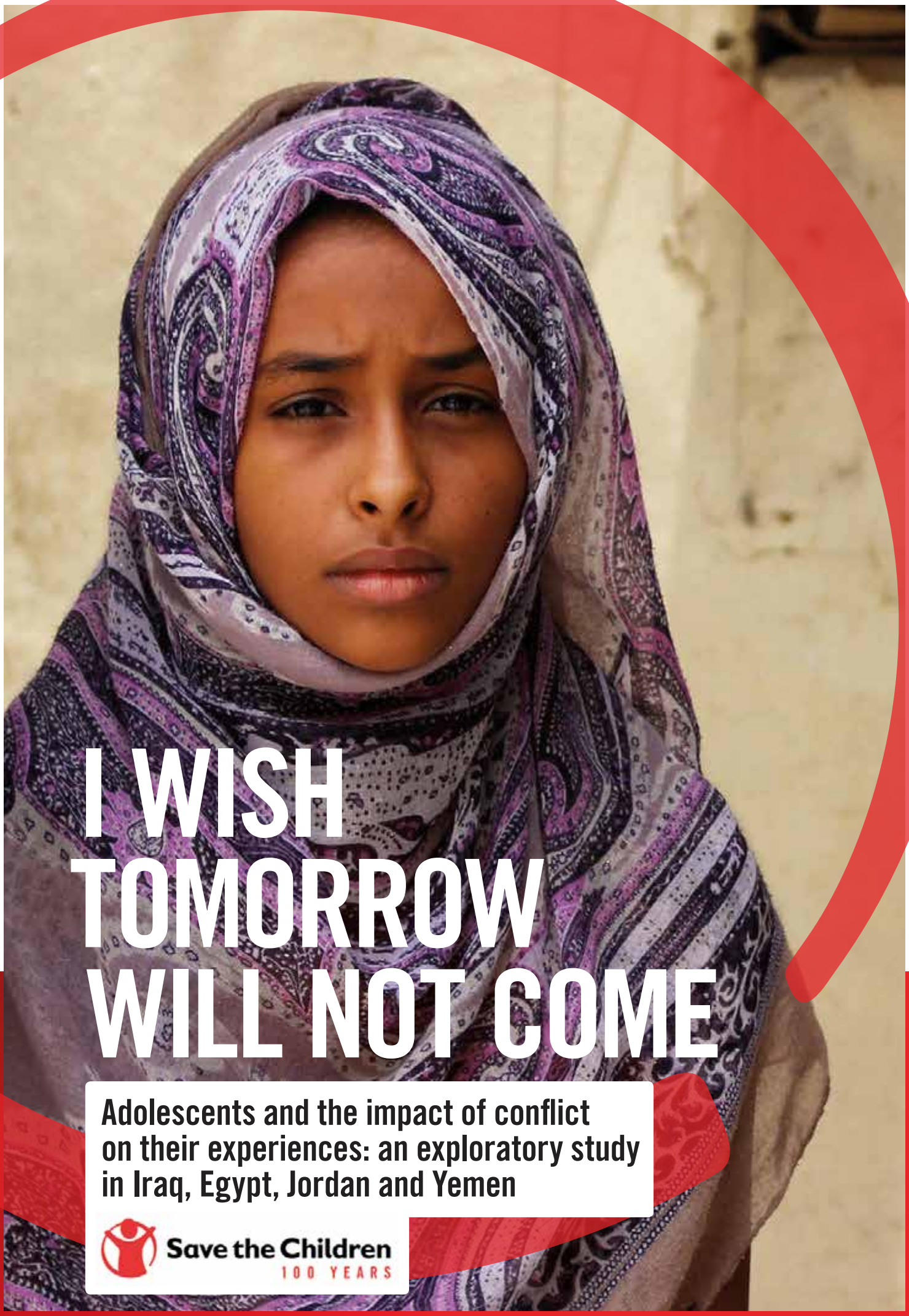

I WISH TOMORROW WILL NOT COME

Adolescents and the impact of conflict on their experiences: an exploratory study in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen

Save the Children
100 YEARS

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. Around the world, we give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

Acknowledgements

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For information about this study and report, please contact Natalia Tapies, Regional Senior Advisor, Adolescents and Youth at Natalia.tapies@savethechildren.org

Note

Throughout this report names marked * have been changed to protect the person's identity.

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Cover photo: Hanan,* 13 years old, stands outside her home in Aden, southern Yemen. Hanan's father was injured during the conflict, which has prevented him from working and made life difficult for the family. Hanan also contracted tuberculosis and took a long time to recover, so missed out on a lot of school. (Photo: Noora Nasser/Save the Children)

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I WISH TOMORROW WILL NOT COME

Adolescents and the impact of conflict on their experiences: an exploratory study in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen

Hamza,* 16 years old, helps provide for his mother and five siblings. He was injured on the first day of airstrikes in Amran, Yemen when a shell injured him and broke his leg.

PHOTO: MOHAMMED AWADH/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Contents

Mariam,* 16 years old, is from Mosul in northern Iraq. She lost her hand during the conflict.

PHOTO: SAM TARLING/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Executive summary

"Sometimes I go to my neighbours' wedding parties to dance and have fun, otherwise I stay at home alone. I always keep thinking of tomorrow, when I will be so tired from work and the bad people will throw stones at me. I wish tomorrow will not come. Sometimes I come home crying because people at the market and the farms are so mean to me."

