



**#NOLOST  
GENERATION**  
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## NO LOST GENERATION EVIDENCE BRIEF: HEAR THE VOICES OF SYRIA'S ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

Before the start of the conflict, Syria was home to one of the youngest populations in the world. Around one third of the Syrian population is between 10 and 24 years old. The seven years of war in Syria has had a devastating impact on adolescents and youth. Instead of entering an age of transition filled with learning, exploration, dreams and ambitions – they have been continuously exposed to a brutal war, experiencing indescribable suffering through displacement and continued conflict, which impacts not only their present but also their future.

This evidence brief presents data on adolescents and youth from Syria, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries from the following sources: a systematic desk review<sup>1</sup>; evidence generated in partnership with Syrian adolescents and youth<sup>2</sup> through Participatory Action Research<sup>3</sup>; a survey targeted at vulnerable adolescents<sup>4</sup>; and blogs by adolescents and youth on the Voices of Youth Arabic site<sup>5</sup>.

The aim of this brief is to ensure that the international community convened at the second Brussels conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region – donors, government representatives, and NGOs alike – hears the voices and views of young people affected by the Syria crisis and takes these into consideration when making decisions about their lives and their futures.

*"I have only finished ninth grade because of war. I really wish to go to university. I want to attend high school, and I hope I can study and work at the same time. I started working when I was in second grade. For now, the only choice I have is to work."  
Saji\*, 16, living in Syria*



“**Civil war  
Siegues  
Bombings  
Casualties  
Refugees -**  
I had heard these terms in history class, abstract concepts I hadn't paid much attention to. Seven years ago, at the age of eleven, they became my reality.”

Haya\*, 19, Syria

## I. WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES YOUNG SYRIANS FACE?



**Education failing adolescents and youth:** The Syria crisis has significantly hindered young people's<sup>6</sup> participation in learning opportunities. Although host countries have opened their systems to include refugee children and youth, enrolment rates for adolescents at secondary school level remain dramatically low. At upper secondary education level, the enrolment rate is under 25 per cent in all host countries except Egypt. It is at secondary and tertiary levels that enrolment comparison between Syrian refugees and host community peers shows the greatest gap, as a result of having missed on education opportunities in earlier years, and the need to work to support their families. Other factors that affect participation are quality of teaching in schools, discrimination against girls and violence in schools<sup>7</sup>.

Despite promising practices, interventions in the areas of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and skills development remain fragmented and limited to ad hoc service delivery rather than embedded in existing systems. The total number of youth reportedly reached is marginal as compared to the needs<sup>8</sup>.

*“I want the world to know what kind of misery we're living in, without education and with all the things we've been through during war. We need some attention to share our words and ideas with the world, we need someone to help us develop our accomplishments and help us share it with the world.”*

*Sameer\*, 16, Azraq Camp*



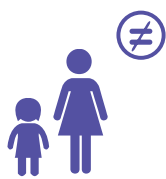
**Youth unemployment and socio-economic exclusion** is a major challenge for young people, both those for whom completion of certified formal education proved impossible or hard to attain due to the crisis, as well as those with secondary or tertiary qualifications. Opportunities are limited and young people experience a mismatch between skills taught and required by the labor market. Unemployment levels for Syrian refugees are particularly high in host countries, for example 60.8 per cent in Jordan. Unemployment puts many young people at risk of exploitation and more likely to engage in risky behavior in an attempt to achieve financial independence or contribute much needed cash to their families<sup>9</sup>. Child labour in Jordan has doubled since 2007, now reaching 70,000<sup>10</sup>, while in Lebanon an estimated 180,000 children<sup>11</sup> are engaged in child labour, including in its worst forms. Within Syria, child labour is a significant issue. More than 70% of the participants in the Participatory Action Research (PAR), cited being increasingly stressed and frustrated from family tensions emerging from economic deprivation and felt increasingly responsible for trying to improve their situation. 15% of the young researchers from the PAR inside Syria, were working. All of them had dropped out of school and were working to provide an income to their families.

