youths spoke of tensions between ethnic groups. For IDPs living in areas which had similar ethnic make-up, particularly the IDPs living in Kirkuk, ethnic tension was not raised as a key challenge. However, for IDPs living in Erbil or Dohuk governorate, ethnic tension was a challenge that made them angry, caused concern about their safety, and resulted in the isolation particularly of girls because of the perceived safety risks. The situation for Syrian refugees differed because many of them identified as being Kurdish, similar to the Iraqi Kurds they were now living in close proximity with. However, they also felt they were being discriminated against, and expressed deep feelings of injustice and anger at this discrimination by people who they felt were no different to them. As one 17-year-old Syrian male said: "We are all Kurdish, so why are we treated differently? There is no difference between an Iraqi Kurd and a Syrian Kurd".

The differences in opinions by all interviewees and in the FGDs on the reasons for discrimination highlights that there are likely to be different factors involved in creating social tensions in different parts of Iraq, and thus a more in-depth study is needed.

## Iraq's Demographic Composition

Between 75-80 percent of Iraq's population are Arab, with Kurds accounting for 15-20 percent, followed by Turkoman, Assyrian and other groups at 5 percent.[23] Of the population, 99 percent officially recognise as Muslims (Shia 60-65 percent, Sunni 32-37 percent), 0.8 percent identify as Christians, and remainder as Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, unaffiliated and 'other'.[24] However, there is little reliable data on the breakdown of the population in Iraq, so figures are estimates only. The composition of the Iraqi population has increasingly become difficult to ascertain as people leave Iraq due to previous and current conflicts, and the Syrian refugees now seeking safety in Iraq.[25] This movement of people is also likely to have affected the demographic composition. For example, the expansion of Kurdish control outwards from the autonomous area of KRI and into Kirkuk and Ninewa Governorates in the disputed areas and the rise of Shia militia groups have also created a shift in the demographics of particular areas.

Existing ethnic, religious and tribal tensions in Iraq have been exacerbated by the conflict and the large displacement and movement of people within the country. History has seen sectarian affiliation playing a key role in the politics of Iraq, and the narrative around the current conflict has also fallen largely along sectarian lines. This serves to fragment society along sectarian lines, and also restrict movement due to perceived terrorism threats and country-insurgency strategies. It is for these reasons that the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) states that the ability of displaced people to access safe areas of refuge in Iraq have been dramatically restricted.[26] This has further cemented the division of Iraq into Kurdish, Sunni and Shia entities.[27]

### Inequality in the distribution of aid

Perceptions of inequality in the distribution of aid manifested throughout different discussions, and between all groups. For example, IDP youths mentioned that if they were refugees they would get more access to aid, and youths outside the camps felt the people living in camps received more aid. Both IDPs and refugees also felt that aid was distributed based on a person's relationship with either camp management or NGO staff. As one 14-year-old IDP boy said: "When aid is distributed, the only people who get it are the ones that are friends of the people giving it out. There is no transparency."

A member of the Livelihoods and Social Cohesion Cluster highlighted that this inequality in the distribution of aid, perceived or real, has the potential to trigger conflict or social tension. The issues of inequality was raised by various members of the international community who said the issue of the separate funding streams for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and the HRP could create problems in a mixed community when funding is based on population group (eg. refugees or IDPs) rather than need. Many UN and NGO workers also said that the different funding sources for providing assistance to refugees and IDPs made it difficult to coordinate a single system.[28] Many felt that the humanitarian operation should be organised according to need, not status of beneficiaries.[29]

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Humanitarian actors

- Embed youth programs in host communities so they have the potential to transform attitudes, enhance linkages between ethnic groups, and ease social tensions. Such a focus will also create positive and empowered youths who are engaged in their community, and also may change the attitudes of the community towards these youths.
- Prioritise programs that incorporate social cohesion activities as either a cross-cutting theme or as a primary objective.
- Undertake a mapping exercise to locate those areas that are prone to social conflict, identify the causes of the conflict, and form programs to mitigate against its likelihood through early warning mechanisms. Additionally, identifying the groups which have a tendency to participate in violence and social conflict would enable practitioners and policymakers to identify policies and programs to mitigate this tendency and promote peaceful development.
- Utilise education programs to mainstream social cohesion programming. For example, mixed community schools; classes on conflict resolution, communication skills and peaceful co-existence; and teacher cultural sensitivity training.
- Analyse how successes can be replicated in other programming in order to overcome inhibitive or unsafe environments for youths. For example, many youths spoke of feelings of safety and happiness in the CFS/YFS but not in schools – identify the success factors of the CFS/YFS and analyse how these can be replicated in other programming or integrated into the school system.
- As an orientation for all staff, conduct internal awareness raising to ensure all INGO staff are reflecting views and objectives of the organisation, and not perpetuating their own prejudice or discrimination.

### UN and Donors

#### Enforce a 'do no harm' and 'conflict-sensitive' approach

- The UN and donors should avoid the current dual planning process for supporting displaced people that produces two separate appeals for refugees and IDPs. Instead funding should be provided on the basis of need, not status or population group. Together with humanitarian actors agree on common vulnerability criteria, and adjust to smarter, evidence-based assistance targeting in order to 'do no harm'. It is essential that humanitarian actions do not perpetuate the social tensions that already exist within the communities, or create new ones.
- Donors should adopt a conflict sensitive approach to funding, such as by funding programs that can, where possible, benefit IDPs, refugees and host communities, rather than just one community.

Promote the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism

- Donors should support the KRG and GoI in promoting the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism, and in building resilience of an integrated community, as well as supporting a Government-led program encouraging social cohesion and harmony.
- Donors and humanitarian actors should support the KRG and GoI to promote social cohesion and support both displaced and host community youth through dedicated youth programming. Harnessing the power of the media will support stabilisation objectives and provide a more harmonised environment in areas with high numbers of displaced people.

Ensure youth programmes that encourage social cohesion and resilience are fully funded

- Fully fund programs that work with community groups that include host community, IDPs and refugees in joint activities and dialogue. Particularly support youth committees/groups inside camps and in the host communities to foster cohesion, and to empower youths to play a constructive role in their community.

