Save the Children

ANYWHERE BUT SYRIA

How 10 years of conflict left Syria's displaced children without sense of home

Save the Children

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All names have been changed to protect the identities of children and the families featured in this paper.

Cover photo: Lara, 7, holding an umbrella in front of her family's tent in North West Syria. Taken on 29 January, 2021. Photo by Hurras Network / Save the Children.

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Lara, seven-years-old Syria girl currently displaced in a camp in North West Syria. Taken on 30 January 2021. Photo by Hurras Network / Save the Children,

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CHILDREN'S FOREWORD

Syrian children and young people are forced to accept and adapt to injustice and deprivation of basic needs, to labour, to hardship, to discrimination, and to bullying.

We ask the world's leaders to help Syrian children secure their rights to play, to education, to good food, to citizenship and to a safe environment. We ask leaders to provide safety, security and stability to Syrian children all over the world, to listen to their voices and to rebuild their destroyed homes.

In displacement camps, Syrian children need a lot of support. During winter, the tents flood with water; people do not feel safe and cannot protect their children and provide them with education, their rights or stability. There are limited schools, centres, and facilities for children to achieve their potential. Some children dream of having financial support to pursue their education to achieve their dreams. Due to social norms and expectations, girls in particular face barriers to continuing their education once they are past 15 or 16 years of age. These girls should be supported to achieve their ambitions.

We hope that Syrian children achieve their rights and secure a good future. We hope that those who wish to emigrate can do so to build a better and safer life. Those that wish to return to Syria need an end to the war; they need safe places to return to and they need to be able to continue their education.

Our message to Syrian children is to keep dreaming, be strong, and never give up.

Syrian Adolescent Committee in Lebanon and Jordan[1]

My name is Lara and I am 7 years old. My siblings and I are forced to live in a tent that does not protect us from winter cold because we simply cannot return to our village because it is not safe and there are many children like me.

My siblings and I cannot access the most basic services as we have to walk long distances to reach the nearest hospital, and very recently I have been able to join a school that was recently established near the camp.

Here it is not safe, the sound of dogs scares me. I ask world leaders to help me and all the children around me so that we can return to our homes, rebuild them, play safely, go to school without fear of dying, and have enough food for us to grow up.

My peers and I need a lot of support so that our tents are not flooded in the winter and to not get bitten by deadly scorpions in the summer, as a girl I dream that I can complete my education to become a teacher when I grow up and support the girls around me so that they can read and write.

I will not give up and I will dream of going home so I can open my bag of toys to play with with Yasmine, my teddy bear.

Lara, seven-years-old Syrian girl

TWO

CEO'S FOREWORD

More than 10 years of conflict in Syria has had a devastating impact on the country's children. This conflict has also created the largest wave of displacement in modern history and in the world today with 13.2 million displaced, including 6.6 million refugees and more than six million internally displaced people[2]. Millions of children now find themselves stuck in limbo faced with the prospect of further displacement or unsafe return.

A few months after the crisis began in 2011, Save the Children launched a response in Syria and neighbouring countries. Over the years, we have supported 3.2 million people, including 2.1 million children inside of Syria alone. Children have told us repeatedly of the ongoing challenges they are facing, including threats to their lives, losing loved ones, missing out on education, and having to leave home multiple times to flee violence. At the start of the crisis, we spoke to Nour who was just 9-years-old when her family fled the conflict. She told us:

"In Syria I was happy, I used to play football and other games. Then the violence started and they started to make us suffer. There was nothing that they did not use to hurt us with. I was terrified…I used to like hiding. Hiding is better than dying".

This year, Nour will turn 18, marking her transition to adulthood. Like Nour, children participating in this research have spent most of their upbringings in conflict and displacement. This ten-year conflict has cost them their childhoods, but the world should not allow it to rob them of their future. We cannot allow for this to continue, for young adults like Nour, for the children of today and for future generations to come.

'Anywhere but Syria' is a unique insight into children's lives in displacement inside Syria, in the region and in Europe. The report was shaped and co-created with a group of young Syrians and represents the collective voice of nearly two thousand Syrian children in multiple contexts. The children paint a stark picture of their daily struggles to feel safe and at home where they are, while also not seeing a bright future for themselves inside Syria. They speak of trying to reclaim their childhoods and their futures while facing multiple barriers including widespread discrimination, a loss of agency and fear of forced return.

Hearing children's voices and supporting their demands must always serve as our most vital call to action. Globally, in the midst of a pandemic, we have been reminded of the importance of compassion, humanity and shared responsibility across borders. So let us be clear: if solid pathways for Syrian children to achieve the full spectrum of their rights is not set now, there is a risk of this milestone becoming a grim marker of a second generation of Syrian children losing their opportunities for a decent childhood and a future.

Inger Ashing

CEO, Save the Children International

‘ In Syria I was happy, I used to play football and other games. Then the violence started and they started to make us suffer. There was nothing that they did not use to hurt us with. I was terrified ... I used to like hiding. Hiding is better than dying. ’

Nour, now 18, was 9 when she said this to Save the Children

Amina, 14 drawing with her friend, Reem, 13, in the Netherlands . Amina, 14, has been living with her mother, Rasha in The Netherlands since 2015. She, her mother and grandmother fled Syria at the age of six because of the conflict. Her mother had been in prison for one year and during that time Amina lived with her grandmother. Taken on 12 February 2021. Photo by Save the Children.

THREE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Being forced to flee your home is a life-changing event that often results in negative impacts that persist long after the conflict or disaster that triggered it has ended.

To support progress towards a safe and fulfilling future for displaced children, Save the Children emphasises the importance of ensuring that displaced children experience full physical, material, legal and psychosocial safety, all of which are crucial for a child's survival and development. The aim of this research is to explore in greater detail the elements of a displaced child's experience that contribute to building their mental health and sense of belonging, also known as "psychosocial safety". This lesser-explored element of safety is vital to working towards safe and meaningful participation of children in decision-making, supporting positive mental health and wellbeing, in any attempt to meaningfully reduce the vulnerabilities a child experiences as a result of their displacement.

Between November-December 2020 Save the Children spoke about the experience of displacement to over 1,900 Syrian children aged 13-17 in Syria (in areas controlled by the Government of Syria), Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and the Netherlands; short surveys were also conducted with parents and caregivers of some participating children. Speaking to children of this age group in particular provided an insight into the views and opinions of Syrian children who are in a particularly important stage of development when it comes to psychosocial safety. Older children in their teens are forming their own identities and starting to make choices about their futures.

Through the course of this research, three main topics emerged as contributing to the experience of psychosocial safety for Syrian children growing up in displacement: access to meaningful future opportunities; a sense of connectedness; and agency in decision-making.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

When we asked Syrian children what constitutes safety for them, access to meaningful future opportunities was the most commonly mentioned factor in qualitative interviews. Having hope for a future with ability to study and to secure a job, as well as being able to live in a stable context without fear of losing one's home or facing safety threats, all appeared to have a significant impact on children's overall sense of wellbeing. Based on findings from the survey, having a sense of being able to access opportunities for self-improvement and fulfilling future aspirations correlated with general life satisfaction. At the same time, the data showed that uncertainty about the future was detrimental to their wellbeing, at times even more so than concerns about current physical safety.

When exploring future opportunities, children expressed the importance of peace inside Syria; securing their choice of durable solution pathway (return, resettlement, integration in the context context); and continuing their education.

Wishing for the conflict and violence in Syria to end was the most commonly held wish for the future across all respondents. In qualitative interviews, children (and particularly girls) often spoke about the importance of ending violence and harassment on the streets, as well as the need for justice and rule of law. In Syria and Lebanon, they spoke about general injustice in society that leads to discrimination and inequality and mentioned the need for stronger legislation to ensure that people are treated equally.

When asked about their preferred place of residence two years into the future, the vast majority of the children saw themselves somewhere other than Syria (79%). Out of the refugee children in the neighbouring countries and the Netherlands, few foresee a return to their country of origin (14%). While the

> ‘We cannot go back to Syria, because there is war there and [my siblings] and I are afraid. I am not hopeful. I am afraid because of the war in Syria and because of the blast here in Lebanon.’
>
> Girl, 12, Lebanon

majority of the interviewees in these countries were hoping to integrate where they are (63%), approximately one-in-five refugee children (23%) also reported hoping to live in a third country.

“We cannot go back to Syria, because there is war there and [my siblings] and I are afraid. I am not hopeful. I am afraid because of the war in Syria and because of the blast here in Lebanon.” - Girl, 12, Lebanon

Children in Syria were significantly less likely than those in the other countries surveyed to respond that in two years, they would want to be living inside Syria. When asked about whether the children believed they were able to live where they hoped to in the future, those inside Syria were the least confident and those in the Netherlands felt most optimistic. A pessimistic outlook was especially prevalent amongst internally displaced Syrian children, with only 42% confirming that they thought they would be able to realise their wish—significantly less than those in any other country.

