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Ahmad Baroudi/Save the Children

# small hands **HEAVY BURDEN**

HOW THE **SYRIA** CONFLICT IS DRIVING MORE  
**CHILDREN** INTO THE WORKFORCE



I feel responsible for my family. I feel like I'm still a child and would love to go back to school, but my only option is to work hard to put food on the table for my family."

Ahmed (12), refugee in Jordan

## Summary

Before its disastrous plunge into crisis and armed conflict, Syria was a middle-income country capable of providing a decent living for most of its people. Almost all children went to school, and literacy rates were above 90%<sup>1</sup>.

Four and a half years into the crisis, four out of five Syrians are estimated to be living in poverty<sup>2</sup> and 7.6 million people are internally displaced<sup>3</sup>.

By the end of 2014, the unemployment rate had almost quadrupled to reach 57.7%<sup>4</sup>. Neighbouring countries are also suffering the consequences of what has become a regional crisis, struggling to cope with an influx of four million refugees, about half of whom are children<sup>5</sup>.

Children's lives have been profoundly affected by the crisis. Inside Syria, children are exposed to escalating violence and indiscriminate attacks, and the trauma they bring with them. Some have been forced to take up arms. Too many have lost loved ones or had to flee their homes and communities, sometimes multiple times. Syria's children are paying a heavy price for the world's failure to put an end to the conflict.

Child labour was a fact of life in Syria prior to the war, but the humanitarian crisis has greatly exacerbated the problem. As a result, many children are now involved in economic activities that are mentally, physically or socially dangerous and which limit – or deny – their basic right to education. In its most extreme forms – such as child recruitment by armed forces and groups, or sexual exploitation – child labour is a grave violation of children's rights.

The Syria crisis has dramatically reduced livelihood opportunities and impoverished millions of households in the region. Whether in Syria or neighbouring countries, children are often the main – or even the sole – breadwinners. In Jordan, 47% of refugee households say they rely partly or entirely on income generated by a child<sup>6</sup>.

Some 2.7 million Syrian children are currently out of school, a figure swollen by children who are forced to work instead. The limited access these children have to quality education is part of the problem; moreover, children who work are more likely to drop out of education.

As the economic circumstances of families become more desperate, the working conditions in which children find themselves are worsening.

In Jordan, for example a majority of working children in host communities work six or seven days a week; one-third work more than eight hours a day. Their daily income is between US\$4 and US\$7<sup>7</sup>. Children also start working very young, often before the age of 12. In some parts of Lebanon, children as young as six are being put to work<sup>8</sup>.

Harmful work hurts children's bodies as well as their prospects in life. Around 75% of working children in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan reported health problems; almost 40% reported an injury, illness or poor health<sup>9</sup>; 35.8% of children working in Lebanon's Bekaa valley are unable to read or write<sup>10</sup>. Boys and girls involved in harmful work miss out on their childhood.

Child labour represents one of the key challenges to the fulfilment of the "No Lost Generation" initiative launched in 2013, in which UNICEF, Save the Children and other partners aimed to put child protection and education at the centre of the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis<sup>11</sup>.

The purpose of this report is to shed light on the plight of working children and influence a bold discussion on strategies to address the phenomenon. Drawing on assessments and studies undertaken in countries affected by the Syria crisis, it examines the implications for children, and proposes a set of recommendations for stakeholders to consider that could reduce the impact of child labour among Syrian children, and help them reclaim their childhood.

1 Save the Children, 'Futures under threat. The impact of the education crisis on Syria's children', 2014, p. 3  
2 Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR), 'Alienation and Violence. Impact of Syria Crisis Report 2014', Syria, 2015, p. 8  
3 Key figures UN OCHA, May 2015, [www.unocha.org/syria](http://www.unocha.org/syria) accessed, 2015  
4 SCPR, 'Alienation and Violence. Impact of Syria Crisis Report 2014', Syria, 2015, p. 8  
5 UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response Statistics, 2015  
6 UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, 'Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage', 2013, p. 35

