



North-West Syria

photo courtesy of the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP)

I. INTRODUCTION¹

Over a decade of sustained conflict, protracted and multiple displacements, violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws, and endemic violence have led to an acute protection crisis in North-West Syria (NWS).² The continuing impact of conflict has depleted the resources and capacity for resilience of the 4.4 million individuals living in this area of Syria. The vast majority of the region's population were forcibly displaced to the North-West because of conflict in other parts of Syria. They are now trapped by a border wall and conflict frontlines, unable to escape the extreme violence and poverty that have become part of everyday life in the North-West.

Insufficient access, inadequate funding, and limitations of the operational environment have severely compromised the ability of humanitarians to deliver critical lifesaving aid into the region. What this looks like in practice is widespread food insecurity, little to no access to education for a generation of children, very limited coverage of specialized protection services, and extremely limited health care, including mental health and psychosocial support. As

Key Protection Figures

4.4m	Population of NWS
4.1m	People in Need of Protection Services
2.8M	Internally Displaced People (IDPs)
65%	Locations Reporting Injuries/Deaths from Explosive Hazard Contamination
32%	Disability Prevalence

people are increasingly forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms given the lack of the very basics, protection risks are further compounded.

This report, highlighting the protection risks in NWS, is part of a series of regional Whole of Syria Protection Analysis Updates (PAUs).

II. CONTEXT

Eleven years into the conflict, NWS remains a complex humanitarian emergency characterized by ongoing hostilities, protracted displacement, and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, and health facilities. The region is currently home to 4.4 million people, approximately two-thirds of whom were forcibly displaced from other areas of Syria during the conflict.³

Individuals who were forcibly displaced in NWS include a sizeable number of individuals who were evacuated through humanitarian corridors from areas that were previously besieged, including Eastern Ghouta in south-west Syria. 1.74 million people live across 1,414 IDP sites,⁴ the overwhelming majority of which do not meet the recognized minimum Sphere standards for humanitarian response.

¹ Methodology: In addition to relevant desk research, the NWS Protection Cluster relied on the household and key informant interviews conducted as part of the Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment between July to September 2021, monthly key informant interviews conducted by members of the Protection Monitoring Task Force, reports from protection cluster partners, other humanitarian actors, and internationally mandated human rights actors.

² For area of coverage under NWS, see Part IV: Protection Cluster Coverage & Funding, "Operational Context and Access".

³ *The Implications of the UN Cross-Border Vote in Syria*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2021 at 2.

⁴ *IDP Sites Integrated Monitoring Matrix for March 2022*, Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM Cluster – NW Syria).

1,230 of the 1,414 sites are unplanned, self-settled locations with high population densities, making it particularly difficult for humanitarians to effectively reach the most vulnerable populations. 56% of the residents of IDP sites are children.

A March 2020 ceasefire agreement ended some of the more large-scale military operations in NWS. However, there are near daily breaches of the ceasefire, with shelling, airstrikes and bombardments resulting in death and injury to civilians as well as damage to key civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and water points. Insecurity and violence resulting from conflict remains widespread, as does high levels of criminality coupled with an absence of rule of law.

Grave violations against children by parties to the conflict remains a significant concern. Violations include children being killed, injured, recruited, used in hostilities, detained, abducted, and sexually abused. Between January and September 2021, at least 1,440 grave violations were reported and verified by the MRM, the majority of these violations took place in NWS.

IDPs in NWS have faced protracted, and often multiple, displacements. For families this has contributed to the depletion of already limited resources, coupled with limited livelihoods opportunities and reliance on significantly over-stretched coping mechanisms, including increased household debt. The Syrian economy continues to spiral downwards with the Syrian pound losing close to 80% of its value, and the Turkish Lira, used in parts of NWS, losing 40% of its value in 2021. At the same time the region has seen high inflation: food prices have increased by over 200% in the last

year. A staggering 3.1 of the 4.4 million people in NWS are food insecure, and an additional 1 million are considered at risk of food insecurity.⁵

This worsening economic situation is further aggravating and driving protection risks as households have no remaining assets to draw on and few choices: there is an increasing prevalence of negative coping mechanisms, including child marriage and child labor, as a result. For already vulnerable populations, especially households that include persons with disabilities and child- and female-headed households, their options are even more constrained as humanitarian needs spiral.

Parts of NWS face an acute water crisis due to climate change and the widespread destruction of and damage to water facilities, at times deliberately.⁶ NWS is also exceptionally vulnerable to COVID-19 and other communicable diseases due to the degradation of its health system and the overcrowding, lack of water, and poor sanitation in IDP sites. As of March 2022, only 4.4% of the population had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.⁷

Surrounded by active conflict frontlines and border walls, Syrians in the North-West are neither able to escape their dire living conditions nor the endemic violence linked to the ongoing conflict. In this context, the cross-border mandate provided by the UN Security Council has provided a lifeline to millions of civilians in NWS, enabling the delivery of life-saving assistance, including medications, food and emergency shelter, and specialized protection services.⁸ Nonetheless, the delivery of critical aid has been hindered by chronic underfunding.