Ensure engagement with youths

- Ensure coordination mechanisms are established for all youth actors.
- Foster dialogue between government, UN and local and international NGOs on youth focused programming, and with youths themselves.

**Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government**

- GoI and KRG should show leadership to encourage social cohesion and explore programs such as disseminating anti-discrimination messaging through public awareness campaigns, and positive use of media.

## 4.2. ACCESS TO SERVICES

### 4.2.1. "Education is our biggest challenge": access to quality education

Education was consistently listed a key challenge for both IDPs and refugees of all ages and genders, with a variety of barriers. As one Iraqi girl, aged 14, said: "School is the most important thing in our lives and will fulfil our dreams." The girl's mother agreed, stating that if she could have any support from aid agencies, it would be increased access to quality education for her children. Most parents interviewed echoed this sentiment, regardless of gender or age of their child. Additionally, both Syrian parents and youths said a lack of education was one of the primary issues causing them to consider journeying to Europe.

As identified by the youths, key barriers for not being able to access education were that there are not enough schools, schools were located too far away from where the youths lived, classes were not culturally appropriate, there were not enough Arabic language schools and many of the youths lacked the required documents for school registration. Youths also spoke about physical punishment in schools, unprofessional or untrained teachers, and education documents not being recognised outside of KRG.

Many of the youths said that if they had access to a safe place to learn, it would solve many of their other problems such as being at risk of abuse during the day. This corresponds to other studies that show when children have safe spaces to learn and play, and can access a full range of services and support, they are significantly less vulnerable to the increased risks that go hand-in-hand with instability, including violence, sexual exploitation, early marriage, recruitment into armed groups, and child labour.[30]

Discussions with members of the Education Cluster, staff from the Ministry of Education (MoE), and other education-implementing NGOs highlighted the various short- and long-term benefits of education, with many emphasising why education must not be forgotten by donors. Many of these interviewees highlighted findings from other studies which show that ensuring children

> "We see education as really important for us and is our biggest challenge."
>
> Syrian girl, 14, Domiz.

can continue their education – particularly in protracted and recurring crisis contexts – is also an investment in future global and national prosperity, stability and security. The longer children receive a high-quality education, the less likely they are to live in poverty and the more likely they will contribute positively to their countries' economies.[31]

### Lack of access to education

Youths in the FGDs gave several reasons for not attending school. For refugees and IDPs inside the camps, many said that there were not enough spaces in the schools available, particularly for youths of secondary school age. Access to university was an issue for youths aged between 20 – 24, with refugees and IDPs stating that there were virtually no tertiary options available to them because there were no nearby universities, they did not possess the relevant accreditation, it was too expensive or they were not accepted because they were refugees or IDPs. Outside of the camps, a main challenge was that there were not enough schools or the schools were too far away. This distance presented a significant obstacle particularly for girls of all ages due to their parents not wanting them to walk to school in an environment where they were subject to harassment, abuse or discrimination. As many refugee and IDP girls said, "If we just had a bus with a trusted teacher on board, then our parents would let us attend school". Other challenges specifically for IDP girls were that many of the classes were not segregated by gender, which meant their parents would not allow them to attend.

Language differences were also listed as a significant barrier to accessing education. Many IDPs and refugees do not speak Kurdish which is the language used in most schools in KRI. Youths also complained of either a lack of teachers or poor quality teaching. In one of the IDP camps, youths of secondary school age said the quality of education at the schools was extremely low because the teachers were volunteers. They said that there were many teachers living in the camps, but because they were not getting paid as teachers, they had found other forms of employment rather than working as volunteers. As one 14-year-old Syrian girl said: "The teachers do not care about our education. They don't explain the lessons and will not repeat what they have said, even if we don't understand".

> "School is the most important thing in our lives and will fulfil our dreams."
>
> Iraqi girl, 14, Bahake.

### Physical punishment in schools

Another key issue for children was physical punishment and humiliation in schools. Refugee and IDP youths both inside and outside of camps spoke of teachers physically striking them, or humiliating them such as by making them stand out in the sun for long periods of time. Some youths perceived this as a form of discrimination by saying that the teachers do not hit the children from host communities.

> "Teachers are hitting the students and punishing them even if they did something very small. When a student arrives late, the teacher makes them stand out in the sun for hours instead of entering the class."
>
> Syrian girl, 14, Domiz.

## Physical Punishment

Iraq's Compulsory Education Law does not explicitly forbid physical and psychological punishment by teachers, relying instead on internal instructions issued by MoE (GoI) to address the topic. While the Instructions for Primary Education schools provide guidance to teachers on how to interact with students, it does not specifically forbid the use of physical and psychological punishment. However, the instructions for Higher Education schools' personnel explicitly forbid corporal punishment under any circumstances.[32]

### Education and happiness

Lack of educational opportunities presented a major barrier to being happy and feeling positive about the future for youths of all ages, and this was also expressed by their parents. Issues such as a lack of recognition of education certificates from KRI for Syrian refugee students if they returned home to Syria and for many IDPs wishing to return to their places of origin in Iraq added to their feelings of hopelessness. As a Syrian boy aged 15 said: "What's the point in going to school? When we go back to Syria it won't matter anyway because they won't recognise our certificates". Similarly, a 20-year-old Syrian girl said: "I have lost my education and I don't want to study because even if I study and whatever certificate I get, when I go back to Syria they will not care about it."

> "After coming here, I forgot about an education"
>
> Syrian girl, 20, Domiz.