7 ILO, 'Report of the rapid assessment on Child Labour in the Urban Informal Sector in three governorates of Jordan (Amman, Mafrqa and Irbid)', 2014, p. 31  
8 ILO, 'Rapid assessment on Child Labour in North Lebanon (Tripoli and Akkar) and Bekaa Governorates', 2012, p. 37  
9 UNICEF and Save the Children, 'Baseline Assessment of Child Labour among Syrian Refugees in Za'atari Refugee Camp Jordan', 2014, pp. 6–7  
10 ILO, 'Rapid assessment on Child Labour in North Lebanon (Tripoli and Akkar) and Bekaa Governorates', 2012, p. 12  
11 No Lost Generation initiative <http://nolostgeneration.org/>





## Children at work

### A less visible effect of the Syria crisis

In the Kurdish city of Erbil, a restaurant that was long popular for its kebabs is now as remarkable for the many young refugees from Syria who are employed there. Sixteen-year old Khaled and his two brothers are among them. "I really want to finish school and become a teacher or something useful," says Khaled. "But I have to work 12 hours a day to pay the rent."

As the impact of the Syria crisis spreads across the region, the number of children and adolescents who carry the burden of supporting their families is steadily increasing. Replacing adults as the main family breadwinners, more and more children are toiling for long hours with little pay, often in dangerous and unhealthy conditions.

Despite the lack of recent large-scale assessments of child labour, there is no shortage of evidence that the Syria crisis is pushing an ever-increasing number of children towards exploitation in the labour market. The data that are available are probably an under-estimate: Employers and vulnerable families tend to hide the problem, fearing the consequences of disclosing it. In the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, heads of households reported that 13.3% of children aged between seven and 17 years old were working. However, when children themselves were asked whether they had worked during the preceding week, a much higher percentage (34.5%)<sup>12</sup> said they had.

## The child work continuum

According to Save the Children, there are three broad categories of child labour requiring different responses to protect the rights of children:

- **Worst forms:** work where harm is extreme and the violation of rights is impossible to prevent, which requires the urgent removal of children from the workplace and the provision of assistance to children and their families<sup>13</sup>.
- **Hazardous child labour:** work where rights are violated, but the prevention of these violations is possible, possibly through an improvement in working conditions.
- **Decent work:** where rights are not violated and work may contribute to the fulfilment of rights, which might require the provision of some support to children<sup>14</sup>.

Sometimes, children are themselves eager to work. In Jordan's Za'atari refugee camp, an assessment found that "Almost 90% of working children said they were willing to work and (...) 81% that they liked working," often because of the money they earned. Additionally, around 21% of children – and 40 % of girls -- said they wanted to learn a skill. In general, however, children and adults' attitudes towards work are greatly influenced by the conditions they live in, especially if there are scarce livelihood opportunities for adults, and limited access to quality education.



*This nine-year old boy works in construction 12 hours a day.*

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF and Save the Children, 'Baseline Assessment of Child Labour among Syrian Refugees in Za'atari Refugee Camp Jordan', 2014, pp. 6-7

<sup>13</sup> Article 3, ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour, 1999

<sup>14</sup> Save the Children, The Protection from Harmful Work, Position Statement, 2013

## Long hours, little pay, hard work

“The first thing I do when I get to the workshop is sweep the floor and clean the tools. I repair cars and work on engines. I’m usually done with work after sunset.” Ahmed, 13, a refugee in Jordan

As the Syria crisis drives more and more families towards destitution, working conditions for children are worsening. Children are increasingly exploited as cheap labour by employers who abuse their desperate situation, paying them as little as half the wage an adult would receive for the same job.

Children inside Syria face particular hazards, especially those involved in smuggling goods across borders, collecting and selling oil, or other forms of manual labour. Assessments have found children aged between nine and 16 working 12 hours a day for little pay, and under the threat of physical abuse<sup>15</sup>.

Children working in agriculture can be exposed to pesticides, dangerous equipment and long working hours in extreme temperatures. In the Jordan valley, for example, Syrian and other children have been found working an average of 25-30 hours a week.

School is not an option for most such children; only 2.4% of working Syrian children attend school<sup>16</sup>. In Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, prior to the conflict landowners used to pay migrant farm workers US\$10 for five hours of work. Now children as young as 10 who work alongside adults receive just US\$4 for an entire day<sup>17</sup>.

In urban areas, children find employment in shops, workshops and in construction sites. In Lebanon, for example, 10-year-old boys are engaged full-time repairing vehicles, doing metal-welding, carpentry or filling domestic gas cylinders<sup>18</sup>.