Children being able to further their education or return to school was the second most reported wish for the future overall, with almost unanimous agreement that access to quality education, especially higher education, was key for them to be able to secure a life that they wanted. Interviewees also underscored nuanced barriers to education, in addition to attendance barriers, children identified language barriers in Turkey or parental support and transferability of education in Lebanon as obstacles.

“My future is in the Netherlands; I speak better Dutch than Arabic and economically it’s better.” Boy, 15, the Netherlands

SENSE OF CONNECTEDNESS

Across contexts, the need for displaced Syrian children to feel a sense of connection and belonging was clear. While the policies in countries of asylum and often the perceptions of the surrounding communities seemed often to differentiate displaced children from the resident community (also particularly strongly inside Syria) displaced children themselves clearly aspired to build an identity that is distinct from being perceived as a ‘refugee’ or ‘an internally displaced person’, and to develop positive relationships with them.

Generally, feeling close to one’s family, community, and peers had significant correlations with children’s experiences of life satisfaction. While the participants in general spoke positively about integration and assimilation, children also spoke about the challenges of accommodating their two very different cultures into their identities, in particular in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, over half the children surveyed (64%) indicated that they had experienced discrimination, especially at school. In Lebanon, experiencing discrimination in their communities due to difference in socio-economic status was mentioned by several adolescent participants in interviews.

Perhaps surprisingly, the IDPs inside Syria were the group in the study that showed the lowest sense of connection with their communities, and they were significantly more likely to report having experienced discrimination than their peers in Jordan or Lebanon, which could be an indication of torn social fabric inside the country.

Ziad is 10 years old and from rural Aleppo writing in a book during class. Taken on 2 February 2021. Photo by Hurras Network/ Save the Children

AGENCY

"Before the war the country was not perfect. People could not live with each other and there were many divisions among people and groups in Syria. People should adjust better to build a peaceful society. We can advise Syrians how to build peace. Write articles in newspapers about this. Maybe not everyone can adjust or change but many will, and they can make a difference." Girl, 13, the Netherlands

The Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for children to be recognised and respected as rights holders rather than as passive objects of protection and care, and the treaty sets out the right of children to express their views and to be heard in decision-making processes that affect their lives. All children have a need to take part in decision-making and have a voice when it comes to issues that impact their personal lives, education, their broader environment, including through political participation and voicing their priorities and concerns around the future of Syria.

Freedom of expression was a key theme that was brought up by children in the interviews. Many children also highlighted the importance of being able to be part of decision making outside their homes and in the broader society. For example, participants in Lebanon stressed the importance of working together to effectively influence decisions. In the Netherlands in particular, many children expressed a desire to help Syrians in Syria, with many highlighting the potential to send money or contribute to peacebuilding inside Syria.

"Some girls wear hijab because they were forced by their parents; but some choose it because it's beautiful, but when they visit other girls, who wear short sleeves, they might envy them or just feel that they don't belong. They lose their confidence in themselves." Girl, 15, the Netherlands

An inability to access opportunities for reasons out of their control had a significantly negative impact on children's wellbeing, indicating that being able to determine their own path is important for children to progress towards psychosocial safety. In the context of Syria, opportunities to speak out in a protected environment are scarce and little evidence exists to confirm that young people are given opportunities to contribute to community or other decision-making mechanisms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has demonstrated that securing material, physical and legal safety is crucial, but not sufficient to achieving psychosocial wellbeing and supporting children in overcoming the detrimental impacts of displacement on their development.

- Policy makers, humanitarian practitioners and authorities inside Syria and in countries of asylum need to consider it as a unique priority in supporting durable solutions and children's ability to feel safe. Fostering psychosocial safety is crucial to supporting Syrian children's ability to plan for their future; develop their identities and become positive agents of change for the societies in which they reside.

- Syrian children whether inside Syria or elsewhere, do not see bright and happy futures inside Syria. Protracted conflict has led to fear and pessimism about children's ability to build their lives in a country scarred by war and a society that is struggling to heal, with little hope of justice and accountability. Children want the opportunity to fulfil their dreams in safety, with full access to their rights. Given the right tools, children show high levels of willingness to overcome adversity and integrate into environments that allow them to develop and grow. Their voices need to be heard. Safely engaging children and young people in processes relating to their futures and the future of their country is vital for achieving meaningful long-term outcomes.

- Inside Syria, the needs and priorities voiced by children after ten years are no longer something that traditional humanitarian response alone can deliver. They request access to quality education, jobs and stable income to build the future they want for themselves. If the international community and authorities inside Syria are serious about promoting durable solutions inside Syria, including dignified, informed, voluntary and safe returns, a significant shift in approach will be required, including promoting an urgent end to the conflict, fostering an environment of meaningful positive peace and investing in recovery.

- Currently these conditions are not in place inside Syria. In addition, refugees continue to fear persecution, forced conscription and direct threats to their personal safety if they were to return to Syria[3]. Countries hosting Syrian refugees must uphold the principle of non-refoulement, end deportations to Syria and explicitly limit any coercive measures which may encourage or incentivise return. Temporary protection status should be renewed, or asylum granted to individuals who remain at risk.

- Governments and public figures should refrain from characterizing Syria - or parts of the country - as 'safe' as such statements are not in line with international standards, do not reflect conditions on the ground, and fail to take risks to individuals into account. For children who have spent significant proportions of their lives in displacement, particularly in Europe, the stress and lack of predictability in life related to them turning 18 and 'ageing out' of the protection systems needs to be given due consideration. There is a need for more transition schemes for young people turning 18, which would allow them to access education, traineeships and/or vocational training.[4]

> ' My future is in the Netherlands; I speak better Dutch than Arabic and economically it's better. '
>
> Boy, 15, the Netherlands

FOUR

INTRODUCTION

Ten years since the start of the crisis, and one year into the COVID-19 crisis, displaced Syrian children are facing impossible choices about their futures.

Whether inside Syria, in neighbouring countries in the region or elsewhere, displaced Syrian children have to continue to live their lives, grow up, develop, and make plans for their futures despite the protracted displacement and continuing conflict. Displacement is a life-changing event that often results in negative impacts that persist long after the conflict or disaster that triggered it has ended. For displaced Syrian children, this is an unbearable reality that impacts their ability to build meaningful futures, to contribute to their communities and societies and to establish their own families. These are all future wishes that Syrian adolescents participating in this study expressed over and over again.

To support progress towards a safe and fulfilling future for displaced children, Save the Children emphasises the importance of ensuring that displaced children experience full physical, material, legal and psychosocial safety, all of which are crucial for a child's survival and development. For many years, there has been a strong emphasis on the physical, material, and legal challenges that children are facing — including rates of school attendance, access to basic services and securing their civil rights and documentation. Much less is known or understood about children's psychosocial safety, which refers to a sense of safety in relation to the psychological and social processes that can be negatively impacted by displacement.

What it means to feel 'safe' can vary greatly from one person to another. The aim of this paper is to understand the common threads that emerge from conversations with displaced Syrian children to identify key factors that influence children's' experiences of displacement. Only through building a deeper understanding of this can we start to better meet the full spectrum of their needs and meaningfully support them to make decisions about their future.

To do this, between November-December 2020 Save the Children spoke to 1,900 Syrian children, 52% boys and 48% girls, aged 13-17 in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, the Netherlands and Syria. In Syria, the research focused on the experiences internally displaced children in areas controlled by the government of Syria. In Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, short surveys were also conducted with parents and caregivers of some participating children. Using a structured questionnaire inclusive of validated measures to assess areas of wellbeing, as well as speaking directly to children through qualitative interviews, this research aims to gain unique insights into what makes children feel psychosocially safe across key displacement contexts.

It is important to note that the selection of participants for the interviews in the refugee-hosting countries was based on operational access—targeting refugee children who were in contact with Save the Children or partners' programmes—which poses limitations to generalising the findings to the total adolescent refugee population in those countries. COVID-19 and related movement restrictions also made outreach to the Syrian refugee community significantly more challenging, with the typical gathering places for young people closed. Inside Syria, the survey sample should allow for relatively good representation of the findings in areas controlled by the government of Syria.

This research sheds light on key issues that constitute a sense of safety for displaced Syrian children, and provides evidence that psychosocial safety indeed plays an important role in their perceptions of good life – at times even more so than concrete material or physical issues. What we see emerging is a nexus across three key areas that are important for children now, namely:

1. **Futures:** viable future opportunities.

2. **Connectedness:** a sense of belonging and being supported.

3. **Agency:** having their voices heard in decisions that concern them.

This report explores these three areas, looking at the common experiences of children across displacement contexts and how these are impacting their current situations and their hopes for the future.