Samira,* 14-year-old girl, Yemen

The world today is home to the largest generation of young people in history – 1.8 billion – who now make up nearly a quarter of the world's population.[1] After sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region hosts the second-largest proportion of young people in the world in terms of population size (29%).[1] At the same time, the MENA region has experienced the most rapid increase in incidents of war and violent conflict over the last decade.[3] It now has the greatest concentration of humanitarian needs globally and is home to the world's largest refugee and internally displaced population.[4]

The situation for adolescents affected by conflict in the MENA region is underexplored. There is a significant lack of data and research on their experiences and rarely are the voices of young people heard. In light of this, in 2017 Save the Children conducted an in-depth participatory study with 331 adolescent boys and girls aged 12–17 living in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen and asked them what their biggest concerns and priorities are. We wanted to hear directly from young people how conflict affects their lives, what challenges they face and what they see as the solutions.

We were staggered by what adolescents told us – especially about the extent to which violence permeates every aspect of their lives – and we have produced this report to ensure that their unique perspectives are heard, to highlight the challenges they face and to mobilise decision makers to do more so that young people have all they need to survive and thrive.

The study found that adolescents, across all age groups, genders and locations, are exposed to high levels of violence in all spheres of their life – at home, in school and in the community – and they often have no safe place or support network to turn to.

Violence was not only found to be highly prevalent in countries affected by armed conflict, but also in locations not affected by active conflict.

How we define adolescents

We define adolescents as those boys and girls transitioning from childhood to adulthood. This transition is contextual, and influenced by many developmental and environmental factors.

Adolescents may include both children and adults. Some commonly accepted age-based definitions are:

Children: 0–18 years old
(Convention of the Rights of the Child)

Adolescents: 10–19 years old
(UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA)

Youth: 15–24 years old
(UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA)

Young people: 10–24 years old
(UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA)

The study – a rare in-depth regional study that raises the voices of adolescents in MENA region and hears directly from them how they cope with and manage conflict in their lives – found that adolescents, across all age groups, genders and locations, are overwhelmingly exposed to high levels of violence in all spheres of their life – at home, in school and in the community – and they often have no safe place or support network to turn to.

Violence was not only found to be highly prevalent in countries affected by armed conflict such as Yemen or Iraq. The study also shows the high levels of violence and discrimination adolescents face in locations not affected by active armed conflict, such as Egypt and Jordan.

Many adolescents expressed how they are rarely asked about the conflicts they face in their lives, and overwhelmingly feel that nobody listens to them. They talked about how they have to constantly negotiate their way with their parents, teachers, other adults and authority figures. While many reported turning to their primary caregivers for support when facing the risk of injury or death during times of active conflict, others reported not seeking their caregivers' support when they faced other forms of violence or harassment – on the contrary, adolescents often feared further punishment from their caregivers. Although strained relationships between adolescents and caregivers are common, the environment of systemic violence in which adolescents in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen live, at both a micro- and macro-scale, leads to them feeling frustration, distress and fear on a daily basis about their situations. Boys and

Many adolescents expressed how they overwhelmingly feel that nobody listens to them.

The environment of systemic violence leads adolescents to feel frustration, distress and fear on a daily basis about their situations.

Key findings

Across all four contexts the key findings of the study include:

- Adolescents girls and boys in all locations reported being **witness to and/or being subjected to high levels of violence in their communities**. Those in countries in active conflict mentioned shelling/bombing and armed fighting, while adolescents from both conflict-affected and other contexts also reported the prevalence of criminal violence, kidnappings, killings and various forms of sexual violence.
- Adolescent **girls reported feeling imprisoned** by their parents, as they are forced to stay home and are not allowed to go to school or even to go out with or speak with friends, for fear of damaging their reputation. They reported physical and psychological violence perpetrated against them by male relatives. Adolescent girls expressed frustration at their lack of options and the fact that no one listens to them. They do not feel in charge of their present or their future.
- Adolescent girls and boys reported use of **physical and psychological violence at home, by caregivers as well as other relatives**. They reported how caregivers were not only unable to play a positive role in helping them manage conflicts in their lives, but were often the source of conflict and violence.
- Adolescents girls and boys in all locations spoke of the **violence, neglect and corruption they experienced in schools**. They reported regular violence from teachers and school administrators. They described the hitting in school as a great injustice being done to them. They expressed frustration with their inability to deal with the issues they face at school.
- Adolescent **boys reported being targeted by the police, as well as by gangs and armed groups**, and felt particularly powerless and resigned to not being able to change the situation.

When we asked adolescents what would help solve the problems they face, they were clear – the majority prioritised feeling safe at home and in their communities.