Children living or working on the street face the biggest dangers of all. A recent study in Lebanon identified 1,510 street-based children, mainly in Beirut and Tripoli, 73% of whom were refugees from Syria. The most common type of work is begging (43%), followed by street vending (37%). Incomes averaged US\$11 per day, but vary considerably, from US\$9 for begging and windscreen washing to US\$21–36 for illicit activities or prostitution.

One of the first images that strikes a visitor to Jordan’s Za’atari refugee camp are the young children – some only seven years old – lining up with wheelbarrows waiting for work. Most shops in the camp employ children, with the largest number working as porters. They earn an average of US\$12.4 per day.

In host communities in Jordan, a 2014 survey found that working children are typically employed for six or seven days a week; one-third of working children labour for more than eight hours a day. The majority reported daily incomes between US\$4 and US\$7.

In Iraq, the situation is no different. “My children used to go to school and now I’m seeing them killing themselves, working from 8 in the morning till 9 at night, and coming home exhausted,” says Abdullah, a father of four children who all work in a steel factory in the city of Sulimaniyah in northern Iraq.

Type of work done by Syrian children	Typical Wage
Harvesting potatoes in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon	US\$ 4/day
Street work in Beirut, Lebanon (selling food and drinks, carrying grocery bags, shining shoes, working in parking lots and begging)	US\$ 3-12/day
Illicit work (including prostitution) in Beirut, Lebanon	US\$ 21-36/day
Selling food/drinks on the streets and working in shops and restaurants in Jordan	US\$ 4-7/day
Pushing a wheelbarrow or selling tomatoes in Za’atari refugee camp, Jordan	US\$ 12.4/day
Working as a shoemaker’s assistant in Kilis, Turkey	US\$ 7/week

Sources: ILO, UNICEF, Save the Children

<sup>15</sup> Save the Children, ‘Child Protection Assessment north-eastern Syria’, 2015

<sup>16</sup> ILO Jordan, ‘Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in the Agricultural Sector in Jordan/Mafraq and Jordan Valley, 2014, p. 35

<sup>17</sup> FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, ‘Running out of time. Survival of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon’, 2014, p. 36

<sup>18</sup> Ibid



The situation of older working children aged 15-17 is somewhat different, as many of them are entitled to work<sup>19</sup>. However, in many cases they are engaged in harmful forms of labour that violate their rights and hinder their development.

At the same time, more and more younger children are being drawn into the workforce. In the Jordan Valley, for example, 17.9% of children from Syria working in agriculture are under the age of 12<sup>20</sup>.

In urban areas of Jordan, a study found 34% of working children were aged under 15<sup>21</sup>. In Lebanon, over half of children working or living on the street are aged between 10 and 14 years old. The main activity of the youngest was begging, which often started at the age of seven<sup>22</sup>.

A rapid assessment of child labour in Lebanon found that almost a third of working children were under 14. The report found children of 6, 7 and 8 years old in the north of Lebanon who had been working for at least six months<sup>23</sup>.



*Thousands of children, some as young as seven, are paid as little as US\$2 to gather potatoes in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.*

19 Legal age for employment: Syria: 15, Jordan: 16, Lebanon: 13, Turkey: 15, Iraq: 15 and Turkey: 15. Minimum age for hazardous work: 18 in all of them – US Department of Labour, 2013

20 ILO Jordan, Rapid Assessment on Child Labour in the Agricultural Sector in Jordan/ Mafraq and Jordan Valley, 2014, p. 28

21 ILO, Report of the rapid assessment on Child Labour in the Urban Informal Sector in three governorates of Jordan, 2014, p. 24

22 ILO, UNICEF, Save the Children, Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Labour, Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude, 2014, p. 12

23 ILO, Rapid assessment on Child Labour in North Lebanon (Tripoli and Akkar) and Bekaa Governorates, 2012, p. 37



## Where are the girls?

Eight year old Jumana has a scar below her left eye, a reminder of the shrapnel that injured her during the conflict in her home town of Jarabulus in northern Syria. “I am lucky not to have lost my eye,” says Jumana.

Today Jumana, her mother and six elder siblings live in a makeshift shack in the Turkish capital, Ankara. Jumana has not been able to go to school either in Syria or in Turkey. Like all the other members of her family, she works daily and for long hours collecting waste paper for recycling. Each child earns about US\$3–4 daily.