CHILD-SENSITIVE DURABLE SOLUTIONS

'Durable solutions' is a central concept for any organisation working on displacement. Immediately following a displacement crisis, and after initial life-saving activities have been provided, a long-term – or durable – solution must be realised for each child. A durable solution is achieved when rights lost due to displacement are restored, and the adverse impacts of displacement, including discrimination and distress, are meaningfully minimised. For refugee children, this can be achieved through local integration in the country of asylum, resettlement or voluntary return to the country of origin. Children displaced inside their countries, should be able to enjoy their rights and be protected, wherever they choose to seek solutions in their country. Central to the achievement of durable solutions is that displaced people are able to make informed and voluntary choices, and pursue durable solutions in safety and dignity. Displaced girls and boys often have concerns and priorities that may differ from those of their parents or communities, and they should be enabled to participate in the planning for their solutions in accordance with their age and maturity.

Nour, is from Aleppo but she and her family were displaced many times during the conflict. Her father joined an armed group and was later arrested. They now live in Al Hol camp. Nour was out of school for several years and when she arrived at the camp she could not read or write. She now attends a Save the Children's school in the camp. Taken on 12 February 2021. Photo by Muhannad Khaled / Save the Children.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR DISPLACED SYRIAN CHILDREN

- Two million children are out-of-school and 1.3 million children are at risk of dropping out.[5]
- An estimated 6.9 million people (97 per cent children) need humanitarian education assistance with 94 per cent of school-aged children living in areas with severe, extreme or catastrophic education conditions mainly concentrated in Aleppo, Idleb and Rural Damascus governorates.[6]
- Between 2018 and 2019, the number of food-insecure people increased from 6.5 million to 7.9 million, and food prices went up by 60 per cent.[7] Almost 137,00 children under five in Syria are facing life threatening risks and require immediate treatment for acute malnutrition.[8]
- 27% of households report that children show signs of psychological distress – almost double the figure in 2020 (14%).[9]
- In 2020, the UN verified 2,638 violations affecting 2,292 children in 2020. The UN verified that 1,454 children were killed or maimed.[10]
- In 2019, there were 157 attacks on Syrian schools.[11] The education system is overburdened with multiple curricula taught in some areas, this has significant repercussions on the provision and certification of learning.[12]

- 36% of refugee children of school age are not enrolled in any formal or informal education system.[14]
- 80% of refugees live below the poverty line and nearly 90% are in debt.[15] Only 2% have savings.[16] 70% of households were either food-insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity in 2018.[17] 1 in 5 refugees live in camps where conditions are extremely poor.[18]
- 75% of refugees do not have any form of health insurance coverage.[19]
- In 2020, 54% of the 24,000 shelters in the Za'atari camp had leaking roof and damaged structure.[20]
- In 2018, 16% of Syrian children from 0-5 years do not have a birth certificate.[21]

- 44% of Syrian children are out of school,[22] those attending public schools have no or very limited access to online/remote learning.
- 91% of displaced Syrians are living on less than $2.90 per day.[23] 89% of households living under the extreme poverty line in 2020[24] and 50% of Syrian refugees are food insecure.[25] Child labour continues to be an issue and child marriage is increasing.[26]
- Lebanon's privatised healthcare system means that healthcare is expensive and inaccessible to a large proportion of the population.[27]

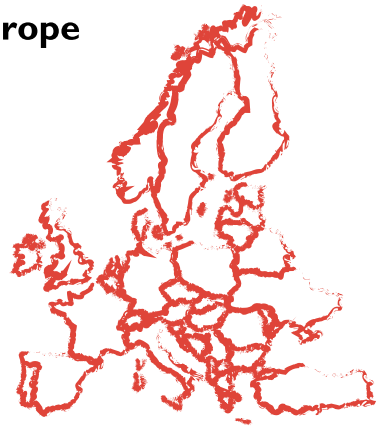
  60% live in shelters that are overcrowded, below humanitarian standards and are in danger of collapse.[28]
- 70% of Syrian refugees lack legal residency.[29] 31% of households have at least one member with legal residency; 69% of households have no members with legal residency.[30]
- 28% of births that had occurred in Lebanon were registered, compared to 30% in 2019 and 21% in 2018. 98% have the minimum documentation (doctor or midwife certificate).[31] 79% of Syrian children born in Lebanon have not completed the complex registration process required to make their birth certificate legally valid.[32]

- Turkey hosts over 3.7 million Syrian refugees and over 300,000 asylum seekers, 46% of which are children.[33] In 2019, it was estimated that 60,000 Syrian refugees in Turkey were unregistered.[34]
- 35% of children are out of school.[35] Before COVID-19, of the more than 1 million school-aged Syrian refugee children in Turkey, around 684,000 attended school. Over 400,000 children are out of school.[36]
- Over 64% of the urban Syrian households live close to or below the poverty line.[37] 69% of Syrians lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.[38] One of the negative coping mechanisms is deprioritization of adequate food consumption—it has been reported that 96% of the households consider food as their priority need.[39] Only 34% of refugees live in good quality housing.[40]
- Registered Syrian refugees have access to free healthcare and education with certain barriers including but not limited to language; however, unregistered Syrians do not have the right to access those services. [41] School enrolment in primary level has decreased around 10% following COVID-19.[42]
- In 2019, official figures showed that 720,000 Syrian children were engaged in economic activities, they often work in dangerous jobs such as construction and textile workshops.[43] The actual number of children engaged in economic activities is estimated to be significantly higher.

- 2% of Syrian refugee children are out of school.[44]
- 51% of the Syrian refugee population is food secure while the rest are either food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity.[45] 85% of registered Syrian refugees are unable to meet their basic needs.[46] and 79% stated that they need to borrow money to survive.[47] Refugees live in overcrowded accommodations with inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene.[48]
- Due to COVID-19, many Syrian refugees have lost their source of income and cannot afford basic supplies or pay their rent. Unaccompanied children are becoming increasingly vulnerable, and cases of gender-based violence continue to be reported.[49]
- Constraints related to residency, labor policies as well as challenging market conditions have also compelled many refugees to resort to informal labor in order to meet the basic needs of their families.[50]

- 68,800 school-age Syrian children reside in Iraq. Prior to COVID-19, low enrolment in camp and urban areas into a parallel education system was a standing concern. Within camps, primary school enrolment reached only 51%, falling to 29% by upper secondary.[51]
- Since COVID-19 started, 60% of Syrian refugee households reported needing access to health services and hospitals.[52]
- 19% of Syrian refugees in Iraq live in poverty[53] and 19.2% Syrian refugees are with insufficient food consumption.[54]
- COVID-19 has limited access to livelihood opportunities, leading to increasing the risk of SGBV and negative coping mechanisms. Child protection cases increased due to risks presented by specific COVID-19 and related control measures, including children identified as unaccompanied after being separated from their parents/caregivers.[55]
- The absence of an effective legal framework for refugee protection continues to preclude longer-term residency rights and other legal benefits for Syrian refugees.[56]

Europe



- Once in Europe, refugee children are supposed to have access to education in accordance with human rights law but barriers still persist for many children, including limited places in schools and the lack of language support.[57, 58]
- Since 2013, Syria has remained the main country of citizenship of asylum seekers and the most common country of origin among child asylum seekers, currently representing 21% of child asylum seekers in Europe.[59]
- Even when children do manage to access asylum systems in Europe, very few are granted refugee status and family reunification has become increasingly challenging for children.[60, 61]
- Recent years has seen harsher border policies including an increase in detention of children, as well as violence at borders.[62]

‘ One day I wanted to play football with the other neighbourhood kids, I stood for some team to pick me as a player, but no one did. They told me “you don’t belong to this area and there is no place for you to play”. ’

Boy, 16, Syria

FIVE

CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY

In this research, displaced Syrian children living in different contexts were asked about the aspects of their daily lives that make them feel safe. Depending on their context, children often highlighted various themes within material and physical safety, as well as aspects related to psychosocial safety.[63] As an example, in Syria almost all interviewed children mentioned access to a source of income and protection from violence as important elements for their day-to-day material and physical safety, whereas in the Netherlands children had few concerns in these areas. In both contexts, however, children highlighted the importance of being able to contribute to their community or society, feeling like they belong and being able to take decisions on issues impacting their lives. The findings suggest that the experience of psychosocial safety is distinct from material, physical or legal safety, and therefore must be explored separately as a key priority in supporting durable solutions.

Through the findings of this research, three main topics emerged as contributing to the experience of psychosocial safety for Syrian children growing up in displacement: access to meaningful future opportunities; a sense of connectedness; and agency in decision-making. This section of the report unpacks each of these through the children’s experiences in different contexts and highlights factors that are crucial to support progress towards durable solutions.

Kubra, 13, now lives with her father, stepmother and siblings in Turkey. Kubra, her father Hassan and her two brothers fled from Syria to Turkey eight years ago because of the conflict. Kubras mother was killed in an explosion when Kubra was just one year old and thereafter they left Aleppo to live in a camp for displaced families bordering Turkey. Eventually they were able to cross into Turkey but on the journey one of her brothers, who was eight at the time, was also killed in an attack. Kubra says she does not remember much about her life in Syria except the clothes she used to wear when she visited her grandparents. Kubra has been out of school since she was five years old and has found it hard to make friends in Turkey. Her younger siblings have been registered in school but the recent COVID-19 pandemic has affected their learning as the family only have one mobile phone which they share to access remote learning. Kubra loves drawing and spends all her time with her siblings. She told Save the Children how she is focused on going back to school so she can become a doctor in the future. Taken on February 11, 2021. Photo by Onurcan Ileri / Save the Children.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

When asked about what constitutes safety for them, access to opportunities that can help them build a better future for themselves and their future families was the number one issue mentioned by interviewed Syrian children.