⁵ *North-West Syria Situation Report*, last updated on 20 April 2022, OCHA.

⁶ *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, 8 February 2022.

⁷ *North-West Syria Situation Report*, last updated on 20 April 2022, OCHA.

⁸ *The Implications of the UN Cross-Border Vote in Syria*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2021 at 3.

III. PRIORITY PROTECTION RISKS

A. Risk: Ongoing Attacks Against Civilians and Civilian Infrastructure, in Violation of Human Rights and IHL

Despite the 5 March 2020 ceasefire,⁹ conflict in NWS continues. In 2021, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified incidents in which at least 259 civilians were killed, over 100 of whom were children, and at least 735 civilians were injured, as a result of attacks carried out by various parties to the conflict, including through airstrikes, ground-based strikes, armed clashes, shootings, and attacks with various types of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and incidents of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW).¹⁰ These figures are merely indicative, as verified by OHCHR, and should not be considered comprehensive; they likely represent a fraction of the violence faced by civilians. In every monthly situation report in 2022 thus far, OCHA has reported conflict activity including “artillery shelling occurred on most days.”¹¹ Importantly, clashes and mutual shellings are not limited to military targets. According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, residential areas have been affected, and evidence suggests that the

attacks appeared to be aimed at targeting civilians and civilian objects which are protected under IHL.¹² In areas affected by hostilities, first responders operate despite the risk of targeted attacks from secondary explosive devices.¹³

Idlib city and Ariha town are among the areas in NWS that have seen intensified attacks on densely populated civilian areas. According to the Commission of Inquiry, this has included artillery strikes on parts of Idlib city and its suburbs that killed multiple civilians and using munitions that appeared to be unguided artillery. Attacks include the one carried out one October morning in 2021 when at least 10 munitions hit central Ariha town as children were on their way to school. The attack killed at least 13 people, including four children and a female teacher, and damaged two schools. In this and other such attacks, there was not any indication of a military objective in the targeted urban areas.¹⁴

B. Risk: Continued Practice of Arbitrary Arrest & Detention, Torture and Ill-Treatment

NWS has also seen a systematic effort to stifle political dissent, including through an identified pattern of arbitrary arrest and detention of perceived political opponents and media workers by

various parties to the conflict. Many detainees report never having been brought before a judge and/or being denied legal counsel, including in death penalty cases. In the majority of cases documented

⁹ The agreement, brokered by the governments of Russia and Turkey, called for all military actions to cease along the line of contact in the Idlib de-escalation area.

¹⁰ *Civilian casualties in NW Syria and in Tel Abyad and Ras al-Ain, 1 January to 31 December 2021*, OHCHR. The incidents/figures/info exemplify human rights issues of concern as documented and verified by OHCHR. However, owing to the changing patterns of the conflict and the limited access to credible and/or reliable sources and info in many conflict-affected areas, verifying all incidents occurring across Syria remains challenging.

¹¹ See *OCHA Syrian Arab Republic: Developments in north-west Syria and Ras Al Ain – Tell Abiad* monthly Situation Reports from January to April 2022.

¹² *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, 8 February 2022, available at 10.

¹³ *Id.* at 14.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 11.

by OHCHR, detainees were denied information about the reasons for their detention and other due process rights, while their families were denied information concerning their whereabouts or their fate, raising concerns of enforced disappearances. Former detainees report that children are held alongside adults. Torture and ill-treatment have also allegedly taken place during detention and interrogation, and have included beatings, holding individuals in

stress positions, and electric shocks, including to genitals. Deaths in custody have also been reported. Some detainees have also been subject to sexual violence, including female detainees and male detainees, with those who are gay or bisexual, or perceived to be, at higher risk of violence. Transgender women and men have also been targeted for violence.¹⁵

C. Risk: Pervasive Gender-Based Violence, with Limited Availability of Preventive & Responsive GBV Services

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been a pervasive feature of the conflict in Syria, including the North-West since it began in 2011. Sexual violence, including conflict related sexual violence (CRSV), has been regularly reported. Other forms of GBV in NWS include femicide, “honor” crimes, targeted physical, psychological and emotional abuse, family and intimate partner violence, and child and forced marriages.

Women and girls are disproportionately targeted by all forms of sexual violence. However, men and boys are also impacted, particularly in detention. Survivors of sexual violence often suffer from long-term physical and psychological traumas, including sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, and post-traumatic stress. With health and protection services severely stressed, survivors are often unable to receive adequate care. Additional consequences for female survivors of sexual violence range from threats of divorce and excommunication from one’s family to the very real threat of “honor” killings. One of the most devastating consequences of rape is unwanted pregnancies in a context where safe abortion services remain illegal.