## Education in Iraq

Both the HRP and the 3RP highlight the clear gaps in education for displaced children and youths in this response. The HRP states that: "Displaced boys and girls, including adolescents, desperately need access to education in a protective environment where life and cognitive skills can be developed to enable them to heal from psychosocial distress and return to a sense of normality".[33] Similarly for refugees, the 3RP reports that limited access beyond primary and secondary education for adolescents and youths remains a clear gap.[34]

As a consequence of the crisis over three million refugee, IDP and host community children are being denied their right to quality education in Iraq, with this expected to rise to 3.6 million by the end of this year. Of the 860,000 school-aged IDP children,[35] only 32 percent had access to any form of education when the academic year ended in July 2015.[36] Nearly 76 percent have lost almost an entire year of school. Additionally, nearly half of the 60,000 school aged Syrian children in Iraq are missing out on formal education.[37] The 3RP Iraq August education update states that there are also disparities in the provision of education activities for refugees in camp and non-camp settings. For example, while 74 percent of children aged 6 – 14-years-old are attending schools in camps, only 62 percent of children the same age are attending schools outside of the camps. Shockingly, only 5 percent of children between 15 – 17 years of age are attending formal education.[38]

The Iraq Education Cluster states that the arrival of large numbers of IDPs and refugees has placed pressure on host community schools and children impacting their education and psychosocial well-being. The Education Cluster has identified as the key barriers to children accessing and continuing education:[39]

- There is currently insufficient capacity to host children in the existing school facilities. Syrian refugee children must attend schools teaching the KRG curriculum in Arabic.
- There is a shortage of educational materials, equipment, and adequately trained teachers to provide quality learning.
- There is a shortage of secondary level schools and teachers.
- There are insufficient Arabic language schools in KRI.
- IDP teachers' salaries are currently not being consistently paid. Not all refugee teachers are on the payroll and there is a shortage of funding for them. This has contributed to the shortage of teachers.
- Some families lack the information needed to register and enrol their children in school.
- Children with disabilities have specific needs above and beyond other children in Iraq.

The Education Cluster reported that there are a large number of youths and adolescents with nothing to do and who are in great risk for negative coping mechanisms and at risk behaviour. They stated that to mitigate these negative coping mechanisms, the provision of secondary education, life skills and vocational training is urgently needed. And that additional financial support and allocation of adequate learning spaces are required to cover for existing needs.[40]

## RECOMMENDATIONS*

### Humanitarian actors

- Awareness-raising on the benefits of positive discipline to both parents and teachers to combat the widespread acceptance of violent punishment methods.
- Ensure that education programs integrate psycho-social support and have qualified teachers to deliver it, so that children can learn in a safe and protective environment with quality schooling tailored to their needs.
- In the short-term, ensure culturally appropriate schooling options such as the gender segregation of classes if necessary and appropriate. Also include the sensitisation of parents where classes are not segregated to encourage children of both genders to attend school.
- Girls particularly face multiple disadvantages to accessing education, which single solutions alone cannot address. Investigate multiple, blended approaches to tackle these barriers, including looking at economic (direct and indirect costs), socio-cultural (traditions, attitudes and behaviours), educational (poor quality, lack of female teachers), institutional-political (inequality in services, lack of accountability) and physical (distance to school, or water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in the school).
- Investigate tertiary education opportunities for older youths, including acceptance into local universities and scholarship opportunities.

### UN and Donors

- Fully fund requests for education programming in humanitarian responses. Recognising the long-term nature of the crisis, fund education as a long-term investment in the development of Iraq. This includes secondary education which has not been prioritised in the humanitarian response, leaving a significant gap in education opportunities at this level.
- Ensure funding is available within education programs to enable classes to be taught in a language students understand, and language classes can be widely offered to enable students to transition to Kurdish-speaking schools.

* Please also see recommendations in the September 2015 Iraq Education Cluster 'Back to School' brief.

**IDP children attend non-formal education classes at Save the Children's centre in Kirkuk. Photo: Ali Arkady/Save the Children.**

## DETERMINATION WITHIN DISPLACEMENT

Due to the violence that erupted in her hometown in June 2014, Hadeel and her family were forced to flee to Kirkuk to find safety.

Leaving friends, cousins, and her home behind in Salah el Din was heartbreaking for 15-year-old Hadeel, but what she couldn't imagine ever leaving behind is her education.

For years Hadeel was one of the top three students in her class, earning her way into 9th grade without having to sit for final exams, as she received an exemption by the Ministry of Education for her outstanding marks.

"My dream is to study medicine and become a dentist," she said.

In Kirkuk, schools were overcrowded and official school transcripts and documents were needed for enrolment, something that most families fleeing their conflict stricken hometowns do not manage to carry. Hadeel found a way to get her required documents to Kirkuk, and enrolled at one of the few schools that register internally displaced children in Iraq.

"For one month, I attended that school. We were a total of 20 IDPs there," said Hadeel. "But I was spending a lot of my parent's money on transportation to school, so I dropped out to find one closer to our home."

Like a number of IDP families, Hadeel's were living in a bare unfinished building in Kirkuk. Her father had not received his salary from Salah el Din in months, and their savings were depleting.

Due to challenges of distance and being displaced, Hadeel had been to three different schools in three months, but stayed determined to pursue her schooling regardless of the challenges that arose.

In her overcrowded classroom of 75 girls, she found it very challenging to learn.

"There were only 5 students in the whole class who were really there to learn but that was extremely difficult. We got together and decided to create a friendly competitive environment to get high marks, and soon all the others were participating, paying attention in class and studying for

**Hadeel, 15, attends Save the Children's Child Friendly Space in Kirkuk. Photo: Farah Sayegh/ Save the Children.**

**Save the Children provides non-formal education to internally displaced children in Kirkuk. Photo: Ali Arkady/Save the Children.**

exams," shared Hadeel enthusiastically, "we were the leaders of this, and our teacher was very proud that his class were doing the best in the entire school."

After the IDP crisis in Iraq, some schools have been adopting the concept of double shifting, to accommodate for the high number of students. Hadeel's school began to implement these shifts.

During the summer holidays Hadeel is attending non-formal education classes at one of Save the Children's CFS in Kirkuk.

"I come here to practice and become better at Maths, Science, English and Arabic, and I also help the other children with their studies," she said.

Nearly 600 children attend the CFS on a daily basis. The CFS offers age appropriate psychosocial support activities, early childhood education and non-formal education. The structured activities provide routine and a sense of normalcy to the children whose lives have been disrupted by crisis and displacement.

"I have three daughters, and to me their education is a priority. I've raised them to see education as the only key they can carry with them in life no matter where it takes them," shared Hadeel's mother Rima, who is now working at the CFS.

With Rima generating an income for the family, they were able to move out of the unfinished building and rent a small apartment. "We live in a much better building, and can buy clothes for school. I always say that Save the Children saved my family," Hadeel said.