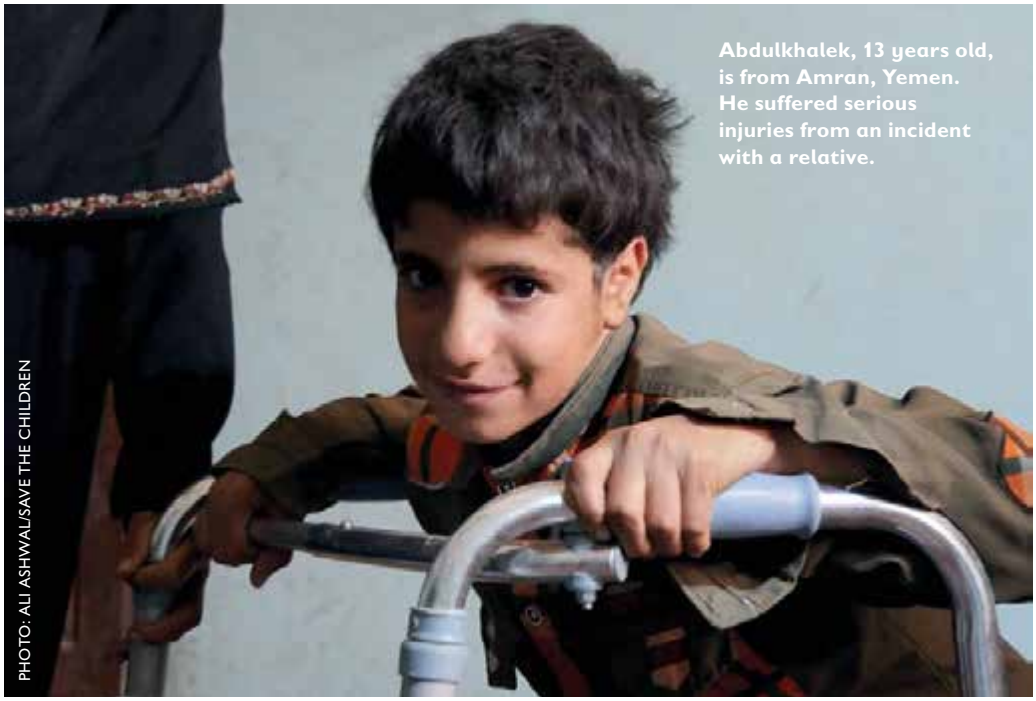

PHOTO: ALI ASHWAL/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Abdulkhalek, 13 years old, is from Amran, Yemen. He suffered serious injuries from an incident with a relative.

girls reported using coping strategies that are harmful for them – some boys and girls expressed a desire to take part in fighting to feel like they are contributing in some way, with many more resorting to drugtaking or marrying young to escape their situations.

The macro-scale violence – such as armed conflict or political violence – that adolescents face further exacerbates their hardships. Armed conflict and displacement force families into dire conditions and cause psychological distress to families as a whole. The study found a very deep divide and breakdown between adolescents and their caregivers. Caregivers feel overwhelmed by the difficult economic situations they find themselves in and as a result do not have the time or energy to deal with their "stubborn, selfish or aggressive" adolescents.

When we asked adolescents what would help solve the problems they face, they were clear – the majority prioritised feeling safe at home and in their communities. Many adolescents also prioritised protection from drugs and being able to freely express their thoughts and beliefs. Adolescents also consistently prioritised access to education and health care, often stating how important both are to enabling them to manage the problems they face in their young lives. They also asked for more opportunities to express their views, and emphasised wanting to develop their talents by having more access to programmes that offer drawing, theatre, art and games. They also expressed that they wanted more programmes in which they could "share their feelings" and "learn to deal with them".

Caregivers feel overwhelmed by the difficult economic situations they find themselves in and do not have the time or energy to deal with their "stubborn, selfish or aggressive" adolescents.

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Adolescents have been largely neglected by humanitarian and development actors in the crises affecting the MENA region. At a crucial time in their development as they transition to adulthood, adolescents face multi-layered vulnerabilities that are exacerbated by a context of conflict and violence. They are neither cared for as the children they still are nor respected as the young adults they are becoming, and feel that their thoughts, feelings and experiences are neglected and dismissed.

In spite of this grim picture, some adolescents showed a desire to change things around them – they have an awareness of their rights and a deep

Adolescents showed a desire to change things around them – they have an awareness of their rights and a deep sense of injustice when they are not respected, and they ultimately want to see conflicts – both political and personal – resolved peacefully and through dialogue.

sense of injustice when they are not respected, and they ultimately want to see conflicts – both political and personal – resolved peacefully and through dialogue. Adolescents have a critical role to play in addressing challenges and they can be agents of change for positive futures.

As Save the Children reaches its 100-year anniversary, we are intensifying our century-long efforts to push more than ever for the protection and support of children affected by conflict. This study is a timely reminder that children affected by conflict are not a static, homogenous group – they are at different ages and life stages and, like all children, they will continue to grow and develop even through protracted conflicts and crises. As children's wants and needs – as well as their strengths and vulnerabilities – change as they move from childhood to adulthood, the international community must adapt and change with them. As this study also highlights, the impacts of conflict on adolescent girls and boys are complex, far-reaching and insidious – bombs and warfare are not the only threat faced by adolescents in active warzones: their homes, schools and streets can also be battlegrounds, and even for those who have fled to places of relative safety, their protection, recovery and development remain under acute threat.

Much more needs to be done to create a visionary, long-term, holistic programming and policy response that follows adolescents affected by conflict throughout their childhood and works to protect and empower them in their adolescence as they become young adults. It is time for all actors to listen to what adolescents are saying, intensify efforts to protect them and provide them with the opportunities they need to thrive.

PHOTO: GUILHEM ALANDRY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Amal,* 15 years old, from Syria, at one of Save the Children's drop-in centres inside Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. Amal was forced into marriage at the age of 13, but has since divorced the man.