Based on GBV assessments conducted in 2021, women and girls reported feeling more exposed to sexual violence than in the past and overall feeling less safe in their communities.¹⁶ Sexual

“I know a story about a girl who was raped when she was nine years old by the neighbor’s son. The girl has still not got married and her family spread rumors that she has a mental illness. They [think] that it is better that people consider her as mentally insane than to know that she was raped at a young age. The girl is always a victim, and they refuse to let her meet any stranger.”

-Adult woman, Al Bab sub-district, Aleppo.

¹⁵ “I lost my dignity”: Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic, Conference room paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2018, and They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways: Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and Transgender Women in the Syrian Conflict, Human Rights Watch, 2020

¹⁶ *Voices from Syria 2022: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence, Area of Responsibility.

harassment remains present in all places frequented by adolescent girls and women, including schools, markets, work and distribution points, and has impacted on their freedom of movement as well as on their capacity to engage in needed education or livelihood activities. According to GBVIMS+ data analysis,¹⁷ most GBV incidents in NWS are reported over a month after occurrence, which impacts on a survivor's ability to receive timely lifesaving interventions. Fear of the continuation of abuse, or new violent consequences such as social stigma or retaliation, along with insufficient coverage and availability of services, prevent survivors from receiving timely care.

Women and girls who are affected by multiple systems of discrimination, such as widows, women and girls who are displaced, or live with a disability, are exposed to higher levels of risk overall and

D. Risk: Worsening Trends with Respect to Child Marriage

Child marriage remains one of the most widespread forms of GBV experienced by children. Adolescent girls between 12 and 17 years old are disproportionately affected. The risk has increased in 2022 with 71% of communities raising child marriage as a protection concern (HNO 2022) compared to 62% in 2021. Child marriage is a harmful traditional practice pre-existent to the crisis. However, the trend has worsened due to the protracted nature of the conflict: vulnerable families now use child marriage as a coping mechanism to alleviate financial burdens and/or to protect the girls against pervasive sexual violence. Child marriage has been documented in progressively more harmful forms over the years, including at younger ages - including via induced puberty by use of hormone therapy - to older partners, or for serial and/or temporary marriages. Virginity testing – a form of GBV - has become a common practice to prove the chastity of adolescent girls before marriage.

face specific forms of sexual violence as well. Women with intellectual impairments are five times more likely to be sexually abused,¹⁸ and women who are divorced or widowed are considered much more likely to be sexually exploited in the process of seeking housing or employment compared to married women. It is important to note that rape also continues to happen within the context of marriage, including child marriage, making the home a highly unsafe space for married girls and women.

Unfortunately, while the need for GBV prevention and response activities continue to increase, funding for GBV programming has been inconsistent and short-term, and resulted in the temporary suspension or the outright closure of essential programs.

Following child marriage, adolescent girls are at heightened risk of secondary violence perpetrated by the intimate partners or in-laws, such as sexual, physical, economic, and emotional abuse. The consequences on their health, education and general wellbeing are devastating. Child pregnancy is on the rise, with an average 15% of the assisted deliveries in NWS involving under-aged mothers.¹⁹ About 45% of the assisted child pregnancies end by miscarriage, including documented cases of unsafe abortions.

GBV actors are working towards ensuring social inclusion, and fostering an environment favorable to safe disclosure, and help-seeking behavior for adolescent girls at risk or survivors of child marriage through targeted prevention and response programming.

¹⁷ [GBVIMS Trend Analysis Reports](#).

¹⁸ Protection Working Group meeting, 17th February 2021. Intersectionality in NES. [presentation]. Humanity and Inclusion.

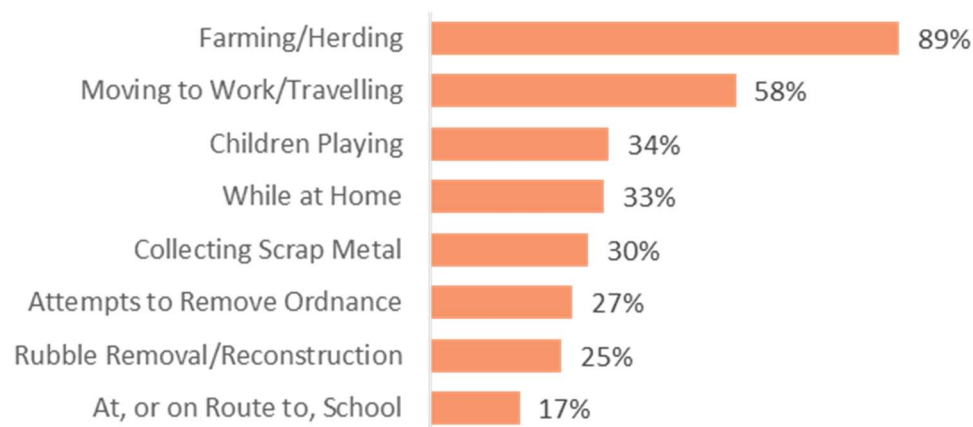
¹⁹ Sexual and Reproductive Health Technical Working Group, 2021.