Furthermore, in the quantitative survey, significant associations existed between children's general life satisfaction and their access to future opportunities. This was true for both perceived and real access. Thus, feeling like there were opportunities to improve oneself for the future was strongly and significantly associated with general life happiness, as was currently attending school. Not being able to access school or work opportunities, on the other hand, had a strong adverse impact.

Perhaps even more importantly, fear and uncertainty about the future were also detrimental to a child's wellbeing, sometimes even more so than concerns about one's current physical safety. This section unpacks the themes and issues that children wish for their futures.

Choice of a durable solutions pathway

"I prefer to travel to have a better future. We want to go to a place where I have all the means and opportunities to learn and to practice my hobbies." Girl, 15, Lebanon

"[If I travel abroad], who will take care of the dreams of Syrians?" IDP girl, 17 years, Syria

"My future is in the Netherlands; I speak better Dutch than Arabic and economically it's better." Boy, 15, the Netherlands

"We cannot go back to Syria, because there is war there and [my siblings] and I are afraid. I am not hopeful. I am afraid because of the war in Syria and because of the blast here in Lebanon." - Girl, 12, Lebanon

The majority of survey respondents across all contexts (58%) reported that in two years, they hoped to be living where they currently were and over a quarter (26%) expressed a want to be living elsewhere, though not their place of origin. Out of the refugee children in the neighbouring countries, few foresee a return to their country of origin: only 3% of surveyed children in Turkey, 9% in Jordan, and 29% in Lebanon reported wishing to be living in Syria. While the majority of the interviewees in these countries were hoping to integrate where they currently are, a significant number of refugee children also reported hoping to live in a third country (39% of children in Jordan, 24% of those interviewed in Lebanon and 9% of participants in Turkey). Similarly, in the Netherlands, the vast majority were hoping to stay where they were, with 10% hoping to live in a third country and only 9% of interviewed children hoping to return to Syria.

Children in Syria were the least happy in their current place of residence, significantly less likely to respond that in two years, they would want to be living where they are now, with only one-in-five of the interviewed internally displaced children hoping to locally integrate. For comparison, 62% of non-displaced children were hoping to stay in their current place of residence. Just over half of the internally displaced children (56%) said they would like to return to their areas of origin. Almost a third (29%) of all respondents inside Syria said they would like to be living outside of their country, with no difference between displaced and non-displaced Syrian children. The countries mentioned by children included 'anywhere but Syria' (14%), multiple European countries (55%), Turkey (7%), Gulf countries (7%), or 'any country that protects me,' 'that maintains human dignity' or 'that has no mandatory military service'. Overall, the wish to migrate away from Syria appeared to be correlated with the child having experienced discrimination and the lack of opportunities in their current location, such as not being able to access employment or essential services like electricity, internet, gas, diesel, food, internet, and mobile phones.

When asked about whether the children believed they were able to realise their wish for the future, those displaced inside Syria were least confident in what the future holds for them. Only 42% of internally displaced children felt able to realise their wish (38% of those wishing to return and 21% of those hoping to migrate elsewhere). The most often cited reason for children not feeling like they would be able to realise their wish was the current situation not allowing for their wish to be realised (29%), followed by their family having a different priority (15%).

Approximately two-thirds of refugee children across Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey felt optimistic about being able to live where they wished in two years' time, with no significant differences between the countries. However, the reasons for not feeling able to realise their wishes differed by the country they lived in. In Lebanon, for those wishing to return, this was mostly feeling that the situation inside Syria does not allow it. Other reasons, such as feeling that they would not have the money, possibility, or skills, were primarily named by those wishing to move to a different country altogether. In Jordan, the most quoted obstacle to children's preferred durable solutions options was that the opportunity was simply not there due to immigration decisions held by various authorities—particularly for children hoping to move to a different country altogether. Concerns about family having different plans or priorities were also regularly mentioned, particularly for those hoping to remain in country. For children in Turkey, family having different priorities or plans was the most often quoted reason by far, with a smaller group, particularly those interested in staying in Turkey, feeling that improper documentation was the main barrier to doing so.

In the Netherlands, children mainly felt optimistic about the future, with 70% expressing that they would be able to realise their future wish. Those who wished to stay in the Netherlands, felt particularly optimistic about this being a realistic option for them (83%), while only 12% of those wishing to return to Syria felt like they would be able to realise their wish.

In qualitative interviews, children in the Netherlands mentioned safety, language, education, economic opportunity and 'freedom' as reasons for wanting to stay in the Netherlands. Many participants also highlighted that they would like to visit Syria one day, for a short trip or a holiday, but they stressed the need for a political transition before they would feel safe to go back to Syria.

Peace and end to violence

"[Some people feel like they do not belong because of] injustice, cruelty, and inequality because in Syria rights are not given equally to people but rather, they are given to money holders and authorities." - Girl, 17, Syria

"I wish people who assault us and make us feel weak to be punished." - Girl, 13, Syria

Wishing for the conflict and violence in Syria to end was the most reported wish for the future across all respondents across all countries. Inside Syria, children (and particularly girls) strikingly often spoke about the importance of ending violence in day-to-day life, as well as the need for justice and rule of law. This included repeating pleas to end gender-based violence, such as harassment on the streets, as well as ensuring clear repercussions for the perpetrators – which currently they felt was not happening. Children also spoke about general injustice in society that leads to discrimination and inequality, and mentioned the need for stronger legislation to ensure that people are treated equally.

Ziad, 10, and his brother Fadi, 12, playing together in rural Aleppo, North West Syria. Taken on February 2, 2021. Photo by Hurras Network / Save the Children.

Education

"I always follow my dream; I am so persistent. I tell people I don't want to get married or fall in love. I want to focus on my education. I want to become a doctor or a teacher. I stopped my education because of COVID-19, this scares me. I fear losing someone that I love." - Girl, 13, Lebanon

"I want to study architecture to reconstruct our homes." - Boy, 16, Syria

The second most common wish for the future among the surveyed Syrian children was to pursue education or return to school. Regardless of the context, children almost unanimously agreed that access to a good education was key for them to be able to secure a life that they wanted. This most commonly included reflections on the importance of higher education and achieving prestigious professions, like being a doctor or a lawyer. Currently accessing education also had a significant positive association with the child's life happiness.

Despite the high value placed on education, 42% of those who participated in the quantitative survey reported that they were not currently attending school. In Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, girls were more likely to be in school, while no gender differences were observed in Syria or the Netherlands. School attendance rates and barriers to learning for Syrian children varied significantly by country. All surveyed children in the Netherlands were attending some form of school, and they were most commonly reporting that they had opportunities to improve and develop themselves for the future. School attendance rate dropped to 84% of those surveyed in Turkey, which is still significantly higher than the overall school enrolment (64%) in the country.[64]

Children frequently talked about language challenges that had an impact on both their academic success in school and their integration into the school community. School attendance fell to less than half of surveyed children in Jordan (49%) and only 31% in Lebanon. Indeed, 45% of children in Lebanon identified school as a service they wanted but could not access, and children underscored the importance of ensuring that their parents were supportive of their efforts to remain in education. The recognition and transferability of their education was also of concern due to the high levels of non-formal learning[65] and unclear processes in relation to conversion and acknowledgement of obtained certificates in other countries.

Inside Syria, 66% of the surveyed internally displaced children were in school, while the same percentage among the interviewed non-displaced Syrians was 88%.[66] In qualitative interviews, children often mentioned economic considerations and discrimination as important issues when talking about education. In the survey, the most commonly reported barriers to services for those reporting missing school were the cost (41% of those wanting but not being able to attend school), discrimination (29%), safety concerns (19%) and lack of documentation (19%). Needing to work was repeatedly mentioned by boys as a key barrier to education.

Supporting meaningful future opportunities

Concretely supporting children in their path to the future they desire will not be easy and will require significant change in policies in countries of asylum and inside Syria. The needs and priorities of children after ten years are no longer something that the current humanitarian response can deliver. Inside Syria, their ability to attain their dreams will depend on a sustainable end to hostilities as well as a significant shift in policies to support longer-term recovery by the government, different authorities, and international actors.