Child labour is generally more prevalent among boys. For example, a UNHCR study found<sup>24</sup> boys made up 94% of children working in Za’atari camp. In Lebanon, over two-thirds of street-based children were found to be male<sup>25</sup>.

However, such data may be misleading because girls are generally employed in less visible activities. In Jordan, for example, a report found that girls were carrying out economic activities in 15% of households which reported income generation by children. Almost half of these girls were domestic workers and 33% worked in agriculture, generally alongside other family members<sup>26</sup>.

According to the same study, older girls between the ages of 15 and 17 often worked as live-in domestic help, a practice that isolates girls from their families and can put them at risk of abuse and sexual exploitation. In Lebanon, girls in paid work are mainly engaged in cleaning, selling goods and farm labour. One-third of street activities – mainly begging – were carried out by girls<sup>27</sup>, more than half of whom are under 11 years old<sup>28</sup>.

Girls are also expected to undertake more household chores than boys. A study in Za’atari refugee camp found that on average girls spend 4.6 hours on household chores (compared with 2.9 for boys). When this domestic work was combined with income-generating jobs, those girls who were involved in economic activities outside the house were estimated to work 17 hours compared with 12 hours for boys<sup>29</sup>.



**1 IN 3** STREET BASED CHILDREN  
IN LEBANON ARE GIRLS.



*A Syrian refugee girl collects potatoes on a farm in Lebanon.*

<sup>24</sup> UNHCR, *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, 2013, p. 36

<sup>25</sup> ILO, UNICEF, Save the Children, Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Labour, *Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude*, 2014, p. 12

<sup>26</sup> UN Women Inter-Agency Assessment, *Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage*, 2013, pp. 36–37

<sup>27</sup> ILO, UNICEF, Save the Children, Republic of Lebanon Ministry of Labour, *Children Living and Working on the Streets in Lebanon: Profile and Magnitude*, 2014, p. 35

<sup>28</sup> Ibid p. 37

<sup>29</sup> Save the Children and UNICEF, *Baseline Assessment of Child Labour among Syrian Refugees in Za’atari Refugee Camp, Jordan*, 2014, p. 33

## Worst forms of child labour

The most vulnerable of all working children are those involved in armed conflict, sexual exploitation, and illicit activities such as organised begging and child trafficking<sup>30</sup>. These worst forms of child labour constitute grave violations of child rights, and are poorly documented.

Children from Syria are increasingly exposed to recruitment and use by armed forces and groups<sup>31</sup>. In 2014, the UN verified at least 278 such cases including children as young as eight years old. However it noted that actual numbers are much higher. In 77 percent of these cases, children were armed or used in combat roles, including attending to the wounded or recording battles for propaganda purposes. Other children work as guards or at checkpoints. Children have also been employed as suicide bombers.

Recruitment of refugee children in neighbouring countries has also been documented<sup>32</sup>. A child labour assessment in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq found that 30% of children interviewed had been approached for recruitment<sup>33</sup>.

Children who join armed groups can receive monthly salaries of up to US\$400<sup>34</sup>, making it particularly lucrative. Others participate without pay – perhaps to join family members or friends, or because they have suffered personally at the hands of one of the warring parties. Some children live in areas without functioning schools and joining an armed group is one of the few options open to them<sup>35</sup>.

Instances of the commercial sexual exploitation of children have been reported, including in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley where gangs are said to be exploiting Syrian girls and women<sup>36</sup>. In Za'atari camp, female refugees say they fear being pressed into 'temporary' or 'dishonourable' marriages<sup>37</sup>.

However, data on the extent of the phenomenon and the age of the girls and women involved are limited. Reports suggest that girls tend to be more vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, although the sexual exploitation of boys is generally less researched.

Criminal networks organise and control the work of many children. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, nearly 13% of respondents to a child labour assessment stated that a third party was organising children's work, especially those involved in domestic work and illicit activities such as the production and trafficking of drugs and petty crime<sup>38</sup>.

Bonded agricultural labour and other forms of forced labour where intermediaries receive most of the income from child labour, are also categorised among the worst forms. In some instances, children as young as 10 or 12 are forced to work alongside their parents in the fields because of pressure from landlords<sup>39</sup>.