Recommendations for action

We call on national governments, donors, humanitarian actors and the international community to:

- Protect adolescent girls and boys living in humanitarian contexts against all forms of violence, including armed conflict and violence at home, school and in the community, by working with caregivers, communities and institutions to change how they see adolescents. Support adolescents in their agency so that they are better equipped to navigate their violent and conflict-prone environment.
- Recognise that adolescent girls and boys living in humanitarian contexts have needs that are distinct from those of younger children and adults, and support and increase programming approaches targeted specifically at adolescents that are responsive to their diverse needs. Invest in age disaggregation in all programmes, and ensure humanitarian structures are age-sensitive and inclusive of adolescents.
- Prioritise programming for adolescents that is flexible; culturally sensitive; innovative; multi-sectoral; and integrated to ensure that adolescents' distinct needs in humanitarian contexts are met and that they are supported in successfully transitioning to adulthood. In particular, more adolescent-targeted programming must be developed that focuses on a combination of the following:
  - **Participation** – creating more opportunities for adolescents to build their capacities to express their views, engage in decision-making processes and contribute to their communities.
  - **Protection** – strengthening community-based systems and institutions to ensure that adolescents are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect within and outside the home, they are empowered to report abuse and they can trust authorities will hold perpetrators to account.
  - **Education** – expanding initiatives to ensure adolescents can continue their education by supporting their access to quality, safe and inclusive learning opportunities, including access to secondary education, non-formal education, skills building and job training;
  - **Mental health and psychosocial support services** (MHPSS) – improving adolescents' access to MHPSS to help them process negative experiences and teach them skills to manage their emotions and find positive ways of coping, build resilience and foster mental wellbeing. MHPSS that incorporate access to creative activities, play and other forms of self-expression should also be prioritised.
  - **Livelihoods** – in tandem with supporting adolescents to continue their education or pursue further training or skills building, ensure that they can access safe and adequate employment and livelihood opportunities.
- Support caregivers in humanitarian contexts to positively parent their adolescent children by providing livelihoods assistance, mental wellbeing and parenting support, and strengthening community-led child protection and accountability mechanisms.
- Ensure institutions that interact with adolescents, including schools, government departments and enforcement agencies, protect adolescents and act in their best interests.
- Ensure that adolescent-focused programming is evidence-based and address the significant gap in data and research on adolescents living in humanitarian contexts by funding improved data collection, disaggregated by age and sex, and targeted research –conducted *with* rather than *on* adolescents – to ensure adolescent programming is evidence-based and fit-for-purpose.
- Listen to adolescents and respond to their challenges and priorities – adolescents must be provided with meaningful opportunities to communicate the challenges and risks they face, voice their ideas on solutions, engage in decision-making processes and develop their leadership potential. Adolescents must also be supported to build their capacities to express themselves, know their rights and feel safe and confident to advocate for themselves at home, at school and in their communities.
- Support the development of adolescent-focused programming policies, guidelines and training materials to assist the appropriate targeting and implementation of interventions.

Why we need to prioritise adolescents in the MENA region

Adolescents have specific vulnerabilities and therefore have particular needs

Adolescence is a time of great change for any child as they transition from childhood to adulthood. In their journey to becoming an adult, children face huge changes physically, emotionally and socially. As they try to define who they are and find their way in the world, adolescent boys and girls are likely to test boundaries and experiment with 'adult behaviour', which is essential to their long-term development but also leaves them more vulnerable to risk.[5]

Becoming an adult is challenging even in the most peaceful settings. Adolescence should be a time when children have a safe and clear space to come to terms with the changes they are facing, unencumbered by engagement in adult roles and with the full support of nurturing adults at home, at school and in the community.[6] But this is rarely the case for adolescents living in conflict-affected contexts – their coming of age is instead surrounded by destruction and violence and they are also likely to experience a breakdown in their key support structures, including their families and wider communities.

For many adolescents in the MENA region, their development trajectory has been disrupted due to conflict and displacement and the paths they thought their lives would take have gone wildly off course. Many expected that they would finish school, get good jobs and one day have a happy family life. For young people from places such as Syria, Yemen and Iraq, their lives have instead been rocked by war, and many now find themselves living in new countries having lost everything they knew, including their homes and family members. Their caregivers are likely to be under significant stress and their capacities to support their children through this formative period of their lives will be stretched. As a consequence, many conflict-affected adolescents will be struggling to negotiate the transition to adulthood without adequate support. Their development is put at further risk because their difficult circumstances make them more vulnerable to protection risks.

In conflict-affected situations many adolescents will be required to take on adult responsibilities earlier than expected to support their families. Many will stop going to school so that they can earn a living or marry early, which affects their long-term potential and leaves them highly vulnerable to a range of risks including exploitation, physical and sexual violence and early pregnancy.

Adolescent boys are particularly vulnerable to child labour[7] and forced recruitment into armed groups.[8] For adolescent girls, who are often already isolated and marginalised, crisis heightens their vulnerability to gender-based violence; unwanted pregnancy; HIV infection; maternal death and disability; early and forced marriage; rape; trafficking; and sexual exploitation and abuse.[9] While the MENA region has shown a rapid decline in levels of child marriage over the past 25 years,[10] the practice often increases within conflict-affected and refugee populations as caregivers see it as a form of 'protection' and a way for families to keep the 'honour' of their daughters or to relieve financial pressures.[11] Child marriage brings significant health and wellbeing risks for adolescent girls – globally, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death for females aged 15 to 19.[12]

The mental wellbeing of adolescents – in both conflict and non-conflict contexts – is a key global concern. Worldwide, depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents,[13] and suicide is the second highest

cause of death for people aged between 15 and 29.[14] If girls and boys experience violence, poverty or humiliation or feel devalued during this formative part of their lives, they are at increased risk of developing mental health problems and, without special attention and support, the consequences will be long-lasting.[15]