Outside of Syria, return intentions among young Syrians are low, and even for those wishing to return the conditions are perceived to be prohibitive. As identified in other research,[67] harsh conditions in countries of asylum do not trigger return, but only result in more hardship for refugees and block them from positively contributing to the host country economies and societies. In Lebanon, for example, while the hopes of eventual return among refugees are higher, this has not translated into actual large-scale return movement. This is largely due to the conditions inside

Preferred place of residence for Syrian refugee children in 2 years from now	Stay where I am now	Return to Syria	Move to another country (not Syria)
Lebanon	47%	29%	24%
Turkey	88%	3%	9%
Jordan	52%	9%	39%
Netherlands	80%	9%	10%
Total	**63%**	**14%**	**23%**

Syria not being perceived as safe. It is therefore vital to urgently invest in other solutions options, including advancing access to opportunities in current countries of residence and ensuring that children are not forced to live in perpetual uncertainty about their future opportunities and the realisation of their rights.

In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, the currently available opportunities do not match the future that young Syrians see for themselves. In addition to investing in supporting access to basic education and vocational skills development, ensuring access to formal education at higher grades and supporting pathways that can lead meaningfully to higher education and related career opportunities is key. In the immediate future, this requires investment in harmonising educational programming practices and creating clear pathways to accreditation from informal education, as well as establishing a framework for acknowledgement of obtained certificates across the region.

Yousef, 13, holding his late brother's shoes

Yousef, 13, lost his father, his older brother and twin sisters in the conflict. The family used to live in the Aleppo countryside but are now living in a displacement camp in North East Syria. Nine years ago, an airstrike which hit the post office next to their home, killed Yousefs 23-year-old brother, who was a medicine student at the time. Yousefs mother Layla and two of his baby twin sisters, who were 25 days old, was injured by shrapnel. At the time they were rushed to the hospital where one of Yousefs baby sister died of her injuries. A few days later, Yousefs other twin sister also died at the hospital from her injuries.

Over a month later, Yousefs parents got divorced. Yousefs mother was five months pregnant at the time. Three months later, Yousefs father was killed in an airstrike while he was in a market. Yousefs mother gave birth to another boy whom she named after her late eldest son. The child also died when he was just 25 days old. Layla says that she thinks the cause of his death is that he was born with health issue due to being exposed to toxic substances at the time of the airstrike, when she was pregnant with him.

Meanwhile, Layla wad diagnosed with cancer. She took Yousef and his sister and sought refuge in a camp in North East Syria for 18 months. In the camp, the family was struggling to integrate. Yousef was very shy at first but after being enrolled in Save the Children's temporary learning space and Child Friendly Space in the camp, he started opening up. He now has a best friend, Anas, 11, with whom he goes to the school. Yousef wants to grow up and be a doctor like his late brother. Taken on 11 February 2021. Photo by Muhannad Khalid / Save the Children.

CONNECTEDNESS

For healthy development and well-being, children should have the opportunity to build an identity that is distinct from their displacement status, such as 'refugee' or 'internally displaced person'.

They should be able to shape this identity in a way that also allows them to relate to their communities in a positive way.

Across the survey findings and qualitative interviews, and regardless of the context they were living in, the need for displaced Syrian children to connect and belong was clear. Generally, feeling close to one's family, community or peers had significant correlations with children's experiences of happy life.

Family support

"I think, for our generation which lived with big griefs, family is the most important and they are the meaning of safety." Boy, 16, Syria

"The society in the Netherlands is different from that in Syria: we are more accustomed to the Netherlands and my family is more accustomed to Syria." Girl, 14, the Netherlands

Family was generally perceived as a key safety net for children. Feeling safe with and supported by one's family—including feeling like people in your household know a lot about you and watch over you—were all important for general life happiness.

Across all countries, most children (94%) agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe with their families and agreed or strongly agreed that their family stands by them in difficult times (91%), though children in Syria (86% and 82% respectively) and the Netherlands (84% and 72% respectively) agreed with those statements less than children in the other countries. Children in Syria were also less likely to agree that their family watches over them a lot (49% agreed or strongly agreed compared to 64% in the overall sample), indicating that they felt less supported by their families.

Girls generally felt like their families knew a lot about them and watched over them slightly more than boys, corresponding with the sentiments often expressed by boys in the qualitative interviews, where they often talked about the expectation for them to provide and contribute to the family rather than to be looked after by it. This gender difference did not exist in the Netherlands, however. In general, the experience of family connectedness became weaker for older children.

Inside Syria, losing a family member because of death or detention was a commonly reported source of worry for children. In addition, about half of the participants in the qualitative interviews either mentioned fearing their parents divorcing, or when asked to describe an adverse situation that someone they knew had gone through, talked about a divorce of that person's parents, which did not emerge as a topic in other contexts.

Children in the Netherlands also seemed to have less connectivity and trust in their families than among the refugee children in Syria's neighbouring countries. Just over two-thirds agreed that their families stood by them at difficult times, which was lower than in any other country included in the research. Only just over half of the children in the Netherlands felt that their families knew a lot about them (54%), which was also lower than among refugees in Turkey (84%) or Lebanon (89%). During qualitative interviews, children in the Netherlands mentioned that the young Syrians in the country felt more integrated into the Dutch society than they felt integrated with their parents, which may be a contributing factor to a generational divide.

Community

"All of my friends and myself face discrimination. In school, they take care of the Lebanese students [who study in the morning shift] and they care less about the Syrian students [who study in the afternoon shift]. For example, they don't take us to the chemistry laboratory. Some people think that Syrians took their jobs and their country. That is why they treat Syrians this way." - Boy, 16, Lebanon

"One day I wanted to play football with the other neighbourhood kids, I stood for some team to pick me as a player, but no one did. They told me "you don't belong to this area and there is no place for you to play." – Boy, 16, Syria

"After displacement, I was unable to make friends with the neighbourhood's original residents. I felt like a stranger and everybody dealt with me as a stranger [because]

I'm an IDP and my accent is different. They may not like strangers or maybe because I'm from an area with a different political background." Boy, 16, Syria

"I feel I belong when I don't forget my accent or the noble traditions my community has. […] Integrating oneself in the new community makes a person gradually lose his belonging to his original community." Boy, 16, Syria

"I now feel safe. There are many foreigners in my street and school. But when I lived in the village I felt less safe. When I felt unsafe I was afraid of what others might think of me. It made me feel different. But now in the big city I feel good and it does not happen anymore that I feel different. The government should normalise that we are mixed communities. They should help to explain that we are not different, and people should not think in that way. There is some racism in the Netherlands, and it is more outside the big cities where there are not so many foreigners." Girl, 13, the Netherlands

"Some girls wear hijab because they were forced by their parents; but some choose it because it's beautiful, but when they visit other girls, who wear short sleeves, they might envy them or just feel that they don't belong. They lose their confidence in themselves." Girl, 15, the Netherlands

Feeling connected to one's broader community also had an important correlation with general life satisfaction. Indeed, across all displaced respondents, 44% reported having experienced discrimination in their lives, particularly in their neighbourhoods and in school. Boys were more likely (47%) to report being discriminated against than girls (39%). Refugees in Turkey and the Netherlands were most likely to report having experienced discrimination (71% and 64% respectively).

It is notable that what may be perceived as a significant cultural barrier, such as language differences, did not result in refugee children in Turkey or the Netherlands feeling more "otherness" than reported by their peers in countries in Jordan or Lebanon where the refugees share the same spoken language with the host community. In qualitative interviews children in the Netherlands and Turkey in particular often talked about their willingness to assimilate and the progress they had made in doing so, particularly through learning the language and being able to live in more diverse urban settings.

Refugee children in Turkey similarly emphasised their strong willingness to integrate into Turkish society,

‘ Some girls wear hijab because they were forced by their parents; but some choose it because it's beautiful, but when they visit other girls, who wear short sleeves, they might envy them or just feel that they don't belong. They lose their confidence in themselves. ’

Girl, the Netherlands

to learn the language and understand the Turkish culture. Access to free Turkish language tuition was the most commonly mentioned factor of enhancing their sense of belonging, followed by activities and meeting places inclusive of both Turkish and Syrian people to help facilitate a dialogue between the two communities.

While the participants in general spoke positively about integration and assimilation, the changes in identity were at times also contradictory, and particularly in the Netherlands, children spoke about the challenges of accommodating their two very different cultures.

In Lebanon, discrimination in their communities, due to difference in socio-economic status, was mentioned by several adolescent participants, as stemming not only from their Lebanese peers, but also from Palestinian refugee communities. Physical appearance, skin colour, clothing and the financial status of families were factors mentioned as reasons for children being bullied or excluded. Participants also frequently mentioned being isolated just for 'being Syrian' or being refugees, rooted in negative beliefs of Syrians 'taking jobs' or deepening social instability in Lebanon.

Perhaps surprisingly, children displaced inside Syria scored the lowest in the study in relation to their connection with their communities, and they were significantly more likely to report having experienced discrimination than their peers in Jordan or Lebanon, which could be an indication of torn social fabric inside the country. Almost all displaced children participating in the qualitative interviews, as well as some non-displaced children, highlighted discrimination that displaced children are facing in the areas where they have sought refuge, occurring in schools, in the streets or in relation to work.