### 4.2.2. "I don't feel safe here": protection

Protection risks were included by many youths, particularly girls, in their top challenges and as one of the key issues inhibiting their access to school and restricting their general freedom. Issues such as sexual abuse and harassment, rumours of kidnapping and killing of children, early marriage, physical punishment and child labour were key issues highlighted in the FDGs.

> "I'm not going to school because of the harassment and also the Child Friendly Space because of the harassment I get on the streets. I really want to come but the boys are bothering us too much."
>
> Girl, 16, Domiz.

#### Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Female IDP and refugee youths said that verbal and physical abuse both inside camps and in the host communities had caused their parents to prohibit them from leaving their homes and attending school. Reasons for the abuse varied for different groups however mainly fell into two categories. For those inside the camps, explanations from both parents and youths were that the boys were bored and had nothing else to do. For those outside the camps both parents and youths felt that the abuse was a manifestation of the host community's discrimination of the displaced population. Many examples were given as to what type of abuse the youths were exposed to, which included verbal and physical abuse, and some Syrian refugee girls mentioned being propositioned for sex by host community men. IDP girls in one camp spoke at length of their worry that boys inside the camps were taking photos of them and putting them on the internet. Girls in camps also mentioned lack of privacy and said the cramped living conditions made harassment even worse.

Solutions given by youths ranged from raising the awareness of boys about not abusing girls; having access to safe transportation particularly to and from school; and to simply staying inside their homes because they felt such behaviour will never change.

Nearly all girls who mentioned SGBV incidents expressed a lack of options to report such behaviour without negative consequences for themselves. When the victim and perpetrator's family were acquainted with each other, the girls felt that reporting an incident would cause a lot of problems between the two families, with potential violent outcomes for which they did not want to be responsible. Additionally, reporting incidents of abuse would most likely result in further restrictions on their already limited movements and mean they would be unable to attend school, a risk most girls seemed unwilling to take. As one IDP girl aged 15 said: "If we report this to our parents it will cause big problems with the boy's family and also my parents won't let me go outside or to school anymore".

While none of the male youths mentioned experiencing SGBV, members of the protection Cluster and implementing program staff from various organisations said that boys were also at risk of sexual abuse from their peers and from other adults either in the camps, host communities or in institutions such as schools. Therefore, while male youths did not discuss this in the FGDs, this could potentially be due to the stigma attached to such abuse, rather than its absence.

#### Early marriage

Only two female FGDs (19 participants, aged 15 – 24) highlighted this as a key challenge. However when discussing this issue with both Syrian and Iraqi families, many parents mentioned this as a solution to financial issues or lack of basic items such as food, rather than a challenge being faced. The primary reasons given for early marriage were the lack of job opportunities for women and a family's limited income potential. These economic limitations led to marrying their daughters to husbands with greater financial means to increase the family's own cash flow and/or decrease their own financial burden of supporting a daughter. Parents also said that early marriage presented a way to 'protect' their daughters from SGBV.

Iraqi families in particular said that prior to their displacement the normal age of marriage was 15-years-old however they would now consider marrying their daughters at 13-years-old. While not listing early marriage as a key challenge in the participatory ranking, some female IDP and refugees aged 20 – 24-years-old, particularly those from youth committees, felt that early marriage placed unfair restrictions on girls to attend school, increased social isolation, and placed young girls who were not used to adult relationships in difficult and potentially violent relationships with their husband and his family. The high anecdotal numbers of early marriage was also cited as a key concern by members of the Child Protection Sub-Cluster.

## Early Marriage

According to studies, forced marriages of minors is prevalent throughout Iraq despite being in violation of Iraqi and international laws. Iraqi law stipulates that a person must be 18-years-old or older to marry.[41] The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) has documented a number of cases of girls as young as 13-years-old who had allegedly been subjected to forced marriages. Girls or young women who run away from forced or arranged marriages face difficulties, particularly in rural areas, where they are considered as defying their family's wishes and are at risk of becoming a victim of an honour crime.

### Isolation

Refugee and IDP girls of all ages in and out of camps expressed feelings of isolation, both physical and social. This isolation added to their concerns about the future and feelings of hopelessness. Many spoke of their parents not letting them attend school or even to leave their tent/house due to concerns for their safety.

Syrian girls spoke about how they now had more restrictions on their movements due to cultural differences between Syria and Iraq, highlighting the relative freedom they experienced back in Syria. Conversely, many Iraqi girls said that there was not enough segregation between boys and girls in the camps, schools and host communities, and this resulted in their parents not letting them leave their homes. All girls linked their forced physical isolation to their parents reacting to discrimination both in and out of the camps. Many girls said their isolation contributed to feelings of despair or depression, and spoke of early marriage as one way parents used to 'keep them safe' but which further contributed to this isolation by cutting them off from their peers. Many girls spoke of not telling their parents about cases of abuse because of their fear that this would mean they would no longer be able to leave their house and attend school, thus increasing their isolation.

**Alyawa IDP Camp, Diyala, Iraqi Kurdistan.**
**Photo: C J Clarke/Save the Children.**

## EMAN'S STORY

Eman* is 16-years-old, and an only child from Qamishli in Syria. Her mother died while giving birth to her and her father fled to Europe over 10 years ago, with no communication with Eman. Eman was raised by her grandparents. Due to the ongoing war in Syria, Eman and her grandparents fled for refuge in Iraq where they have been living in Qushtapa camp in Erbil for the past two years. She hasn't been to school since arriving in the camp as she is required to care for her elderly grandparents. With depleting resources and limited employment opportunities in the camp, Eman decided that marriage would be the ideal solution to financially support herself and grandparents. She struggled with an abusive marriage for one year and has now been divorced for 10 days with no rights.

Eman's story in her own words:

"We lived near Damascus and I was living a happy life, living with my grandparents. Life was becoming unsafe so we had to flee. I used to go to school and completed 7th grade, but I haven't been to school since. My dream was to study and become a lawyer, to fight for people's rights. I came here and my dreams shrunk. I thought about enrolling in school in the camp but I needed to look after my grandmother as her health is not so well.

"My two uncles were in the camp and they supported us a lot, but they are now both struggling in Europe that sometimes we have to support them from Iraq.