In the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, children working as farm labourers are often verbally and physically abused<sup>40</sup>. 20% of working children in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan reported physical abuse (mainly beating)<sup>41</sup>. Some 46% of street-based children reported physical harassment by passers-by. Sexual abuse in the workplace has also been reported<sup>42</sup>.

Inside Syria, the involvement of children in hazardous labour is a particular concern in places like Deir-ez-Zor governorate in eastern Syria, where most out-of-school children were reported to work filtering crude oil and operating generators<sup>43</sup>.



**NEARLY 75%**  
WORKING CHILDREN IN  
THE ZA'TARI REFUGEE  
CAMP IN JORDAN  
REPORTED HEALTH  
PROBLEMS AT WORK.



**1 IN 3** CHILDREN  
INTERVIEWED IN THE  
KURDISTAN REGION  
OF IRAQ HAS BEEN  
APPROACHED FOR  
RECRUITMENT WITH  
ARMED GROUPS.

30 The worst forms of child labour are a subset of child labour particularly harmful for children, as defined by Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182. Worst forms of child labour include forced or bonded labour, use in armed conflict, trafficking, sexual or economic exploitation, illicit work and any work carried out and likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

31 Human Rights Council, 27th Session, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab, 2015, p. 53

32 UNHCR, Future of Syria, 2013

33 UNICEF, Assessment of the Situation of Child Labour among Syrian Refugee Children in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 2014

34 Secretary General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict, 2015. A/69/926; S/2015/409. p. 32

35 Human Rights Watch, Maybe We Live, and Maybe We Die, 2014, p. 2

36 The FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, 'Running Out of Time: Survival of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon', 2014, p. 42

37 Save the Children, 'Too young to wed', 2014, p. 6

38 Kurdish Regional Government and UNICEF, 2014, 'Assessment of the Situation of Child Labour among Syrian Refugee Children in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', p. 24

39 The FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, Running out of time: Survival of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon, 2014, p. 36.

40 Ibid. p. 37

41 UNICEF and Save the Children, Baseline Assessment of Child Labour among Syrian Refugees in Za'atari Refugee Camp Jordan, 2014, p. 7

42 ILO, UNICEF and Save the Children, Street based children and work in Lebanon: profile and magnitude, 2015, p. 14

43 Child Protection Working Group desk review, 2015, p. 25



## Scarred for life the consequences of harmful work

Harmful work impacts children in different ways, but younger and inexperienced children tend to suffer disproportionately.

Without decent working conditions and the correct protective equipment and clothing, children risk illness, injury or even death while working with heavy machinery or toxic chemicals in the blistering summer heat and the cold of winter<sup>44</sup>.

Around 22% of children working in the agricultural sector in Mafrq and the Jordan Valley have suffered injuries, of which around one third required medical treatment<sup>45</sup>.

The worst forms of child labour can cause severe psychological damage to children. Working in an environment where they are harassed or experience violence and abuse will have a profound effect on a child's mental health.

In addition, many working children are deprived of an education, as they have neither the time, nor the energy to attend school, due to the demands of their work. Child labour appears to be the predominant reason for the withdrawal of children from schools in many parts of Syria, including Hama (78%), Rural Damascus (75%), Idleb (61%) or Aleppo (60%)<sup>46</sup>.

Dropping out of school puts these children at a life-long disadvantage, hindering their chances of getting decent work and escaping the cycle of poverty and exploitation.



After school finishes I go to work at the diesel market.

When the man selling the diesel gives it to his customer I stand next to him and soak up the diesel that has spilled on the ground with a sponge. I hate the diesel market and the clothes that I wear there; all of it makes me sick. One day some red spots appeared on my body and when I went to the doctor he said it was because of the diesel. He told me to use medical soap. I hate that people treat me badly. One time there was a big explosion at the market; I saw a man fly through the air and there was so much blood. I ran away. Now I feel so scared when I see someone with matches or lighting a cigarette near the market. I immediately run away fearing another explosion."