E. Risk: High Prevalence of Fatalities, Injuries & Movement Restrictions Due to Widespread Explosive Hazard Contamination

The conflict in NWS has been characterized by the widespread use of indiscriminate weapons, namely explosive ordnances, airstrikes, heavy weapon fire, and IEDs. The scale and scope of the explosive ordnance contamination in NWS is not yet fully known because of the inability of qualified mine action actors to access, survey, and clear the contamination. In the 2022 MSNA, key informants in 65% of assessed locations in NWS reported injuries and deaths in their communities as a result of explosive hazard contamination, suggesting a particularly high prevalence of explosive ordnances in the region. Ongoing active hostilities are further expanding the scale of explosive hazard contamination, compounding the risk and impact on civilians and their communities.

Alarming, 61% of key informants surveyed in NWS have indicated that they know someone who has been injured or killed by explosive ordnances.²⁰ Based on available data, for each known explosive accident, an average of 1.5 people are killed and two people are physically injured, with approximately one in three survivors suffering at least one limb amputation.²¹ These injuries are common and require physical rehabilitation (including prosthesis) and psychosocial support, which in turn requires medical specialists and long-term health care intervention, in addition to socio-economic interventions to support inclusion of survivors. Explosive incidents add further pressure on the local health system, which is already stretched beyond capacity.

Activities During Injuries/Deaths from Explosive Hazard Contamination



The detrimental impacts extend beyond physical safety and the right to life. Freedom of movement is impacted, with 86% of households in NWS reporting movement restriction in or close to their current locations because of the risks posed by explosive ordnances (MSNA 2021). Moreover, the destruction or contamination of key infrastructure, such as hospitals, has deprived civilians of basic services.²² The existence of contamination also hampers safe delivery of humanitarian aid and services. With the vast majority of contamination reported on agricultural land, explosive hazard contamination has also affected the ability of individuals to engage in livelihood activities and reduced their capacity for economic recovery.

While explosive hazard contamination affects all individuals, specific groups have been acutely affected by explosive incidents. 31% of

²⁰ MSNA 2022.

²¹ Mine Action Sub-Cluster Victim Assistance Report April 2021.

²² UNMAS Syria, "Programmes: Syria," updated June 2018.

known victims of reported explosive ordnance incidents were children, out of which 30% were hurt or killed while playing.

Humanitarian mine action survey and clearance is the only way to permanently remove this protection threat. Unfortunately, specialized equipment needed for survey and clearance exercises cannot currently be brought into the region due to government restrictions rooted in fears that such equipment may be misappropriated by parties to the conflict. In the absence of clearance, preventive interventions have focused on explosive ordnance risk education (EORE). Current EORE programming includes direct sessions, school sessions, social media campaigns, and SMS. A

scale-up of EORE programming is needed, with specific outreach to harder-to-reach communities, to maximize impacts among people in need. An UNMAS Syrian Response Programme report on Victim Data Analysis indicated that between November 2013 and February 2020, 97% of explosive hazard victims reported that they had not received EORE prior to the incident.

Finally, Victim Assistance (VA) services – including assistive devices and medical care - are often cost-prohibitive for low-income families. Service scarcity results in extended traveling distances for those in need. Economic support, and medical care, prosthetic/orthotic services, and daily functioning assistive devices are key needs for survivors of explosive incidents.

F. Risk: Barriers to Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and Older Persons Persist

Over a decade of sustained conflict and conflict-related injuries, exposure to explosive ordnance and psychological harm, malnutrition, and disruptions to prenatal care and early childhood development, have led to very high incidence of impairment and disability in NWS.²³ According to recent assessments, at least 32% of individuals at or over the age 12 live with a disability.²⁴ This prevalence increases to at least 39% for displaced individuals. At least 59% of all households in this area have at least one member living with a disability. Older individuals are more likely to have at least one disability compared with their younger counterparts. In NWS, 95% of