As we have seen through our research on children's mental wellbeing in the Gaza Strip,[16] Iraq and Syria,[17] adolescents' exposure to armed conflict and political violence in the MENA region is likely to significantly impact their psychosocial wellbeing and have long-term mental health consequences. Life in conflict situations can result in further negative impacts on the youth's lives, such as increased substance abuse and the use of negative coping mechanisms such as self-blame or hiding or ignoring the problem. The majority of studies show that young people during and after conflict are likely to experience an increased risk of developing depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety related disorders. Girls are reported to have a higher prevalence of PTSD, depression, separation anxiety and psychological symptoms than boys. Meanwhile, boys are likely to show more behavioural problems, such as aggression and hyperactivity.[18]

Adolescents can be the catalyst for economic growth and stability in the MENA region

Adolescents represent a large constituency in the MENA region. Never before has the region had such a high share of young people. The MENA region's population is one of the most youthful in the world, with around 35% of the population aged between 10 and 24 years old, compared to the global average of 16%. According to UN estimates, the MENA region is currently home to some 228 million children and youth. Recent analysis, in 2017, projected that the numbers of children, adolescents and youth in the MENA region will reach 271 million in 2050, and that more than 33 million children and youth under the age of 24 will be added to MENA's population in the decade and a half between 2015 and 2030.[19]

While much has been said about the 'youth bulge', which is a phenomenon seen around the world, having a youthful population ultimately presents a window of opportunity for the MENA region. Unlike in other regions around the world, the growth of the youth population in the MENA region has been coupled with a decline in fertility rates.[20] This means

Zuhair,* 13 years old, was badly burned in an airstrike on a crowded funeral in Yemen.

PHOTO: MOHAMMED AWADH/SAVE THE CHILDREN

that with a larger working population and fewer dependants, the MENA region has a one-time opportunity to reap a 'demographic dividend'[21] and foster rapid economic growth and stability. To capitalise on this rare demographic opportunity for development, the MENA region – and the international community – will need to squarely focus on its youth population over at least the next two decades[22] and ensure that both males and females are healthy and educated, have options and opportunities in life, and are fully engaged citizens whose rights are upheld.[23]

Adolescents as agents of change

Adolescents also have a key role to play in society and peacebuilding – both as children who have the right to participate and express their views and as future citizens and leaders. A key hallmark of adolescence is the search for identity and voice. As adolescents become more aware of the world and their place in it, they want to have a greater say in issues that affect them and to be involved in finding solutions to problems they and their communities face. Fostering adolescent civic engagement is an essential part of their journey to becoming an adult and an active citizen. This need to be heard and engaged is likely to be even more acute among conflict-affected adolescents, considering the circumstances they live in and their limited access to education and employment.

Youth have been at the heart of the many of the recent movements for political change in the MENA region. These movements include revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as less visible but still significant calls for reform in Lebanon, Iraq and the occupied Palestinian territories. Young people's involvement in these protests and demonstrations has stemmed largely from their frustration with existing institutions and norms that have denied them economic and social opportunities and a political voice.[24]

PHOTO: NOELLE IBARRA/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Ali,* 15 years old, was displaced with his family by the conflict in northern Iraq.

PHOTO: LUCIA ZORO/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Rasha,* 13 years old, takes part in a drama class which is part of Save the Children's psychosocial support for adolescents at the Makani Centre in Zarqa, Jordan.

During UNHCR's and the Women's Refugee Commission's global consultations with refugee youth in 2015 and 2016, refugee and host-country participants in all the consultations expressed frustration that young people are rarely involved in decisions impacting their personal lives or in broader decision-making processes in their communities. Refugee youth also noted that they have few opportunities to analyse issues, develop solutions and present their ideas to decision makers. They identified a lack of empowerment and engagement opportunities as factors that limit young people's involvement in decision making.[25]

As now recognised in the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action (the Compact),[26] and in line with the commitment to Accountability to Affected Populations,[27] young people affected by humanitarian crises should be consulted and have a meaningful influence when decisions are made by humanitarian actors on how they will respond. As outlined in the Compact, members have committed to support the systematic inclusion of engagement and partnership with youth in all phases of humanitarian action, through sharing of information and involvement in decision-making processes at all levels, including budget allocations. The Compact also recognises that humanitarian crises can be periods of positive transformation for young people and that if young people have the "skills, capacity and resources to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from humanitarian situations it will help reduce the costs of and need for international humanitarian support, improve humanitarian effectiveness and strengthen resilience of communities."

Dominant narratives need to be challenged

More often than not, young people in conflict-affected contexts – especially males – are portrayed as a threat to be contained or solved and their vulnerability to extremism and violence is overplayed. Although there is a statistical relationship between the risk of internal armed conflict and countries with a high youth population, this correlation is not grounded in research which elicits young people's own perspectives on the causal processes leading some to engage in violence. Nor do these claims explain why a great majority of countries with youth-bulge populations have not experienced recent civil conflicts.[28]

The positive role that young people can play in international peace and security needs greater emphasis and, as former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, young people should be seen to "represent promise – not peril".[29]

While adolescents struggle with their identity, what they want out of life and where they belong – and this searching for purpose often puts them at increased risk of falling in with the wrong crowd or

engaging in impulsiveness and risky behaviours – they are ultimately looking for a meaningful social identity, want to take more responsibility and to be part of positive change.[30] For conflict-affected young people, the opportunities to fulfil these ambitions is limited if they are out of school or without adequate employment opportunities so the onus is on governments and the international community to ensure they have ways to channel their positive intentions, feel empowered and have purpose and hope.