*“I work in the land to secure the needs of my family. My father and my mother are very sick. I also take care of my grandmother. I do not like my work at all. My employer does not give me the money sometimes and there is no security. I still have dreams but these cannot be achieved without money.”*

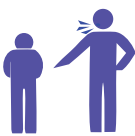
*Ali\*, 22, Syrian Refugee living in Lebanon*

// *No one asked me before what my problems were. I don't know how to deal with them at all. Ask me how to make Mlokhiye (food) and I will tell you, but don't ask me about my problems"*

Tasneem\*, 15-17, Zarqa, Jordan



**Discrimination against young women and girls** remains widespread at home, at school, in the work place and in the street<sup>12</sup>. The crisis in Syria has triggered the exacerbation of existing harmful cultural norms, increasing the vulnerability of adolescent girls to gender-based violence. Child marriage is used both as a coping mechanism for families facing mounting economic pressures and as a "protective" measure in the face of insecurity and instability. Isolation is serious issue for adolescent girls and a contributing factor to depression in this group<sup>13</sup>.



**Violence in its many forms** is a crippling daily reality for many adolescents and young people inside Syria. The armed conflict has not only killed and maimed hundreds of thousands of civilians and displaced millions; it has also inflicted significant psychological damage on young people and created a very real protection crisis for young women and children. Witnessing daily acts of violence has left many adolescents in the region fearing for their own lives<sup>14</sup>.

Participatory research with adolescents and youth revealed evidence of violence at home, in school, on the way to school and in communities<sup>15</sup>. The effects of this are compounded by a lack of space for young people to talk about these issues and access to services to provide them with support. Global statistics reveal that worldwide, the MENA region is the most dangerous place for adolescents and youth. If all adolescents faced the same risk of dying due to collective violence as those inside Syria, there would be an adolescent death in the world every 10 seconds.<sup>16</sup>

*"Children who are exposed to violence do not have the confidence and means to speak out."*  
Manal\*, 17, Syria



**Refugee adolescents and youth have reduced access to essential services and are more likely to suffer discrimination.** In particular, access to decent work or tertiary education is significantly more restricted for those whose are not registered or lack legal status. Poor conditions in camps are repeatedly cited as very demoralizing by adolescents, and exposure to the worst forms of child labour is a reality for large numbers of adolescent refugees; boys in particular. Discrimination and access to opportunities for employment, education and civic participation are even further constrained for **adolescents and youth living with disabilities inside Syria**, whose number has dramatically increased in recent years.

*"Being forced to leave our country is like having to leave our souls behind."*

Aisha\*, 15, Azraq Camp



**Disenfranchisement** is a recurring theme in participatory research carried out with young Syrians. Young people feel disempowered, and unable to control their situation or to end the war and violence that surrounds them. 65% of PAR participants inside Syria had been internally displaced at least once due to the conflict. However, despite acute frustration, **young people are hopeful that their reality will change and seek to share responsibility** in decisions affecting their present and their future<sup>17</sup>. 79% of PAR participants inside Syria had relatives living in other countries. However, they had little desire of moving and preferred to stay in their country, provided that their situation improved.

*"Despite the challenges we face, there is always hope. We've learned that we need and we want to be part of the change. We want to empower young people, make a difference, and change lives."*

Said\*, 23, Lebanon







*“The tragedies of the past seven years have taught me something about myself. Even in the grimmest situations, losing people I love, I have found new strength to move on. I can’t surrender to the circumstances around me. I have to keep following my dreams. I am not simply a survivor. I am the creator of my own destiny.”*

Mohannad\*, 19, Syria

## METHODOLOGY OF THE SYSTEMATIC DESK REVIEW

The desk review\*<sup>i</sup> on which this evidence brief is based draws on a range of other recent desk reviews that extensively document the situation for young people in the MENA region, including an inter agency review of 221 programs addressing the situation for adolescents and youth in the region. This was supported by a systematic review of peer reviewed journal articles, grey literature (conceptual frameworks, baseline and end-line reports etc.) and publications authored by academics, state and non-state researchers, dated between 2011 and 2017.