Khalid, 12, Syria

<sup>44</sup> ILO, UNICEF and Save the Children, Street based children and work in Lebanon: profile and magnitude, 2015, p. 13

<sup>45</sup> ILO, Rapid assessment on child labour in the agricultural sector in Mafrq and the Jordan Valley, 2014, p. 52

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 45





## I collect about 30 bags of potatoes each day and my back hurts a lot.

Once we arrive at the field, we are given huge bags that we attach to our waist. We then start harvesting potatoes. We have to be really fast and we shouldn't leave any potato behind or else we get beaten with a plastic hose. We work non-stop until our 10-minute breakfast break at 10am. We then continue working until 2pm. The job is really hard and the bag becomes really heavy – it weighs more than 10 kilograms when it is full. I collect about 30 bags of potatoes each day and my back hurts a lot. When we come back to the tent, I immediately go to sleep. When I wake up, I have something to eat with my family and then I go outside and play with my friends, some of whom work with me while others go to school."

Salem, 13, a refugee in Lebanon





## War and destitution drive more children into the labour force

“It tears me apart, but I have no alternative. My health doesn’t allow me to work. Which father wants to see his 14-year-old son dropping out of school to collect scrap all day?” Ahmad, a Syrian refugee in Mafraqa, Jordan.

Children affected by the Syria crisis are working primarily because of poverty and their families’ loss of livelihoods. Whether in Syria or in neighbouring countries, children have become main players in the survival of households as partial or even sole breadwinners.

Inside Syria, some children have found themselves separated from their caregivers or have themselves become the head of the household following the death or disappearance of their parents. In other cases, families send children away to work in other areas of the country or across borders to generate income and avoid them being recruited by armed groups or getting injured in the conflict.

A livelihoods assessment conducted by Save the Children in north-eastern Syria found that after years of conflict, families are struggling to meet their basic needs and are increasingly reliant on negative coping practices, putting children out to work, marrying daughters early, and allowing children to become involved with armed groups<sup>47</sup>.

Although lifesaving assistance inside Syria has been crucial to meeting many families’ immediate needs, assistance to communities’ coping mechanisms and resilience has not been sufficiently prioritised in some parts of the country.

The situation of refugees in host countries can be just as desperate. Many Syrians fled the conflict with little more than the clothes on their backs, having lost most of their savings, assets and possessions.

After years of displacement, refugees’ coping capacities are being exhausted. In Jordan, two out of three refugees from Syria live below the extreme poverty line of US\$3.2/day; one in six lives below the absolute poverty line of US\$1.3/day<sup>48</sup>.

Adult Syrian refugees are largely unable to access the formal labour market. While theoretically able to obtain a work permit in their respective host countries, in practice this is almost impossible<sup>49</sup>. UNHCR found that only 1% of refugee households in Jordan had members with work permits<sup>50</sup>.

Without work permits, income generation and employment are difficult to find and limited to the informal sector, where work is often seasonal or irregular and pay is low with a high risk of exploitation. Those who work illegally risk being imprisoned, fined, returned to refugee camps or even deported back to Syria.

In such a desperate situation, it is no wonder that families turn to their children to help support their survival. In Za’atari refugee camp, nearly all children stated their reasons for working were related to the economic insecurity of their households<sup>51</sup>. In Iraq, nearly 77% of refugee children from Syria worked to support their families<sup>52</sup>.

Vulnerable households are spending more money than they can earn. In Egypt, for example, a Syrian refugee household’s average monthly income is US\$115-215, whereas their average monthly spend is US\$360<sup>53</sup>. Families are increasingly reliant on cash and food assistance.

This situation is likely to get worse as agencies cut back on programmes because of underfunding. As of July 2015, the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan and the Syria Response Plan are less than one quarter funded.

The large influx of refugees and reduced opportunities for finding work have also greatly affected vulnerable communities in host countries, and tensions with refugees have been increasing. This is the case in parts of Lebanon where wage and job opportunities have decreased because of the greater presence of refugees in the labour market<sup>54</sup>.

In Jordan, the sudden increase in the number of job seekers and the inability of the economy to absorb them have led to a downward pressure on wages and an overall deterioration in working conditions. The impact is mainly felt in the informal sector<sup>55</sup>, where national laws are less enforced and wages are below the national minimum. Around 99% of Syrian refugees who are employed work informally, compared to about 50% of Jordanians<sup>56</sup>.