"I've been trying to find work in the camp since we arrived because my grandparents are old, but I haven't been employed because I'm too young. I believed that the only solution was for me to marry, and help out financially. I was fifteen. A suitor approached my family and I married him. The first time I met him was on our wedding day.

"He was living outside the camp so we got married and I moved away from my grandparents. He is ten years older than me. I got to know him after two months of marriage. I was afraid, unsure of my decision before we got married, but I thought it was best for my family. He made me cover my head and prohibited me from wearing what I wanted. He started to beat me, then it became on a daily basis.

"Gossip is a big part of people's lives in the camp, and I didn't want them to start rumors about me or my grandparents if I decided to leave my husband so I stayed for one year. Divorce is a taboo here.

**At the age of 15, marriage was Eman's only resort for financial support. Photo: Farah Sayegh/Save the Children.**

"I was continuously verbally and physically abused for no reason. I was very shocked the first time he beat me. He didn't allow me to visit my family after he argued with one of my uncles. I tried to sneak out and see them a couple of times when he was at work. Then we moved into the camp.

"My family didn't believe me until I moved in the camp with him, and he beat me in front of a crowd.

"My reason for getting married was for my husband to support my family, but he refused to give me or my family any money throughout the marriage. I had to sell gold that belonged to my mother, in order to pay for my doctor visits.

"The suffering I went through was unimaginable. I considered committing suicide and started to see a psychiatrist but I felt guilty hurting my family.

"I used to wish that I died back in Syria and not have to go through this.

"My family and I were convinced that divorce was needed and finally it was agreed but I didn't get any of my rights. He paid me some money to compensate for the gold that he made me sell but I didn't get anything that owned. I'm just glad I'm not married anymore.

"It's very difficult to find employment in the camp because people employ their friends and family members. Some people I know have completed their schooling and have certificates but no one is hiring them while they desperately need the money. There is employment opportunities outside the camps, which some girls are doing but it's unsafe and also people start to gossip about girls who leave the camp frequently.

"I wish I could be in school, without this responsibility but my grandparents are old and I'm the only one around to support them."

* All names have been changed to protect identities

### Child and Youth Friendly Spaces

All youths who had attended a CFS/YFS and were part of the FGDs spoke about the sense of safety they felt when in the spaces. Youths spoke highly of the staff who they felt were there to provide them with support, and often used the positive experiences they had with CFS/YFS staff as a direct comparison with the negative experiences they had with teachers in formal schools. Many children expressed fear that the CFS/YFSs would close due to lack of funding with one 14-year-old Syrian boy speaking about the CFS and saying: "We don't know whether we will be able to play here in a few months' time". Another Syrian boy aged 16 said: "The situation in Syria is so bad, and the situation in Kurdistan is getting worse. I want to go to Europe because that's the only place I can see a future. The CFS is closing here in two months and then what?"

> "CFS is the only good thing we have"
>
> Iraqi girl, 14, Barhake.

## Save the Children's Child and Youth Friendly Spaces in Iraq

The conflict in both Iraq and Syria has taken an acute physical and psychological toll on children. The displacement from home, uncertain future, financial concerns and other drastic changes in lifestyle deprive children of their basic right of access to education and causes psychological distress to children and their families. Both IDP and refugee children are in critical need of specialised care, psychosocial support and protection to recover from psychological and emotional distress. Save the Children established and runs CFS and YFS in both camp and non-camp settings where IDPs and Syrian refugees are residing. Structured psychosocial support and resilience programs are provided to children and youth at these spaces, acting as a safe haven for thousands of children and adolescents to support their cognitive and mental development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Humanitarian actors**

- Investigate how protection risks can be mitigated through supporting community based options.
- Provide specific protection programming for girls, ensuring that their particular needs are addressed so such risks are not inhibiting their ability to live productive lives.
- Address issues of school safety when children are in school and during their travel to and from school.

**UN and Donors**

- Fully fund requests for protection programming in humanitarian responses and to support long-term development of protection mechanisms.

## BASMA'S STORY

Basma* is from the Syrian city of Hassakeh and has been a refugee for 3 years in Iraq. Basma is among five siblings who all live with their mother. Since her father passed away, Basma and her family have been facing financial challenges. Now living in Qushtapa camp in Erbil, Basma dropped out of school and has been working long hours outside the camp to support her family.

Basma's story in her own words:

"We left Syria because the fighting was intensifying. For the first 20 days in Erbil we took refuge in a school building because the camp wasn't open yet.

"We had some money with us at the beginning and that helped us continue living as we were in Syria but in the camp. I went to school in the camp and finished 5th and 6th grade here. My grades allowed me to advance into 7th grade but I chose not to.

"We were struggling financially. My mother had irregular work in the camp and I felt sorry for her. My sister lives with her husband in the camp, and she supported us as well.

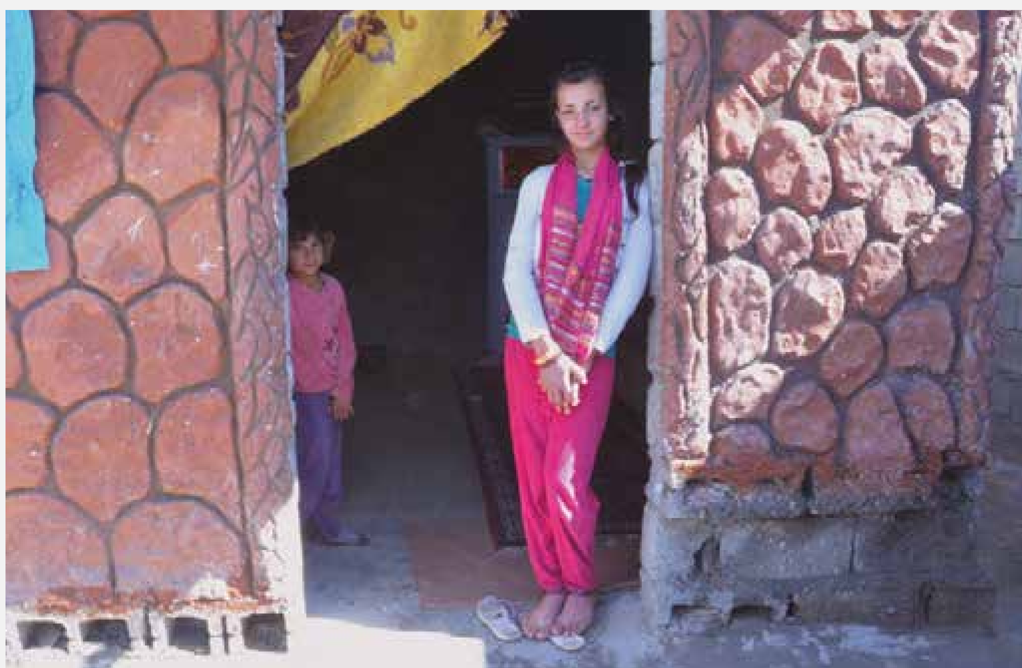
"Some people came door to door in the camp to register workers at a nearby potato factory. They were looking for workers who would pack potatoes into cartons for distribution and I registered my name.