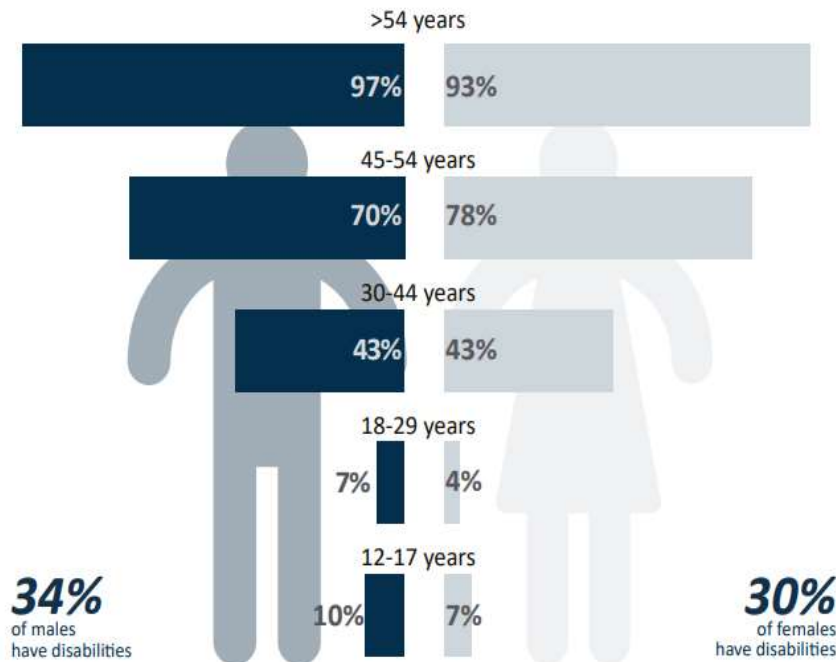
individuals aged 55 years and above have disabilities, compared to 50% of those between 30-54 years and 7% of individuals aged 12-29. Infrastructure degradation in the North-West further exposes Syrians to physical injury and trauma, while compounding risks for persons with existing disabilities, and undermining their access to essential services and tailored support.

All persons have a right to full and effective participation in society on an equal basis to others. Unfortunately, older persons and PWDs

²³As per the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

²⁴Statistics and graphic on PWDs provided by the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) to the Protection Cluster on 25 April 2022. Information covers the geographic region covered by the NWS Protection Cluster, and thus includes both “NWS” and “NS” regions referenced in standalone HNAP reporting.

Prevalence of individuals with disabilities, by sex and age
in NWS/NS (% of individuals)



in NWS face multiple barriers to inclusion in society. Such barriers can include overt acts of physical and psychological violence and prejudice. Misconceptions and stigmas around disabilities have led to a denial of services: many individuals with cognitive and intellectual impairments have been turned away from health centers because they are perceived as a threat to staff. Women, including older women, and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to compounded discrimination, exploitation, and violence, including gender-based violence (GBV). Yet they have significant challenges in accessing support and services that could reduce their risk and vulnerability.

Barriers to inclusion also result from the breakdown of economic structures, health care availability, family and community support, educational opportunities, housing, transportation, and other infrastructures and essential services as a result of conflict. The inability to access assistive devices, tailored services, caregivers, and protection networks make PWDs and older persons more dependent on others, more likely to be left behind in the event of new crises, and at greater risk of neglect, exploitation and abuse.

G. Risk: Widespread Reliance on Child Labor by Impoverished Families

Protracted conflict in Syria, a deteriorating economy with limited livelihood opportunities, coupled with hyperinflation, has resulted in extreme poverty among IDPs, forcing many families to rely on child labor including worst forms of child labor like child recruitment to make ends meet. 22% of assessed communities report child labor as a frequent occurrence to support household income.²⁵ Child labor occurs with even greater frequency at so-called “widow’s camps”, which include sites for women who are widowed, divorced, whose

husbands are missing, or who are otherwise single with children. At these widow’s camps, 58% of boys and 49% of girls aged 11 and above are reported to be involved in child labor.²⁶

In NWS, 68.4% of key informants reported that child labor prevents children from attending schools.²⁷ Most of the children involved in labor are exposed to violence, exploitation, abuse, psychological harm, including death during hostilities.

²⁵ HNO 2021.

²⁶ The Women and Children of Syria’s Widow Camps: Hardest to Reach, Most at Risk, World Vision, April 2022.

²⁷ MSNA 2022.

H. Risk: Increasing Rates of Psychosocial Distress among Children and Caregivers

Children in NWS have been exposed to violence and destruction. Many have witnessed the killing of family members or have experienced multiple displacement and/or family separation. Children in NWS have to cope with reduced access to life saving services. School and normal daily childhood activities are unavailable to most children. Instead, these children must worry about loss of home, economic difficulties and inadequate living conditions. Children are also at increased risk of arrest, detention, torture and sexual abuse. Preoccupation with the many dangers present in their lives, along with difficult and restrictive living environment in IDP sites, has become a major cause of psychosocial distress amongst children. Insecurity, economic hardship and multiple displacements have exacerbated child protection concerns and fueled harmful coping mechanisms. The capacity of parents and caregivers to care and protect their children have been severely undermined.

Child protection situation monitoring reports from NWS indicate a marked increase in psycho-social support needs among both children and their caregivers: 84.99% of interviewees reported that children need psychosocial programs, and 70.22% reported that caregivers need specialized psychological services,²⁸ demonstrating the increasing and cumulative toll on mental well-being, with immediate and if not addressed, lifelong consequences. The increase of psychosocial distress among children and caregivers negatively affects conditions for child development, well-being and safety and can lead to secondary protection concerns including physical violence, neglect of children by caregivers, and harmful coping mechanisms including substance abuse.