### Insufficient education opportunities

Children who are not in school are at greater risk of finding themselves put to work. At the same time children who work are more likely to drop out of education. In the absence of sufficient quality education opportunities, working is sometimes seen as a more productive use of children’s time, generating income for the family, as well as allowing them to learn new skills.

Inside Syria, the education system has suffered huge damage. More than two million children are out of school<sup>57</sup>, and at least one-quarter of schools have been damaged or destroyed, or are being used either for military purposes or as shelters for displaced people<sup>58</sup>.

- 51 UNICEF and Save the Children, Baseline Assessment of Child Labour among Syrian Refugees in Za’atari Refugee Camp Jordan, 2014, p. 6
- 52 UNICEF, Assessment of the Situation of Child Labour among Syrian Refugee Children in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 2014, p. 25
- 53 UNHCR, Joint Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Egypt, 2013, p. 21.
- 54 ILO, Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile, 2013, p. 10
- 55 IMF, IMF Country Report No. 14/152, Jordan, 2014 p. 22
- 56 Stave, S. E. and S. Hillesund, ILO and FAO, Impact of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labour market, 2015, p. 63
- 57 UNICEF, 14 million children impacted by conflicts in Syria and Iraq, 2014
- 58 OCHA, 2015 Strategic Response Plan: Syrian Arab Republic, p. 3

47 Save the Children, Child Protection Assessment, north-eastern Syria, 2015  
 48 UNHCR, Living in the shadow. Jordan home visits report, 2015, p. 30  
 49 SNAP, Legal status of individuals fleeing Syria, 2013, p. 2  
 50 UNHCR, Living in the shadow. Jordan home visits report, 2015, p. 28



“Children belong in school but too many are not here, and those who have come back are now in a constant state of fear and anxiety. Before we had 22 classes, all of them full. Now we are just 12 classes and some are only half full. Too many children are still too afraid to come to school”.  
Marwan, Head teacher at a school in northern Syria

In neighbouring countries, accessing education is extremely challenging for refugee children. An estimated 57% of refugee children were out of school as of March 2015<sup>59</sup>. Host countries generously opened their schools to refugee children living in their communities. However, the crisis has weakened the capacity of education systems across the region to address the needs of all children.

Many schools are overcrowded, with limited learning space and overworked teachers unable to respond to the special needs of new children. In areas with high populations of Syrian refugees, such as Mafraq in Jordan, high levels of over-crowding have inevitably affected the quality of education and exacerbated social tensions within some communities<sup>60</sup>.

The declining quality of education is leading to an increase in school dropout rates among both refugees from Syria and vulnerable communities. In Jordan, some Syrian families are preventing their children from attending school altogether, either to protect them from tensions or to send them out to work<sup>61</sup>.

In other cases, access to education is simply not an option. Refugee children have to deal with a host of issues including unfamiliar curricula, language barriers, discrimination, problems in obtaining certification, the limited legal status of their parents and the psychological impact of the crisis<sup>62</sup>.

Youth aged 15-24 have even fewer opportunities to develop. Whether inside Syria or outside, they live with a frustration born of limited formal and non-formal education opportunities available and a lack of attention and support. In countries like Jordan and Lebanon, for example, young refugees have very few opportunities, if any at all, to enrol in vocational training programmes.

## Employers' preference for children

Some employers prefer to hire children because they accept lower wages than adults. They can be dispensed with easily and form a docile work-force that will not seek to organise for protection and support. Refugee children are also less likely to be noticed and stopped by the police than adults.

In an assessment of child labour in Jordan's urban areas, 84% of employers said that they had been employing children in their establishments for the past one to two years, while 11% said they had employed children for three to four years<sup>63</sup>. While the survey was limited in scope, the fact that many employers reported employing children for the first time within the past two years could indicate a significant change in the preferences of employers – and one with serious negative implications for children.

## Shortcomings in addressing child labour

Syria and neighbouring countries have ratified international instruments on child labour, including the Child Rights Convention and ILO Conventions 138 and 182.

National legislation and action plans to regulate children's participation in the labour market were developed and systems put in place to protect children. While there were certainly challenges before the Syria crisis, most countries were taking steps in the right direction.

However, the Syria crisis has created obstacles to the enforcement of national laws and policies to protect children, including refugee children, from child labour, recruitment and other protection concerns. There are too few labour inspectors and a lack of clear procedures on how to deal with refugee child workers.