"We started with an evening shift for the first month from 2 p.m. until 12 a.m. then for the past two months my shift has been from 5 a.m. until 5 p.m. every other day.

"My day starts at 4 in the morning where I get ready for work and head to the camp gate where a bus picks up 35 people from the camp, mostly women and girls. During the working day, I am mostly seated packing potatoes in cartons. It makes my arms hurt because it's long hours of the same movement. We have a one hour break where they provide us lunch. When I am back at the camp I eat and sleep from 7 p.m. until midnight or more.

"I'm supposed to make $500 USD a month but I still didn't receive this amount. The first two months they only paid us $100 and the third month $120 and I still haven't received this month's salary.

"I'm the only one among my friends in the camp who works instead of being in school. Some days I really wish my day was as easy as theirs. Maybe if my circumstances were different, I would rather be in school. But for now I prefer to work than be in school, to help my family and siblings survive."



**Basma, 12-years-old, is her family's breadwinner, working 12 hour shifts. Photo: Farah Sayegh/ Save the Children.**

* All names have been changed to protect identities

### 4.2.3. "None of us have jobs": job opportunities and livelihoods

All groups consistently ranked poor economic situation and lack of job opportunities as a top challenge being faced by families. The main challenges within this were lack of jobs for either fathers or older male youths, lack of regular financial support from aid agencies, not getting paid by employers on time or at all, low salaries, and the perception that jobs were being awarded based on relationship to employer or ethnicity rather than merit. As one 17-year-old Syrian refugee said: "If we don't see success in anything else, at least job opportunities would make things better".

Syrian refugee youths also linked a lack of job opportunities as contributing towards their decisions to travel to Europe. Many of the Syrian male and female youths between 15 – 24-years-old said that if their family could not afford to send the entire family to Europe, a male youth would be sent as they have the most chances of earning money to send back to their family in Iraq.

Importantly, Syrian and Iraqi youths of all ages clarified that when they spoke about a lack of job opportunities, they were primarily referring to jobs for their fathers. Males aged 20 – 24 also highlighted the need for jobs for themselves, with many adding that this was because there were no tertiary education options available to them. As a 22-year-old Syrian male said: "I cannot see a future here. I have been here three years and can't do anything. One year feels like 10 years. And we can't go to university, and can't get jobs. If I can't get a job, I will have to make a different condition for myself. I don't know what that will look like, but I have to do something."

The discussions within the groups highlighted the link between unemployment and social tensions between the displaced populations and the host community. As one 19-year-old Syrian girl living in the host community said: "Even if you speak Kurdish, they look at you like a refugee. Many people say that the Syrians have ruined everything for Kurdistan and we are taking all their jobs and we should not be here. None of us have jobs, so how have we ruined anything?" Many Syrian refugee and Iraqi IDPs gave similar examples of how they were yelled at on the street for taking jobs from people in the host community.

Furthermore, many camp based refugees and IDPs noted that even without discrimination as a barrier, there simply were not enough jobs available. This was particularly mentioned by camp-based youths where the camps were at a significant distance from any job market and they had limited access to affordable transportation.

> "This economic situation causes us to lose our future"
>
> Syrian boy, 18, Domiz.

#### Child Labour

IDP and refugee males between 13 – 19-years-old discussed working during the day either begging or in informal employment such as domestic work or working for a nearby store or restaurant. Many agreed that this work impacted negatively on their education, with one 17-year-old Syrian youth living in a host community saying: "I am working but also trying to go to school. However when I am at school I am so tired that I can't concentrate".

Boys discussed whether different schooling hours would make going to school and maintaining work easier, but then overwhelmingly agreed that working either made them too tired to concentrate in school, or that they were always thinking about having to work so they could not concentrate when they were able to go to school.

> "If there are no jobs for our fathers, then we have no money and we can't meet our needs. This means we have to go begging or do bad things to get the money we need."
>
> IDP boy, 13, Barhake.

## Economy, poverty and access to basic services

In 2014, Iraq was deemed as being an upper middle-income country, in part due to developing good infrastructure, and efficient education and healthcare systems. However economic and security conditions have since worsened, resulting in increased poverty, vulnerability and unemployment. The decline in oil prices and the fiscal impact of fighting the IS insurgency have contributed to a sharp deterioration of economic activity, public finances and the balance of payments.[42] While the oil sector, critical to Iraq's economy, has continued to expand, the World Bank attributes Iraq's weak economic growth primarily to the non-oil economy which continues to decline.[43] Even prior to the current conflict, Iraq struggled to ensure its population had access to basic services, including electricity, water supplies and health services.[44] This, combined with high poverty levels, means the population remains extremely vulnerable to the ongoing security problems and reduction in oil prices. The number of people living below the poverty line increased by an estimated 2.8 million by the end of 2014, bringing poverty levels to 22.5 percent.[45] The negative impact on Iraq's economy has also caused an approximate about 90 percent drop in fiscal transfers from the GoI in Baghdad to the KRG.[46]

### Unemployment

Rates of unemployment in Iraq vary – the World Bank reported that Iraq's unemployment rate in 2013 was at 16 percent,[47] more recent figures from UNDP put unemployment at 11 percent nationally,[48] and in March 2015 the Iraqi Minister of Labour and Social Affairs announced that unemployment had passed 25 percent.[49] Despite this lack of consistency in figures, there is consensus that the conflict has increased unemployment in certain sectors and parts of the country, with the World Bank attributing the conflict in Iraq with making an additional 800,000 people jobless.[50]

Youth unemployment in Iraq is high, however as with overall unemployment rates, statistics are not consistent. The World Bank reported that in 2013 youth unemployment was 34.1 percent however UNDP puts youth unemployment at 18 percent.[51] A 2014 Save the Children report on the youth labour market highlighted the differences in data just within KRG, with youth unemployment in the region ranging from 18.3 percent (Kurdistan Region Statistics Office – KRSO) to 30 percent (Iraq's Central Statistical Organisation – COSIT).[52] However, despite this inconsistency, all sets of data emphasise a concerning situation. This report states, unemployment rates among youth are an important indicator of the economy's ability to generate economic opportunities for those entering the labour market, consequently aiding both economic growth and social stability.