I. Risk: Continued Inability to Secure Civil Status Documentation Due to Lack of GoS Civil Registries in NWS

The lack or loss of civil documentation (CD) is widespread among the population in NWS. Such documents include, but are not limited to, birth, death, marriage, divorce certificates, identity cards, family booklets, and passports. According to the 2021 MSNA Survey, 89% of households in the NWS reported that at least one household member lacked any Government of Syria (GoS) issued CD, compared to 21% of households in GoS-controlled areas. It is not possible to obtain GoS-issued CD within NWS as there are no GoS civil registration offices. Individuals must either cross conflict lines or employ an intermediary to obtain CD, resulting in the former case in significant physical risks at checkpoints and in civil registry offices, including risks

of arbitrary arrest, detention and forced conscription, or in the latter case in very high costs. Lack or loss of CD is reported to hinder access to humanitarian assistance. Despite advocacy with humanitarian actors and the promotion of a community validation alternative, some donors, auditors, and other stakeholders continue to require official identity documents for access to assistance, including cash-based assistance. Children are among the most affected by lack of documentation, as it can hinder their access to education and health services, and leave them vulnerable in the long term to the risk of statelessness.

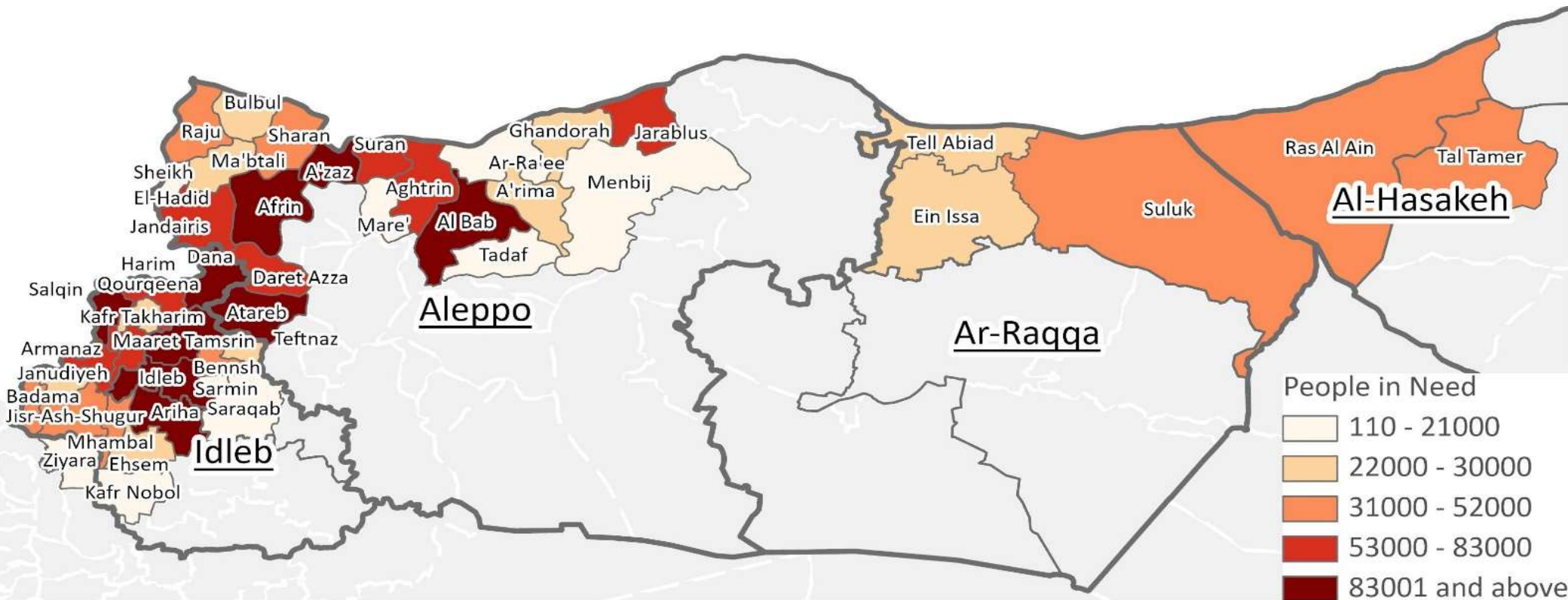
²⁸ Child Protection Situation Monitoring: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/child-protection-situation-monitoring-dashboard>

J. Risk: Systemic Challenges in Exercising Housing, Land & Property (HLP) Rights, and Forced Evictions from Informal Sites

Hostilities have caused widespread damage to HLP in NWS. In addition to the destruction of civilian residential areas, the destruction of land and civil registries has affected land governance and the recording/updating of HLP transactions. In NWS, the broad range of administrative regulations and the multiplicity of de facto authorities governing HLP transactions has added to the complexity of ascertaining legal rights, and accessing remedies. Although the existence of women’s rights in Syrian law is widely acknowledged,

traditions and customs are often used to justify discrimination. Forced evictions continue to be reported in Idleb and northern Aleppo, including from collective centers or makeshift informal settlements, and public facilities such as schools and universities. Even when law enforcement power is not used, coercive practices by landlords or local councils often result in forced evictions, leaving individuals with limited support or alternative accommodation.