Limited adolescent-focused programming, policies and guidelines

Although there will be many young people living and growing up in most conflict-affected contexts, their distinct needs are often overlooked in humanitarian response programming and funding. They either fall into the gap between programming aimed at younger children and at adults or are subsumed into these programmes with no regard for their specific needs and priorities. As seen in a global review of UNHCR's engagement with displaced youth in 2013, young people as 'persons of concern' are 'invisible' when it comes to policy and programme design across the humanitarian sector – there are few sustainable and holistic programmes targeting youth that respond to their concerns, build their capacities and help them secure their future aspirations.[31] Similarly, in a 2016 mapping of adolescent and youth programming in the refugee response to the Syria crisis, it was found that of the 95 programmes identified that benefit adolescents and youth, only 46% of interventions were specifically designed for them and 77% of programmes did not consult with or engage with adolescents and youth at any stage of the programming process.[32]

When there is a focus on young people in humanitarian programming, there is often a tendency to apply stereotyped views on young people: males are typically considered as potentially disruptive and females as particularly vulnerable. Adolescent and youth programming can also be 'one-issue' focused and fail to cater to diversity within this group or holistically address their multiple and intersecting needs (including differences between adolescent girls and boys; younger and older adolescents; those in and out of school; those who are and are not married; adolescents with special needs; and refugee, displaced or unaccompanied adolescents).[33]

The lack of focus on young people is further compounded by a scarcity of targeted research and data on conflict-affected adolescents to ensure approaches to meet their needs are evidence-based and fit for purpose. As noted in the UN's World Youth Report, one of the most serious impediments to effectively meeting youth development challenges under the 2030 Agenda is the lack of timely and accurate age-disaggregated data on the situation of youth.[34] There is also limited guidance on best-practice programming for adolescents living in humanitarian contexts. As found in a recent desk review of programming guidelines for adolescents and youth in emergencies in education, health, livelihoods and durable solutions, there is a significant gap.[35] There are efforts by several agencies, including Save the Children, to develop guidelines to fill this gap. Dedicated funding is needed, however, to support contextualised evidence-based guidelines on adolescent programming and closer collaboration and coordination between agencies that work with adolescents in humanitarian contexts.

Increasing international attention

The international community is starting to recognise the need – and humanitarian responsibility – to enable and protect the rights, address the specific needs and build on the strengths of young people affected by humanitarian crises. This is evidenced by the Baku Commitment to Youth Policies;[36] the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security;[37] the UNHCR and Women's Refugee Commission's global refugee youth consultations;[38] the World Humanitarian Summit's Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action;[39] and the UN's 2030 Youth Strategy.

However, despite these important advances for youth, engagement specifically with adolescents remains scarce – there is a minimal number of adolescent-specific policies or forums and the distinct set of issues they face continues to receive less attention.[40]