Statistics from both the World Bank and the KRSO show that women are more likely to be unemployed than men. There are several reasons for this discrepancy including traditional societal norms that often prevent women from working outside of the home,[53] and the lack of women in the private sector (women account for just 2 percent of all employees in the private sector). Additionally, female levels of unemployment are recorded as lower in rural areas than in urban areas, primarily because of the high number of women working in the agricultural sector.[54] According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), 'promoting women's involvement in education and employment opportunities plays a vital role in Iraq's post-crisis rehabilitation and future economic growth and social development'.[55]

In Iraq, the minimum legal age of employment is 15 with the minimum age for hazardous work being 18.[56] However according to a recent UNICEF and Save the Children report, children in Iraq are engaged in many forms of harmful child labour and nearly 77 percent of refugee children from Syria reported that they are working to support their families.[57]

### Vocational and life-skills training

Vocational training, particularly for refugees living in camps, was mentioned as a key challenge when discussing both education and livelihoods. Many refugee youths between the ages of 15 – 25 felt that there were too many vocational training sessions being offered but there were no subsequent opportunities for jobs. This exacerbated feelings of hopelessness and anger, with many feeling that such trainings were a waste of time. As one 17-year-old Syrian male said: "What's the point of having a certificate if no one cares about it?" This sentiment was supported by a member of the Livelihoods and Social Cohesion cluster who stated that there were very few vocational training programs that linked the type of training being offered with any gap in the job market. This is in contrast to the Iraq 3RP which states that 'youth and adolescents in camps will benefit from vocational training opportunities to enable them to acquire employable skills that will eventually lead them to sustainable livelihoods'[58] and that to 'ensure access to sustainable employment, it is vital to equip refugees and vulnerable local populations, including women, people with disabilities, the poor and the youth, with skills that the markets demand'.[59]

The 3RP also states that a participatory and inclusive approach for livelihood enhancement and business creation, infrastructure improvement, and other socio-economic interventions will foster mutual trust and solidarity between different groups in the communities.[60] However, both male and female Syrian youths aged between 15 – 25 spoke of their perception that even with vocational training, they would not be able to gain employment in their host community because of discrimination and lack of willingness of employers to employ Syrians.

Camp managers, local NGOs and members of the Child Protection Sub-Cluster also highlighted the need for life-skills trainings for both IDP and refugee youth. It was suggested that such trainings could cover topics such as managing a household budget, guidance on the business of the household such as splitting household chores between housemates or paying rent or utility bills, and developing skills such as conflict management, peaceful negotiation and effective communication. This would seek to empower youths, give them knowledge to support them in becoming independent young adults, and prepare them for positive roles in their families and communities, thus contributing towards peace and development.

### Legal Status

Both Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs highlighted the legal barriers that restricted their access to employment. As noted, Iraqi IDPs living in KRI do not have access to residency permits, which means they are unable to gain legal employment. Many of the IDP youths spoke about the risks their fathers took in gaining employment, both in terms of being arrested for working illegally and being exploited or abused by employers knowing they would not be able to report such treatment.

Many IDP youths mentioned the unfairness related in the difference in the legal status between refugees and IDPs. However, it was strongly noted by the 15 – 24-year-old Syrian youths that even with the residency permits, their families faced other barriers to employment, particularly discrimination and lack of job opportunities more broadly.

**Daily life inside Alyawa IDP Camp, Diyala, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo: C J Clarke/Save the Children.**

## Legal Status of Refugees and IDPs in Iraq

In KRI, the regional government issues residency permits to registered refugees, allowing them to rent houses, gain employment and access healthcare, education and other services.[61] However, there are barriers in obtaining these permits, and such barriers may differ per Governorate.[62] While having the residency permits allows Syrian refugees in KRI more rights and freedom than most Syrian refugees in other countries neighbouring Syria, they still remain without the basic rights enshrined in citizenship (such as land ownership) or to a much lesser extent, residency. This means that access to meaningful, sustainable employment and capital is, by default, limited.[63] A REACH assessment from March 2015 found that as Syrian refugees are progressively substituted or competed with by IDPs in segments of the labour market where they traditionally dominate, such as low-wage, agricultural and skilled labour, their abilities to service their own needs will likely diminish, with negative consequences across all other welfare outcomes and indicators. Therefore, although Syrian refugees have been given the legal right to work, there are other legal restrictions that hamper full participation.

Furthermore, under Iraqi law land and household ownership is limited to Iraqi citizens only, meaning that refugee households have few material assets which can be used as collateral in legal and formal credit arrangements with regulated financial institutions. The REACH assessment found that this in turn means that they are potentially more prone to informal borrowing practices than the hosting community and, with no formal arrangement for repayment, renders them more vulnerable to the associated protection concerns which predatory lending practices foster.[64]

### Debt

This was reflected in the discussions with both IDP and refugee youths of all ages who spoke of their parents having to borrow money due to high price of essential goods such as food and household items and of lack of an income source.

### Armed groups

When discussing the lack of options for gaining employment, some Syrian male youths mentioned the possibility of joining armed groups in order to receive a salary. Highlighting that this was generally not due to ideological links with the armed groups, the youths said that joining an armed group, particularly the Peshmerga,[65] meant they would be able to provide for their family. Although the youths said there was no active recruitment into the armed groups, in one camp that was visited for this study young men from the Peshmerga were seen working alongside the youth committee. Male youths from this youth committee said that if they joined the Peshmerga through their contacts in the camp they would get more benefits such as increased food and money than if they joined independently. This was seen as a way to be part of a wider group that would provide social and economic support to both them and their families.