IV. PROTECTION CLUSTER COVERAGE, ACCESS & FUNDING



A. COVERAGE AND ACCESS

The NWS Protection Cluster (Turkey) was activated in 2015 following the passage of UNSCR 2165 (2014). The Cluster includes: GBV, Child Protection & Mine Action Sub-Clusters; Protection Monitoring Task Force; and HLP & Inclusion Technical Working Groups, all of which are co-led by UN agencies & NGO partners. The Cluster coordinates the response of protection actors working inside northern Syria in areas accessible from Turkey and outside the control of the GoS. This includes territory in NWS controlled by non-state armed groups and related de-facto authorities, as well as areas under the effective control of the Government of Turkey, including Ras-al-Ayn and Tel Abyad. All coordination and technical support are provided remotely from Gaziantep, Turkey.

Conflict-related dynamics have been a significant challenge for humanitarian access and have prevented UN agencies and international staff from NGOs from entering NWS. Humanitarian access allows protection actors to build trust with affected communities and vulnerable persons, thereby enabling reporting of violations by survivors, fosters reliability in sustained service provision, facilitates the Cluster to ensure adherence by partners to minimum standards of service provision, including with respect to data protection, and ultimately ensures safety of our clients and staff.

B. FUNDING DATA

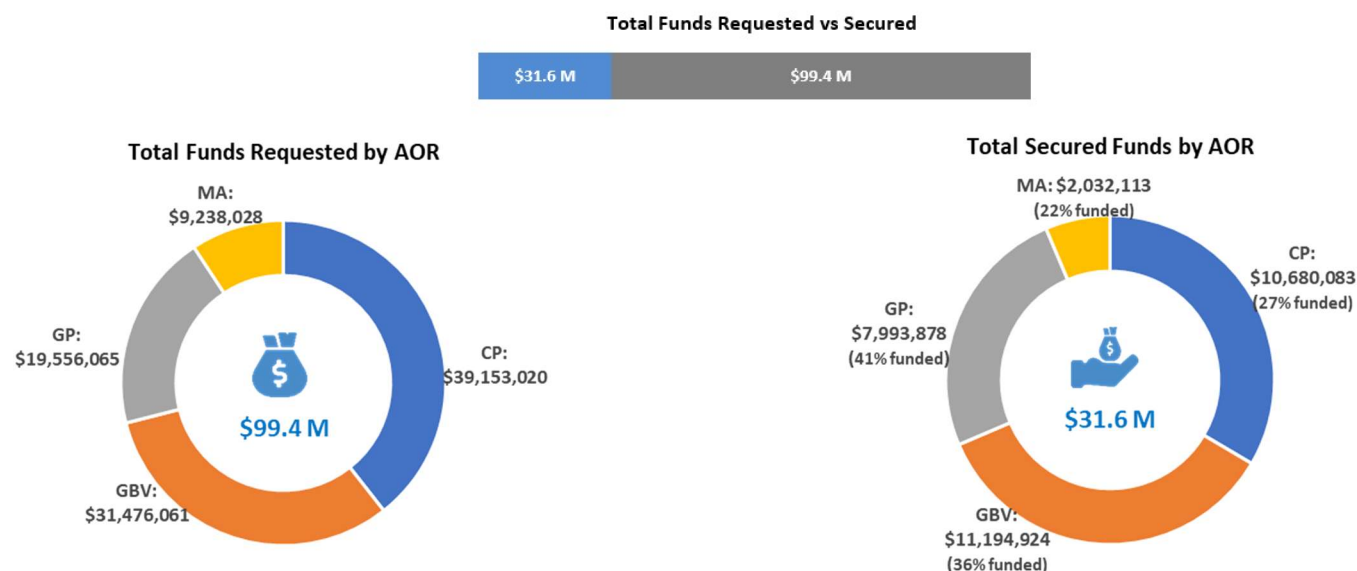
In 2021, only 56% of the NWS Protection Cluster's funding requirements were met, which severely impacted our ability to prevent, mitigate and respond to protection threats, risks and needs. Despite the increase in needs on the ground, the funding gap for 2022 has become more severe. As of March, only 32% of the Cluster's funding requirements for 2022 have been met. Continued underfunding of protection activities will leave critical protection threats, risks and needs unaddressed, with civilians unable to access lifesaving assistance and increasingly resorting to negative coping strategies. This will have detrimental consequences on protection of vulnerable persons, increase demand for services and assistance across sectors, and undermine attempts to foster community resilience.