Despite expressing a clear longing to be accepted, displaced children in Syria did not talk about assimilation, but rather focused on ensuring that their culture, manner of speech or traditional clothing — which to them seemed to be an important source of safety — would be accepted by the host community.

Supporting connectedness

"Psychological support is the most important to make us move forward. For example, I have a teacher who supports me to be better in my classroom and he gives me free lessons after school." Boy, 16, Syria

I remember in one of our classes, we talked about how people here pay taxes in order to have paved and clean roads, so the teacher addressed me saying: "Do you know what it's like to have clean roads?" It slightly hurt me." Girl, 14, the Netherlands

As they grow up in displacement, Syrian children go through significant shifts in their identity that need to be better understood. This impacts their perceptions of self, but also their relationship with others in their communities. Supporting their physical wellbeing, while necessary, is not enough to support their ability to cope with the shock of displacement and their ability to become active, contributing members of their communities and societies wherever they are.

When asked about services that children in the different countries wanted or needed, but did not have access to, access to safe spaces to spend time off and meet with friends was one of the most commonly mentioned by survey participants.[68] In the Netherlands, Turkey, and Syria (the contexts where experienced discrimination was the highest) these spaces were also the topmost reported missing service. Children across contexts highlighted the importance of activities that would help them find ways of connecting with their peers, and especially with those from different backgrounds.

In Turkey and Lebanon, children highlighted the importance of community activities that brought together refugee and host community children and that would help them understand each other. During focus group discussions, several children in Lebanon mentioned that the work with local NGOs had supported their sense of belonging and safety in their community.

In the Netherlands, children spoke about the importance of raising awareness among the host community to combat misconceptions and prejudice, as well as the need for the host community to stop reflecting the political situation inside Syria on the children who had no part in creating it.

Inside Syria, children similarly mentioned the importance of raising awareness between different communities to reduce discrimination, training teachers to avoid bullying and strengthening supportive relationships with adults, in particular the relationship between teachers and students.

Across contexts, support for families and supportive parenting is also key – including support for an inter-generational dialogue when children are going through an identity shift.

Even in the face of continued discrimination and marginalisation, children have worked hard to integrate. They have learnt new languages, forged new connections, adjusted to new cultures and created new opportunities for themselves.

Nada, a 14-year-old girl from Syria, was denied enrolment at school three times because of physical and mental challenges. She never gave up and kept trying to find a school that would accept her. The long search finally paid off and she found a place when she was 10. Nada loves school and enjoys learning about science and geography. She says that "In Geography we learn about the environment, nature and countries. We study about Lebanon too." Taken on 16 August 2017. Photo by Nour Wahid / Save the Children.

‘ Psychological support is the most important to make us move forward. For example, I have a teacher who supports me to be better in my classroom and he gives me free lessons after school. ’

Boy, 16, Syria

AGENCY

The Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for children to be recognised and respected as rights holders rather than as passive objects of protection and care, and includes the right of children to express their views and to be heard in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

All children have a need to take part in decision-making and have a voice when it comes to issues that impact their personal lives, education, and broader environment, including through political participation and voicing their priorities and concerns around the future of Syria.

Being heard in family decision-making

"Where Syrian children are not living comfortably with their families, these families are not familiar with children's right to express themselves. This is what pushes these children to consider the Syrian community not their community and to search within the Dutch community for their rights." Girl, 15, the Netherlands

Only around half (53%) of the surveyed children across all countries reported that they felt their family considered their opinion when making household decisions and 68% said they agreed with the decisions made in their household; no differences were found between boys and girls. Both feeling like one's family considered their opinion and agreeing with decisions made in the household were associated with more life satisfaction and a greater sense of resiliency,[69] although also with a slightly higher sense of insecurity.

Compared to all other countries, children in the Netherlands and in Syria were less likely to say they agreed with the decisions made in their households (45% and 54%, respectively). In Turkey, the level was also significantly lower (66%), compared to Jordan (77%) and Lebanon (91%). Those in Jordan were most likely to report that their family considers their opinion in household decisions with 71% agreeing, compared to 56% in Lebanon.

Qualitative interviews provided some understanding of the lower engagement in household decision-making. In Lebanon, for instance, children revealed that while the family units do discuss opinions and decisions, ultimately parents make the final call, particularly the father. Many also noted that parents are more likely to include older siblings in decision-making.

For girls in Syria, freedom of expression was primarily associated with their personal decisions, such as dress code or choices related to their education. Girls also frequently cited their gender as being an obstacle to them pursuing their dreams of migration in the future, as the culture would 'not allow for girls to travel alone'. Girls in Lebanon also mentioned their gender and age as a limiting factor in their ability to make choices about what they did or where they went, which did not come up in interviews in Turkey or the Netherlands.[70]

Further, children in Turkey reported disagreeing with their parents on a diverse range of issues, from day-to-day issues such as clothing choice, to future decisions regarding return to Syria. In discussions around return, children in Turkey reported prioritising considerations around fear of the conflict, disruption to education, and access to services if they were to return to Syria, while the parents' primary concern was around access to livelihoods, which is becoming increasingly challenging in Turkey.

When comparing answers from the children and their caregivers in relation to preferred durable solutions pathways,[71] approximately half of the families seem to have a shared future priority. Children in Jordan seemed to agree with their caregivers in around two-thirds of the cases (67%) about their intentions to return to Syria one day, while in Turkey there seemed to be more disagreement within the household (the caregiver and child agreed in approximately 45% of the households). Despite the importance of considering children's wishes in decision-making, previous research by Save the Children has shown that children rarely feel that they have a say in decisions relating to return to Syria, with parents taking these decisions in conversation with other adults.[72]

In the Netherlands, the primary decision-makers were also seen as the parents, although many participants mentioned that their parents did proactively consult with them. Participants mentioned the decision to work, future career choices, the choice of school or choice of clothing as areas of previous disagreements. Children also mentioned a shift in their mentality and awareness after having arrived in the Netherlands, which now led to some disagreements within households.

Amina, 14, has been living with her mother, Rasha in The Netherlands since 2015. She, her mother and grandmother fled Syria at the age of six because of the conflict. Her mother had been in prison for one year and during that time Amina lived with her grandmother. Taken on 12 February 2021. Photo by Save the Children.

Participation in public affairs

"[I feel safe] when I enjoy the freedom of opinion and decision of what I want to be when I grow up and when [the community] do not intervene in my appearance and what I wear." Girl, 16, Syria

"We go out, we attend events. Sometimes my parents don't allow me to go out because I am a girl and I am young. Depending on the destination of the visit, my parents may or may not accept to let me go out." Girl, 15, Lebanon

"Before the war the country was not perfect. People could not live with each other and there were many divisions among people and groups in Syria. People should adjust better to build a peaceful society. We can advise Syrians how to build peace. Write articles in newspapers about this. Maybe not everyone can adjust or change but many will, and they can make a difference." Girl 13 the Netherlands

"In Syria, if you criticize the president and his group you end up in prison...before we can build a country, we need freedom." Girl, 15, the Netherlands

"I feel more empowered and I make more decisions with Nabaa [Save the Children partner / local NGO]. In school I don't dare to do so, because the teachers don't often listen to us. With friends, we all discuss and take decisions." Boy, 13, Lebanon

Freedom of expression was an important theme that was brought up by children in the interviews—particularly by boys, but also some girls. This was also more frequently brought up by children inside Syria compared to other countries. For boys, this was most often related to expressing their opinions to their elders, being heard and not being 'treated like kids with no brain', as highlighted by an internally displaced boy in Syria. Inside Syria, when asked about recommendations for peers, adults, and decision-makers on how to improve young people's sense of inclusion many participants, boys and girls alike, mentioned opportunities for male youth to constructively participate in decision-making and community activities.

Children also often highlighted the importance of being able to influence decisions in the society more broadly. Participants in Lebanon stressed the importance of working together to effectively influence decisions. Of the children that mentioned feeling able to influence decision-making, many stressed the need to build confidence and communication skills, as well as referencing positive experiences they had with participating in activities organised by local NGOs.

In the Netherlands in particular, many children expressed a desire to help Syrians inside Syria, with many highlighting the potential to send money or contribute to peacebuilding inside Syria. Echoing comments made by children inside Syria, some also mentioned the importance of accountability for crimes committed against Syrian communities, as many recognised the risks of doing this inside Syria.