The issue of forced recruitment was mentioned by both Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs when discussing that the lack of job opportunities has made some of their families discuss returning to their homes in Iraq or Syria. This seemed to be particularly an issue for those families from Kobane, with many of the younger Syrian girls expressing fear that their older brothers would be recruited if they returned home.

It must be noted that other studies focusing on youth recruitment into armed groups in other countries have stated that while economic inducements may compel someone to join an armed group, this appears to be rare. A Mercy Corps report states that 'while unemployment is often emblematic of systemic sources of frustration and marginalisation, employment status alone does not appear to determine whether a young person is likely to join an insurgency'.[66] Therefore, while the youths in this study mainly pointed towards a regular salary being a key reason to join an armed group, the finding of this study merely shows that economic incentives are just one of the reasons refugee and IDP youth have for joining armed groups in Iraq.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Humanitarian actors

- Link vocational training with the job market and job availability. Training and vocational programs should identify skills the job market needs, what job opportunities exist and how refugees can be linked to these markets. Training should also include practical elements of running a business such as building a client base, advertising their products, managing basic accountancy, and paying employees. Training programs must be designed in consultation with local youths, and take into account local needs.
- Support internships and/or work experience for youth after completion of vocational training in order to support them in gaining work experience.
- Implement life skills programs such as conflict management, peaceful negotiation, effective communication, guidance on the business of the household to empower youths to positively participate in the communities as independent young adults.
- Provide financial incentives for more joint business ventures between Syrians, Iraqi IDPs and host communities, to boost local economies, facilitate more cooperation between communities, and generate income for refugee, IDP and host communities alike.

### UN and Donors

- Support youth-focused multi-sector programs, rather than the more common single sector programs that include youth as a target population and address only one challenge. For example, vocational training should be market driven and combined with protection, inter-community dialogue and peacebuilding, and psychosocial support.
- Fully fund programs that link vocational training with the job market and job availability.
- Donors and humanitarian actors should provide support to the KRG and GoI to develop and implement policies and practices that allow refugees and IDPs to work legally, without negatively affecting the economies of the host communities. Donors, KRG and GoI can work together to unlock the potential economic contribution that refugees and IDPs can make to meet their basic needs, while also benefiting the areas where they temporarily reside.

### Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government

- The GoI and KRG should standardise processes for Syrian refugees to gain the residency permits across all governorates of KRG. Procedures to maintain valid documentation and registration must be clear, accessible, and affordable.
- Investigate legal options that allow refugees and IDPs to work legally.

### 4.2.4. Access to aid

Every FGD highlighted some element of access to aid as a key challenge. Youths who lived in camps with particularly poor living standards were more likely to mention inadequate shelter, poor access to electricity, clean water and health services as more significant challenges than employment or education due to their perception that these issues were more 'life-saving'. For example, youths in both Barhake IDP camp in Erbil Governorate and Yahyawa IDP camp in Kirkuk Governorate highlighted the lack of an ambulance during the night as their top challenge due to worries that this may result in people dying in the camp. Although they mentioned that their number one wish was to go to school, an ambulance was a higher priority because "if we die, then we can't go to school anyway."[67]

Both IDP and refugee youths in and out of camps aged 15 – 24-years-old mentioned a lack of dedicated support for youths, particularly for access to jobs and to psychosocial support.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS

**Prioritising youth as one of the most vulnerable groups in Iraq, and supporting them to realise the key role they can play in peacebuilding and development in Iraq and Syria is a key step that humanitarian agencies, donors and the GOI and KRG need to take. Such measures can better address the current humanitarian crisis in Iraq, and improve the overall short- and long-term situation for refugees, IDPs and host communities.**

Fundamental to success is ensuring youths are provided with enabling opportunities such as education, life and work skills, vocational and entrepreneurship training and community involvement, and limiting inhibiters such as a lack of education and skills, unemployment, early marriage, and violence. Such efforts will mitigate youth conflict drivers, increase youth empowerment and benefit the economic and social conditions in Iraq.

The FGDs and other key informant interviews, combined with the secondary research highlight the many challenges youths are facing in Iraq, because of both their situation as refugees and IDPs but also because of underlying social and economic factors already existing in Iraq or that have been exacerbated by the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Despite the challenging circumstances, most of the displaced youths who participated in this study showed remarkable resourcefulness when discussing solutions to their challenges, and a clear desire to find ways to improve their situations.

Save the Children, like many other humanitarian agencies, believe that this group of refugee and IDP youths are some of the most vulnerable people affected by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Focusing on meeting their needs will have a profound impact on the situation in the region now and in the future. As the UN Secretary-General says, engaging youth is essential to lasting stability. These youths will be the key to building back broken economies[68] and creating lasting peace, but only if they are given the skills, knowledge and opportunity to do so. With the right investments, Iraq can harness and benefit from the energy, enthusiasm and creativity of the youth in its country.

Echoing youth-focused studies in other fragile states and the recently published 'Right to a Future' report, positive engagement with displaced youth would have tangible social and potentially economic benefits for host communities, as well as for the displaced youths themselves.[69] It is also an investment in the futures of Iraq and Syria as an educated, productive and engaged young population represents one of the most promising chances for these countries to rebuild and prosper with lasting peace.

If we want to ensure Iraq has a positive future, we must change the dialogue from this: "The situation in Iraq and Syria has gotten much worse. There is no future. Not here, in Europe, anywhere"[70] to one of hope and opportunity.

# ENDNOTES

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12 'Clusters' are groups of humanitarian organisations (UN and non-UN) working in the main sectors of humanitarian action, eg. shelter, education and protection. They are created when clear humanitarian needs exist within a sector, where there are numerous actors within sectors and when national authorities need coordination support. Clusters provide a clear point of contact and are accountable for adequate and appropriate humanitarian assistance. Some Clusters contain a 'sub-clusters', for example the Protection Cluster also includes the Child Protection Sub-Cluster.

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**Back cover photo: Children playing at Alwand IDP Camp, Diyala, Iraqi Kurdistan. Photo: Mark Kaye/Save the Children.**