Reductions in funding have already had significant impact on protection services. Funding for GBV programming in general, and Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) in particular, remains unpredictable and short-term; ensuring the sustainability of WGSS

remains a challenge. In 2021, at least 5 WGSS had to shut down due to lack of funds. In those communities, there is currently no alternative to access life-saving GBV services. Response to the "Widow's Camps" are of limited scale, short-term and not sustainable. The GBV projects targeting these camps remain severely under-funded, despite alarming evidence of needs. Similarly, reduced funding for child-friendly spaces, community-based programs, psychological support services (PSS), structured non-specialized programs, and parenting skills in NWS has impacted the cluster's capacity to respond to the increase in psychological distress and trauma among children and their caregivers. In the last six months, at least 12 humanitarian organizations operating community-based child friendly spaces and PSS mobile teams reported a full suspension of their activities due to funding gaps. The funding shortfall for mine action continues to have immediate and often permanent consequences. Although risk education promotes safer behavior, NWS needs a small but comprehensive surveying, clearance and disposal capacity able to deal effectively with the

complete range of hazardous items found there. Without this ability to fully eliminate risks, the exceptionally high rates of injury and death from explosive hazards will continue to strain an already

overburdened healthcare system, and to compromise lives and livelihoods in vulnerable communities.



V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Respect for International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law

- *For parties to the conflict* to immediately halt all attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure and civilian areas, in accordance with their international humanitarian law and human rights obligations.
- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership* to consistently and forthrightly raise concerns about humanitarian access, respect for international humanitarian law and human rights standards, adherence to humanitarian principles, and protection related considerations, with parties to the conflict, as well as local authorities.
- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership* to continue supporting impartial and credible investigations into all indiscriminate and direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. This should also include further support for human rights and civil society organizations to comprehensively monitor and report on violations.

- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership to advocate for:*
 - an immediate end to the practice of arbitrary arrests and detentions, alleged torture and ill-treatment during detentions and interrogations;
 - impartial investigation of all allegations of sexual violence and unlawful deaths in custody; assurances that detainees will be afforded due process rights, and the reasons for their detention and the location of detention facilities will be communicated to their families. This should also include support for human rights and civil society organizations to provide legal assistance to detainees, and to access detention facilities to monitor conditions therein.
 - an immediate end to all grave violations against children and related CP violations, including recruitment, detention and killing of children, and structured protection dialogue on such concerns with all parties to the conflict

Continuation of Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid, and Monitoring of Cross-Line Aid Effectiveness

- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership to recognize that UN cross-border operations are the most cost-effective, timely, safe, and pragmatic way to respond to urgent humanitarian needs in NWS at this time.*
- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership to recognize that the provision of humanitarian services, including protection services, requires sustained, predictable, and safe access to people in need and that such sustained access must be supported at multiple levels.*
- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership*
 - *to recognize that linking humanitarian operations and funding with UNSC cross-border resolutions has led to a short-term cycle of aid that does not align with medium to longer-term planning nor supporting resilience and meaningful solutions in a protracted crisis, and*
 - *to strategize on how best to ensure predictability and continuity of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected populations in NWS by separating aid delivery from renewal/non-renewal of the UNSC cross-border resolution, including via identification of viable alternatives to current pooled funding mechanisms.*
- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership to support robust and independent monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of crossline humanitarian aid mechanisms across Syria, including any and all attempts, by parties to the conflict, to delay, block or divert aid or limit the independence and impartiality of humanitarian actors in their crossline efforts.*
- *For member states, donors and humanitarian leadership to recognize that assistance through crossline modality is only complementary and not a replacement to the current cross-border assistance.*

Scaled-Up Protection Response

- *For donors and humanitarian leadership* to support a scaled-up protection response in NWS, via expanded coverage of specialized protection services by INGO and NGO partners – e.g. Women & Girls Safe Spaces; Child Friendly Spaces; case management; psycho-social support for survivors, children and caregivers; tailored multi-sectoral support for PWDs and older persons; legal aid for documentation and detention cases; forced eviction monitoring and multi-sectoral response; protection monitoring and community-based protection; survey and clearance of explosive hazards, risk education and victim assistance – and to view protection programming as a key enabler in supporting community resilience.
- *For donors and humanitarian leadership* to advocate with relevant authorities for lifting of restrictions on importation of specialized equipment needed by humanitarian mine action actors to survey and clear contaminated areas, for unimpeded access to such areas, and for scaling up of funding for Victims Assistance services.
- *For donors and humanitarian leadership* to advocate with all Clusters and humanitarian organizations to adopt community validation - as an alternative to possession of civil documents – as a means to access all forms of humanitarian aid, including cash-based assistance.
- *For donors* to contribute flexible multi-year funding for protection/humanitarian programming, in line with the two-year Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2022-2023, including to local NGO partners, thereby enabling predictable programming, longer-term interventions, community resilience, and measurable impact.
- *For donors and humanitarian leadership* to advocate for the mainstreaming of protection across the humanitarian response, including via inclusion-oriented review of projects funded through pooled funding mechanisms, and scaled up accountability to affected populations efforts across all sectors.