There is often a lack of coherence between national authorities, international agencies and civil society organisations over who does what, leading to a failure in national mechanisms to address child labour. A lack of accurate nationwide information hinders the development and implementation of policies and programmes to counter child labour with the child's best interest at its core.

Although the Government of Syria criminalised (in 2013) the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, the events of 2014 demonstrated that this legal protection continues to be systematically disregarded by armed groups on all sides.

59 UNICEF, Education Regional Dashboard, 2015

60 Education and Tensions in Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees', Thematic Assessment Report, REACH, 2014, p. 1

61 Ibid, p. 4

62 Save the Children, Futures under threat: the impact of the education crisis on Syria's children, 2014, p. 27

63 ILO, Report on the rapid assessment on child labour in the urban informal sector in three governorates of Jordan: Amman, Mafraq and Irbid, 2014, p. 40

## The way Forward

Child labour has become one of the most challenging protection issues facing countries affected by the Syria crisis. Shielding children from harmful work, in particular the worst forms of child labour, requires a broader approach well beyond the capacity of current child protection programmes.

UNICEF and Save the Children call on partners and champions of the “No Lost Generation Initiative”, the wider international community, host governments, and civil society to undertake a series of measures to address child labour inside Syria and in countries affected by the humanitarian crisis.

1

### **IMPROVE ACCESS TO LIVELIHOODS**

- Prioritise funding for resilience, livelihoods and other income-generating activities, especially among the most vulnerable households both inside Syria and in countries hosting refugees.
- Work with host governments to reduce administrative and financial barriers that prevent Syrian and other refugee populations from accessing employment opportunities in the formal economy, particularly in - but not limited to - sectors where the needs of the labour market are not met.
- Encourage joint small business ventures between Syrians and national entrepreneurs that could boost local economies.

2

### **PROVIDE QUALITY AND SAFE EDUCATION FOR ALL CHILDREN IMPACTED BY THE CRISIS**

- Prioritise funding to improve access to quality and safe education for all children.
- Find creative ways of integrating working children back into school, including through informal and alternative education.
- Support the development of technical, vocational and life skills training for adolescents and youth.
- Press parties to the conflict to put an end to all attacks on education facilities and personnel and respect schools as a place of safe refuge.

3

### **PRIORITISE ENDING THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR**

- Undertake research on the extent of child labour, in particular its worst forms, to assist in the development and implementation of policies and programmes to address this problem with children’s best interests at their core.
- Support local civil society organisations to advocate with relevant authorities and communities to address worst forms of child labour.
- All armed forces and groups implicated in child recruitment should undertake urgent measures to release children within their ranks so that they can receive appropriate support, and prevent any further recruitment.

4

### **INVEST IN STRENGTHENING NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND SERVICES**

- Increase funding to support existing national and community-based systems that address child labour and other protection concerns.
- Invest in capacity-building for front-line service providers to manage child labour cases in a timely and effective manner.

The names of all children in this report have been changed to protect their identity.



# CHILD LABOUR & THE SYRIA CRISIS: KEY FACTS



## THE SCALE OF THE ISSUE

In **Jordan**, close to **half** of surveyed Syrian refugee families reported having a child as a breadwinner.

**84%** of employers currently employing children in **Jordan** were not doing so before the crisis.

In **Iraq**, **three quarters** of refugee children from Syria who were working support their families.

In **Lebanon**, nearly **three quarters** of street based children are Syrian refugees.



## WORKING FROM A YOUNG AGE

**One in five** children working on farms in the **Jordan Valley** is under the age of 12.

Inside **Syria**, children **as young as nine** are involved in hazardous manual labour.

In **Turkey**, Syrian refugee girls **as young as eight** years are working.

In **Lebanon**, children **as young as six** are working.



## GIRLS AS WELL AS BOYS

**94%** of working Syrian refugee children in the Za'tari refugee camp in **Jordan** are boys.

In **Turkey**, girls and boys earn as little as US\$3 collecting waste paper for recycling.

In **Lebanon**, **one in three** street based children are girls, who are mainly beggars.



## WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR

**One third** of refugee children in **Iraq** have been approached for recruitment with armed groups.

In **Lebanon**, children as young as ten are victims of bonded labour working in agriculture.







FOR MORE INFORMATION



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