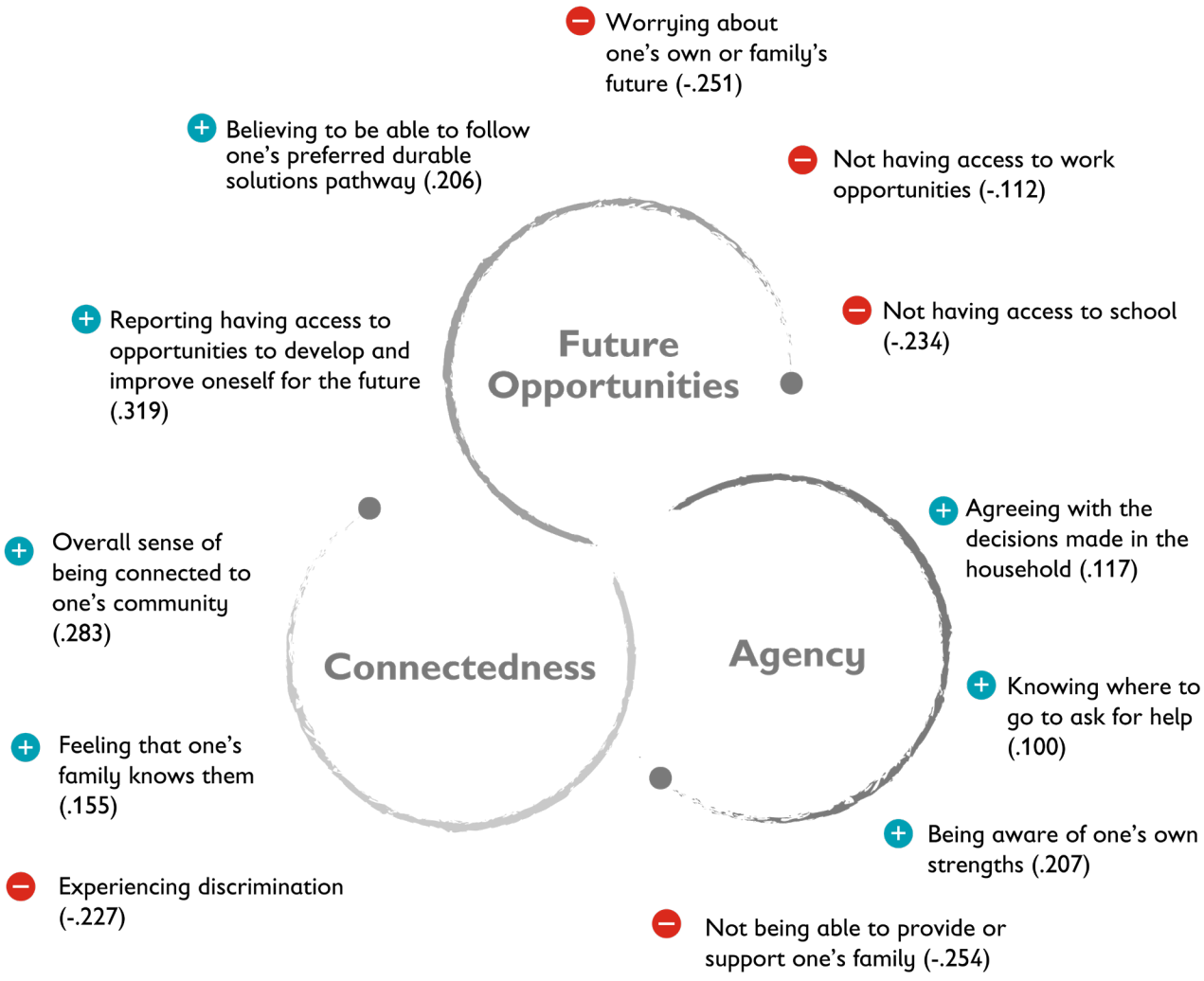
Supporting children's agency

Having a sense of agency emerged as an important element of psychosocial safety for children, with factors such as knowing where to get help and feeling part of family decision-making having an important positive impact for children. At the same time, not being able to access opportunities for reasons out of their control (such as services being too expensive, or being discriminated against in school or work) had a significantly negative impact. Being able to determine their own path or knowing who to ask for support proved to be important for children to progress towards a sense of safety despite their displacement.

This also applies to decision making around their futures, including in relation to durable solutions pathways. Previous research has shown that children often have distinct concerns and priorities in relation to questions such as potential return to Syria.[73] This in combination with the fact that children and their caregivers seem to agree on future plans in only about half of the cases, with also only half of the interviewed children feeling consulted in family decision-making calls for a focus on ensuring that due consideration is given to the best interest of the child in decisions relating to potential return to Syria.

Based on the survey, displaced Syrians children's awareness of their own strengths was generally low and being subjected to years of uncertainty and limited opportunities has taken them further away from feeling that they can achieve their dreams. They must also be allowed opportunities and supported to become active influencers in their communities and societies wherever they reside and according to their interest, including through providing support to civil society organisations led by young people. In the context of Syria, opportunities to speak out in a protected environment are scarce and little evidence exists to confirm that young people are given opportunities to contribute to community or other decision-making mechanisms.

EXAMPLES OF FACTORS THAT SUPPORT DISPLACED SYRIAN CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF HAPPY LIFE



For further information on the measures used see Annex 1

All variables significant at p < .001

SIX

RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving psychosocial safety is a key element of durable solutions. Policy makers, humanitarian practitioners and authorities inside Syria and in countries of asylum need to consider it separately as a key priority in supporting durable solutions.

Children transitioning into adulthood have specific needs related to their empowerment in decision making, supportive relationships in and outside the home, and having opportunities for development of life skills and shaping their futures. Fostering psychosocial safety is a crucial supporting feature of Syrian children's ability to become positive agents of change for the societies in which they reside.

It is therefore crucial that all stakeholders take concrete and practical steps to insulate Syria's children from the psychological and physical violence that has been plaguing their lives for the last 10 years, allowing the #SecondGeneration of Syrian children to grow in an environment where they are free from constant fear for their safety, are not forced to live under the shadow of displacement and further uprooting, and are no longer discriminated against simply because of where they come from.

To achieve this, Governments in Syria and all countries hosting displaced Syrians and the international community should ensure access to durable solutions, including through:

- Protecting Syrian's right to seek asylum outside of Syria, including through:
    - Upholding the principle of non-refoulement, ending deportations to Syria and explicitly limiting any coercive measures which may push refugees to return against their will.
    - Renewing temporary protection status and granting asylum to individuals who remain at risk.
    - Increasing opportunities for resettlement into third countries for those refugees with urgent protection needs
    - Refraining from characterising Syria — or parts of the country — as 'safe' for large-scale return of refugees. Such statements are not in line with international standards, do not reflect conditions on the ground, and fail to take risks to individuals into account. Any future return of refugees and internally displaced persons must be safe, voluntary, dignified and informed, in line with the protection thresholds and parameters for refugee return.
- Urgently increasing access to quality resettlement opportunities for Syrian refugees and refugees from other contexts in line with the commitments in the Global Compact on Refugees, as this remains the only safe and dignified durable solutions option for some of the most vulnerable refugees;
- Facilitating access to complementary pathways for admission to third countries, including through educational programmes and labour migration opportunities. These opportunities need to be supported with adequate safeguards in particular to foster girls' and young women's access to safe opportunities;

- Inside Syria and in hosting countries prioritising longer-term, multi-sectoral approaches to supporting integration or reintegration and addressing root causes of vulnerabilities, in addition to continued provision of protection services, combining child protection approaches with interventions that alleviate child poverty, sustained access to formal education and continued participation of children in decision-making processes;
- Ensuring that psychosocial support needs are part of a multi-sectoral return preparedness framework for those refugees choosing to voluntarily return to Syria;
- Recognising and responding to the psychosocial safety needs of displaced populations, including Syrian children and adolescents, as an important element in all durable solutions frameworks and ensure psychosocial safety is included and funded in related programmatic and advocacy initiatives.

AUTHORITIES IN SYRIA SHOULD

- Ensure full psychosocial, physical, material and legal protection of all population in their territory, including enacting inclusive policies and approaches to recovery and development that ensure that the rights and needs of all community members in all areas are respected, regardless of populations' background. This includes:
    - Respecting the freedom of movement and choice of place of residence inside Syria, enabling voluntary return to places of origin and protection from forced return;
    - Ensuring that displaced persons and returnees are protected from harassment, discrimination, arbitrary detention, physical threat or prosecution on account of their area or origin, having left Syria illegally or for having sought asylum abroad, or on account of any diversity characteristic;
    - Enabling all displaced and displacement-affected communities to be heard and participate in the planning for durable solutions.
    - Ensure that all individuals have freedom of speech and expression and encourage dialogue and feedback mechanisms from children of different ages, gender, and disability status.
- Adopt policies that mend divides in the society and support sustainable positive peace, including:
    - Supporting and protecting trust- and peace-building efforts through initiatives designed and implemented in a participatory manner with children of different ages and genders;
    - Systematically including social cohesion as an element and a goal of education policies and practices;
    - Building capacity of education staff to systematically integrate a social cohesion dimension in the contents and modalities of their work and preventing bullying and discrimination in schools.
    - Understanding the factors that lead to community tensions are often interconnected, linked to different perceptions of different ethnicities, religious groups and displacement-status.
    - Coordinating media literacy and awareness programmes to educate society about the risks of misinformation, hate speech and polarisation in the community. Education curricula should also remain politically neutral and should encourage best practices such as looking at information source and comparing news.