No Lost Generation partner organizations; UN agencies and members of the UN Inter-Agency Technical Team on Young People and MENA UN:NGO youth group were invited to suggest articles for review. Forty-seven (47) papers and publications – quantitative and qualitative, many of which were full desk reviews - were originally shared for review as relevant in terms of criteria including geographic scope, topic and date of publication.

As the process evolved, more targeted research was undertaken to investigate and address for gaps in the literature. Some main key words/terms represented in the reviewed literature include: youth engagement, education, conflict, NEET (not in employment, education or training), radicalization, vulnerability, resilience, adolescents and young people, recruitment (into armed groups), child labor, refugee response, refugee protection, young Arab voices, youth employment, inequality, civil society space, youth participation, among others.

In the case of participatory studies, the review took specific interest in documented evidence of young people’s own experience of opportunities for participation in civic, social and economic spheres of society.

\*i See detailed document at: <https://essay2017site.wordpress.com/>

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1OTcoFtRMHWcF6PpEBp0TFTgRbsXHIwBH>

*“I’m looking for the day when fathers will stop producing twenty children and give their young girls to marry saying: “I can’t afford their living expenses,” while mothers realize that their early marriage experiences shouldn’t be repeated again with their daughters and protect those girls with education.”*

*Dana\*, 24, Syria*

## REFERENCES

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\*Names have been changed across this evidence brief to protect the identity of adolescents and youth.

<sup>1</sup> See box on methodology of the systematic desk review.

<sup>2</sup> Adolescents refers to the 10-19 age group; youth refers to the 15-24 age group. The term 'young people' used elsewhere in this brief refers to both groups.

<sup>3</sup> 121 young researchers representing several vulnerable groups collected data from 985 peers inside Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

<sup>4</sup> Survey was shared with young people engaged in adolescent and youth programmes in the region through partners and online closed Facebook groups of 85 adolescents and youth advocates and researchers.

<sup>5</sup> 214 blogs written by Syrian adolescents and youth inside Syria and in refugee hosting countries.  
<http://www.voicesofyouth.org/ar>

<sup>6</sup> A total of 3.9 million Syrian youth are estimated to be inside Syria, 34 per cent of whom are upper secondary school age. With 416,000 enrolled, the upper secondary gross enrolment ratio is low at 32 per cent. In the five host countries, there are an estimated 1 million registered Syrian refugees aged 15-24 years. Of these, 32 per cent (342,870) are of upper secondary age (15-17 years) and 68 per cent (733,559) tertiary education age (18-24 years). Three quarters of Syrian refugee youth are in Turkey or Lebanon.

<sup>7</sup> The No Lost Generation Education report: We made a promise: Ensuring Learning Pathways and Protection for Syrian Children and Youth (April 2018).

<sup>8</sup> The No Lost Generation Education report: We made a promise: Ensuring Learning Pathways and Protection for Syrian Children and Youth (April 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Evidence Brief: Violence Against Adolescents and Youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by Save the Children (Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office) and UNICEF (Child Protection Section, MENA Regional Office). November, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Labour. 2016. National Child Labour Survey 2016 of Jordan. Amman.

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR. 2016. Child Labour in Lebanon- Stories from Syrian Refugees.

<sup>12</sup> Adolescents and Youth Participation and Civic Engagement in the MENA Region by UNICEF (Adolescent Section, MENA Regional Office, AUB and GAGE.

<sup>13</sup> Evidence Brief: Violence Against Adolescents and Youth in The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by Save the Children (Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office) and UNICEF (Child Protection Section, MENA Regional Office). November, 2017

<sup>14</sup> Evidence Brief: Violence Against Adolescents and Youth in The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by Save the Children (Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office) and UNICEF (Child Protection Section, MENA Regional Office). November, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Participatory Action Research with Young People in the MENA Region by Adolescent and Youth Researchers, Aoun, JOHUD, Masar, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNESCO. November 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Evidence Brief: Violence Against Adolescents and Youth in The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by Save the Children (Middle East and Eastern Europe Regional Office) and UNICEF (Child Protection Section, MENA Regional Office). November, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Adolescents And Youth Participation and Civic Engagement in The MENA Region by UNICEF, AUB and GAGE.