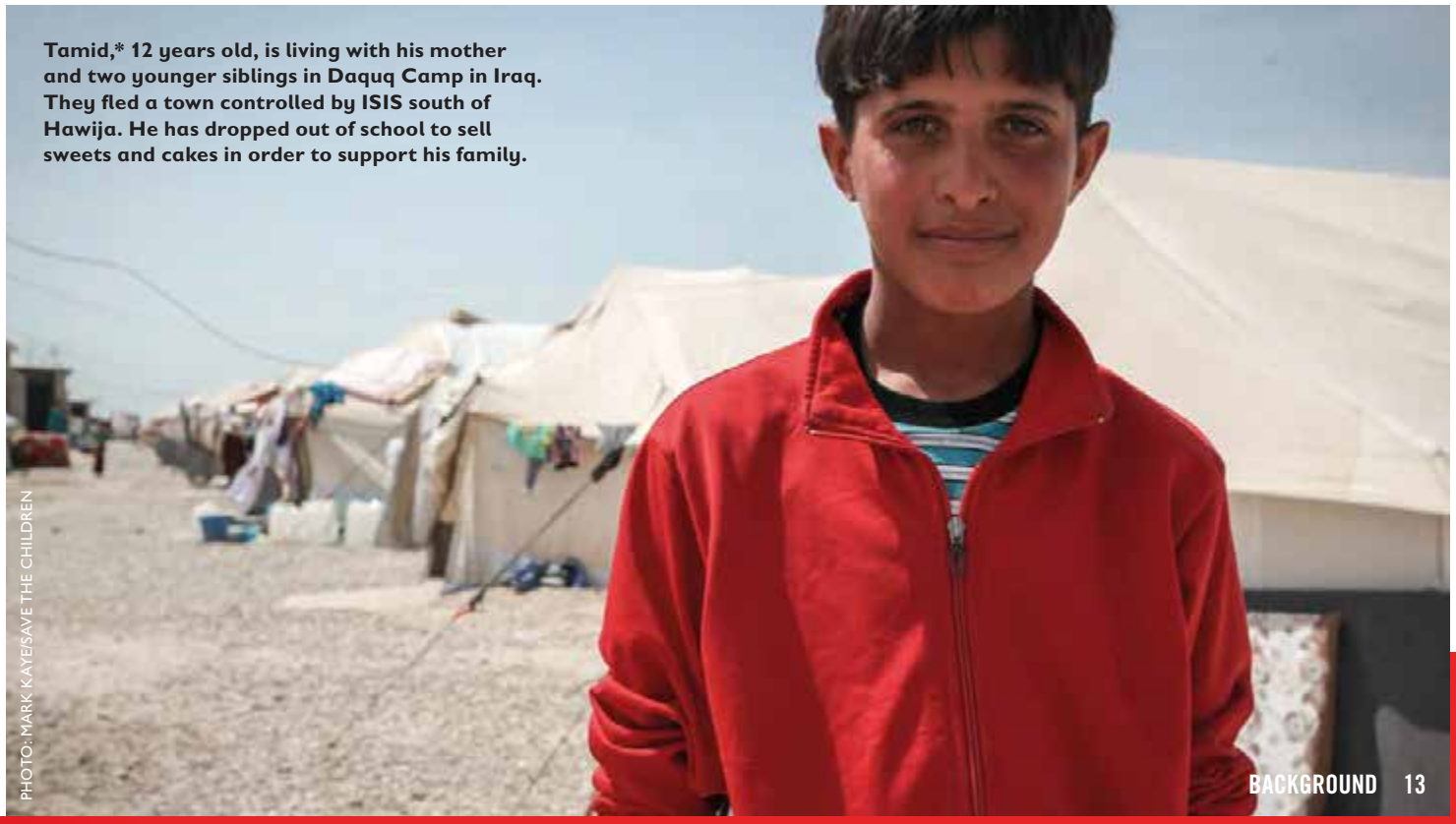
Background

Methodology

Between January and June 2017, Save the Children conducted an exploratory study to better understand what conflicts affect adolescents in the MENA region the most and their experiences in managing them. Participants were selected to take part in open-ended enquiries in Iraq (Khanaqin), Egypt (Alexandria), Jordan (Zarqa and Ma'an) and Yemen (Amran and Aden).

Data was collected from two sets of stakeholders:

- **331 adolescent girls and boys** (175 girls and 156 boys) divided by age group (12–14 and 15–17 years old[41]) and by gender;
- **240 adults**: 164 caregivers and 76 other stakeholders including community members (religious leaders; civil society volunteers; teachers; youth counsellors), NGO staff (field outreach workers; programme facilitators) and university academics and researchers. 131 were female and 109 were male.[42]



Tamid,* 12 years old, is living with his mother and two younger siblings in Daquq Camp in Iraq. They fled a town controlled by ISIS south of Hawija. He has dropped out of school to sell sweets and cakes in order to support his family.

PHOTO: MARK KAYE/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Adolescents took part in interactive and participatory sessions that were designed to foster openness, sensitivity and trust among them, and to help them feel safe and comfortable to share their views. In each location, adolescent girls and boys were divided into groups according to their age group and gender.

Data from adults was collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, in which they were asked to share their experiences with and reflections on adolescents and the conflicts they faced. In all locations except Iraq, caregivers were convened through a **World Café activity**,[45] where participants were asked to discuss the following four questions over a two-hour period:

- What are the major conflicts adolescents are faced with?
- How do adolescents manage those conflicts?
- Are there programmes that have been successful in mitigating conflict?
- What do they consider to be influencers (positive and negative) on adolescents?

Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders ran for 30–40 minutes.

Participatory workshops with adolescents

Each group of adolescents participated in a workshop lasting four-and-a-half hours,[43] structured around the following four exercises:

- **Identity exercise**: adolescents participated in short activities, including an icebreaker, to help them get to know each other and build trust.
- **'Wall of conflict' exercise**: adolescents were asked to reflect on a conflict situation they had faced, how they coped with it and who had helped them, individually writing or drawing on a sheet of paper. Those willing to share with the rest of the group did so.
- **Human rights card ranking exercise**: adolescents were given nine cards listing a range of children's rights relating to participation, protection and service provision. In small groups, they were asked to discuss which of these rights, if respected, would help them address or manage the problems they faced and then to rank them in order of priority. The wider group then came together to discuss their rankings and were given the opportunity to re-arrange the overall order and agree on a final group ranking (see Annex A for further detail).[44]
- **Forum theatre**: in small groups, adolescents were asked to present drama sketches of a conflict scenario they faced in their lives either at home, at school or in the community, and how they would resolve it. On performing the sketch a second time, adolescents from the audience could interject when they had an alternative solution to the problem and the scene was replayed with the alternative solutions.

PHOTO: NATALIA TAPIES/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Aisha,* a 15–17-year-old refugee girl from Syria, shared her dreams during the identity exercise in Zarqa, Jordan.

PHOTO: NATALIA TAPIES/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Girls participating in the study in Zarqa, Jordan, discuss and prioritise during the human rights card ranking exercise.

All the activities described above for both adolescents and adults were conducted in Arabic. The activities were slightly adjusted after the first consultations in Iraq to incorporate feedback and lessons learned. All discussions were voice-recorded and transcribed into English.

Workshop facilitators wrote summary reports and four individual country reports were also drafted from the data, as well as an internal consolidated report with the findings from all six locations, which formed the evidence base for this report.

Six in-depth case studies with adolescents and caregivers were collected in August and September 2018 to supplement the research.

Ethical considerations

A Save the Children consent form was circulated to all caregivers and interviewees to seek approval to speak with their children, including permission to record the discussions and take pictures and video. All adult participants received a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) in Arabic. The PIS sought voluntary informed consent to participate and have their responses captured by audio recording. The PIS explained the purpose of the project, guaranteed anonymity and gave participants the freedom to remove themselves from the activity at any time.

In the case of emerging debates, it was considered critical for the research team to manage these debates into dialogues where participants did not need to respond to each other orally. Participants were provided with the opportunity to respond by recording their thoughts on paper (through drawings, for example).

A social worker or child protection staff member was present at all sessions with adolescents to support in case of need.