- Enact legislation and create the space that allows all children to be recognised and respected as rights holders rather than as passive objects of protection and care, including the right of children to express their views and to be heard in decision-making processes that affect their lives;
- Working with caregivers to promote awareness of child rights, agency and participation, as related to developmental wellbeing and as reflected in inclusive and sensitive parenting practices.
- Develop and implement safe, accessible, age- and gender-sensitive safe spaces that provide an opportunity for adolescents to gather, connect and exchange with their peers.

- Invest in mental health and psychosocial support services, including:
  - Mainstreaming mental health and psychosocial support into the provision of education, healthcare and social services
  - Investing in community based mental health and psychosocial support schemes, including focusing on caregivers' and teachers' psychosocial wellbeing, as well as strengthening peers and friends' capacities to support their friends.
  - Increasing the provision of specialised, gender-sensitive mental health care.

SYRIA'S NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES HOSTING REFUGEES

- Support integration of refugees and combat discrimination, including through systematically addressing misinformation and hate speech in public campaigning and communications, particularly those invoking negative sentiments about the refugee population, and promote and foster spaces and mechanisms for dialogue, cooperation and exchanges between refugees and host communities; and ensure visibility of positive experiences and mainstreaming of best practices.
- Remove formal and informal barriers to refugee children accessing formal education at all levels, both for education's pedagogical value and access to future opportunities, as well as a protective mechanism that allows children, in all their diversity, to learn, socialise, develop skills and attain a degree of normality in their lives.
- Remove barriers to young refugees accessing employment and livelihoods opportunities, skills development and opportunities for becoming self-reliant in their countries of asylum
- Establish safe, accessible, age- and gender-sensitive spaces that provide an opportunity for adolescents, including refugees, to gather, connect and exchange with their peers of different backgrounds.
- Support and expand community-based networks and mechanisms that bolster safety and psychosocial wellbeing for children. Ensure this will strengthen the connections between children and their families, and with their environment, by supporting families and friends with skills and tools to be able to provide a sense of safety to the child and to help deal with their emotions.
- Mainstream mental health and psychosocial support into the provision of education, healthcare and social services through age, gender and culturally sensitive service provision and ensuring access to information about the available services through channels accessed by refugee children.

COUNTRIES OF ASYLUM IN EUROPE AND ELSEWHERE HOSTING SYRIAN REFUGEES:

- Support integration of refugees and promote policies and programmes, especially in schools, that prevent discrimination of children with a refugee background. These should include positive

messaging about children who have migrated from Syria and other places.

- Mainstream mental health and psychosocial support considerations into the provision of education, healthcare and social services through culturally sensitive services for children and their families, starting during their asylum procedure.
- Increase access to specialised mental health care and other targeted support for children and adults who need them, and in particular invest in:
    - Culturally sensitive information to destigmatize mental health issues and services in order to support refugees in dealing with the psychological distress resulting from experiences of conflict and displacement.
    - Availability of culturally appropriate mental health services, for example through recruiting Syrian mental health experts and invest in their capacity to become specialized mental health service providers in their countries of asylum
- Support and expand community-based networks and mechanisms that bolster safety and psychosocial wellbeing for children. Ensure this will strengthen the connections between children and their families, and with their environment, by supporting families and friends with skills to be able to provide a sense of safety to the child and to help deal with their emotions.
- Establish safe, accessible, age- and gender-sensitive spaces that provide an opportunity for adolescents, including refugees, to gather, connect and exchange with their peers of different backgrounds.
- Increase transition schemes for young people who may be at risk "ageing out" from the protection systems once they turn 18, in order to allow them to access education, traineeships and vocational training and increase possibilities to stay in the host country where they have often successfully integrated and feel at home.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND DONORS

- The High-Level Panel on IDPs should consider psychosocial safety as an integral part of the process of achieving durable solutions for Syria's displaced children in its report to the UN SG, with concrete and practical recommendations on building social cohesion, promoting active participation of displaced persons in solutions planning and peacebuilding, as well as promoting predictable policies that enable displaced people to plan their futures and access opportunities as part of addressing any internal displacement situation.
- Child protection outcomes, including preventing and responding to gender-based violence experienced by children, must be strengthened across humanitarian sectors, in line with the principle of the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, while also supporting stand-alone child protection and gender-based violence interventions that are essential to alleviate suffering and provide children with skills to cope.
- Invest in analysis to define the cost of high-quality mental health and psychosocial support, child protection and support for child survivors of violence in order to ensure that these are realistically reflected in funding requirements and become adequately resourced.
- Supporting the establishment of a strong civil society that can contribute to peacebuilding and tackle discrimination, including through:
    - Protecting and supporting civil society organisations led by young people, including displaced Syrians and in particular girls, who may face higher barriers to engagement
    - Fund media literacy and awareness programmes that increase citizens' ability to filter misinformation and hate speech and to avoid polarisation in the community.

SEVEN

ANNEX 1 — METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This report is based on findings from a structured survey with 1,796 Syrian adolescents in Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and the Netherlands. The survey tool used several validated measurement scales to produce data on the subjective experience of psychosocial wellbeing and safety among displaced Syrian adolescents. In order to strengthen the survey findings, it was followed by in-depth interviews with 108 children. In addition, a short survey with caregivers of the refugee adolescents participating in the survey was carried out in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. The identification of topics for the qualitative tools and the analysis process was carried out in consultation with an adolescent committee established for this purpose, consisting of 5 refugee girls and 3 refugee boys from Lebanon and Jordan. The committee met online to discuss the findings of the research and to formulate recommendations based on them. These recommendations are captured in the foreword to this report (***see page 05***).

Country	Surveys with adolescents	Qualitative interviews	Surveys with caregivers
Syria	414 (207 girls, 207 boys)	32 (16 girls, 16 boys)	-
Jordan	433 (175 girls, 258 boys)	-	433
Lebanon	449 (240 girls, 209 boys)	23 (12 girls, 11 boys)	449
Turkey	400 (182 girls, 218 boys)	44 (22 girls, 22 boys)	400
Netherlands	100 (51 girls,45 boys, 4 prefer not to say)	9 (6 girls, 3 boys)	-
Total number of individuals	1,796 (855 girls, 937 boys, 4 prefer not to say)	108 (56 girls, 52 boys)	1,282

The surveys with adolescents and their caregivers were carried out in November-December 2020, and the qualitative data collection in the refugee-hosting countries took place in January 201 and inside Syria in December 2020. The below table summarises the number and type of interviews carried out in each location[74].

The survey tool was a composite tool designed to assess the subjective experience of psychosocial wellbeing and safety among displaced Syrian adolescents. The tool specifically included three measures previously validated with similar, Arabic-speaking populations, including the Child and Youth Resiliency Measure[75] or capturing perceived strengths and resiliency; the community portion of the Identification with All Humanity Scale[76] for or identifying senses of belonging; and the Human Insecurity Scale[77] for measuring sense of physical safety.

The selection of participants for the survey in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey was based on operational access in each country, targeting refugee adolescents who were already in contact with Save the Children or partner programmes. This poses some limitations to the generalisability of the findings. In Jordan, 24% of the survey participants were in camps and the rest in the host community. No qualitative interviews were carried out in Jordan due to COVID-19 restrictions, but some adolescents participated online in the adolescent committee facilitated by Save the Children Lebanon country office.

In the Netherlands, the participants for the survey were reached through social media and through refugee networks. A video explaining the purpose and modality of the research was also disseminated online. Despite these efforts, the sample size reached in the Netherlands remained significantly lower than expected. This was largely due to three main reasons: Firstly, the topic of mental health and psychosocial support was reported to be a taboo among the caregivers of Syrian refugees in the Netherlands. Secondly, caregivers expressed fears of respondents' data ending up in the hands of the Dutch government, despite assurances of anonymity and data protection. Many of the refugee caregivers also did not have a previous experience with Save the Children, and expressed hesitance towards Save the Children's independent role. Several caregivers indicated that they feared the government would get access to the information the children share and which they believed could have repercussions later in the child's life. Thirdly, COVID-19 and related movement restrictions made outreach to the Syrian refugee community significantly more challenging, with the typical gathering places for young people closed. 80 % of the surveys in the Netherlands were responded to online. All qualitative surveys were carried out individually.

Inside Syria, the survey was carried out in four different governorates (Sweida, Damascus, Rural Damascus and Dar'a), and the selection of participants was carried out randomly. It is worth noting that all interviews were focused on areas currently under the control of the Government of Syria, with no currently active conflict. Inside Syria, the interviews included both internally displaced and non-displaced children for comparison purposes, but the analysis in this paper is largely focused on the experiences of displaced children. Inside Syria, all qualitative interviews were carried out individually.

‘ I feel more empowered and I make more decisions with Nabaa [Save the Children partner / local NGO]. In school I don't dare to do so, because the teachers don't often listen to us. With friends, we all discuss and take decisions. ’

Boy, 13, Lebanon

EIGHT

ENDNOTES

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