Limitations

- Due to logistical and security constraints, the research team was unable to travel to Aden or Amran in Yemen, or to Ma'an in Jordan. Save the Children staff conducted the consultations in these three locations.
- In some cases, due to delays in starting sessions, adolescents did not complete all planned activities. In Iraq, sessions with adolescents only lasted one-and-a-half hours and no World Café activity was conducted. This has been considered in the analysis.
- In some workshops the audio recorder failed, so the collection of data from these workshops was limited to notes taken by staff.
- In relation to the human rights card ranking activity, it was difficult to ascertain the final rankings of some groups from the workshop transcripts alone. In these instances, final rankings were determined by reviewing several sources together (such as the country reports, facilitator reports and workshop transcripts) and checking back with country office staff for verification. There were differences in the instructions given by facilitators for this activity: most groups of adolescents were asked to reflect on which rights would help them better manage the problems or conflicts they face in their lives. In some instances however the groups were instructed slightly differently (eg, the adolescents were asked to rank the rights in order of importance of 'things we need in life' rather than specifically in relation to their problems), which may have affected the final rankings in these groups and explain why rights to education and health were often given high priority.
- On reflection, while the research drew out key insights into how adolescents cope with the conflicts they face and what they see as solutions to their problems, in future research we would include more questions to also draw out a better sense of adolescents' resilience and hopes for the future.
- In spite of the participatory methodology used, some participants found it difficult to express themselves or speak about their problems in front of others. In some cases, they chose to share their views privately with the facilitators.

Save the Children worked with Steps Lebanon (a youth and conflict focused organisation) to support the design and implementation of the participatory methodology, and with Notre Dame University in Lebanon to support the methodology and data analysis. The research team consisted of two lead facilitators from Steps Lebanon and Save the Children Regional Office and Country Office staff, under the guidance of Notre Dame University.

PHOTO: ALI ASHWAL/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Sarah,* 12 years old, plays with friends at a Child Friendly Space run by Save the Children in Yemen. She loves to spend her time playing, drawing and studying with her new friends.

Country snapshots

Iraq

When this research was undertaken in 2017, Iraq was in its fourth year of intensive fighting between armed groups and government forces. While the situation in Iraq is stabilising, with major military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) concluding in late 2017, the humanitarian crisis in Iraq remains and large-scale displacement persists – 6.7 million people in Iraq, including 3.3 million children, continue to need some form of humanitarian assistance and protection.[46] The military operations also led to a significant increase in violations against children.[47] Displaced Iraqi adolescents may have experienced or witnessed grave violations against children such as recruitment; killing and maiming; sexual violence; and attacks on schools. They continue to be at high risk of harmful traditional practices, such as child marriage, and other protection risks, such as child labour, exploitation and abuse, while they remain displaced and as they return to their areas of origin.

Field research took place in two camps for internally displaced people (IDPs), "Alwand I" and "Alwand II", outside the city of Khanaqin, in the Diyala governorate of Iraq. Armed conflict between Iraqi and Kurdish forces and ISIS forced hundreds of families from nearby towns to take refuge in these two camps. As of August 2018, the Diyala governorate still hosted over 25,000 IDPs and displaced families returning to their home towns in Diyala are likely to face severe difficulties with accessing livelihoods and services, as well as with social cohesion and security.[48]

Egypt

Egypt has the largest population in MENA, with almost 20 million adolescents.[49] Conflict between people and the government over socioeconomic development and governance has marked Egypt for some years. Violence against adolescents and young people in Egypt is a key area of concern. A 2013 UNICEF study of 13–17-year-old adolescents in Alexandria, Cairo and Assuit found high numbers of adolescents had experienced physical and emotional violence, sexual violence and harmful traditional practices.[50]

Field research for this study was carried out in Alexandria, a port city and governorate in the north region of Egypt located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The research team visited two areas in Alexandria, Izab al Matār and Al-Amriyyah. There are high rates of poverty in both areas as well as high levels of drug use and criminal activity. Al-Amriyyah has a diverse ethnic makeup and feuds and conflict are commonplace. Most residents in both areas relocated from conservative areas in upper Egypt and conservative traditions and self-governance when it comes to conflict management are notable features of these communities.

Jordan

Jordan is one of the countries most affected by the Syria crisis. It has the second-highest population of refugees relative to its population in the MENA region[51] and is host to over 671,000 Syrian refugees. It is estimated that 80% of Syrian refugees live in host communities in Jordan while 20% live in refugee camps.[52]

Field research took place in two cities: Zarqa, the second-largest city in Jordan after Amman, located in the northern region of the country, and Ma'an, a major city in the southern region of Jordan and capital of the Ma'an governorate. Zarqa is home to an estimated 96,500 Syrian refugees.[53] The Syrian refugee adolescents who participated in this study live in low-income host communities in Zarqa.

Violence against Jordanian children at home, at school and in the community is also a key concern in Jordan[54] – in 2014, Jordan ranked the worst in the region for practising violent discipline.[55] Workshops with Jordanian adolescents were undertaken in Ma'an as well to explore a different context in Jordan.

Yemen

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen remains the worst in the world. Due to a longstanding conflict between government forces and armed groups, nearly 80 per cent of Yemen's population – 24 million people – require some form of humanitarian assistance and protection. 20 million people across the country are food insecure, including nearly 10 million who are suffering from extreme hunger. The conflict has also taken a significant toll on civilians – tens of thousands of people have been killed or injured since 2015, among them at least 17,700 civilians, as verified by the UN. Also since 2015, 4.3 million people have been displaced, with 3.3 million remaining displaced in 2018.[56] Children have been significantly impacted by the crisis – there have been a high number of grave violations against children by all parties. The number of children killed and maimed in Yemen remains unacceptably high, as does the number of children recruited and used by armed forces and groups.[57]

Field research took place in two cities in Yemen: Aden, which is on the southern coast and is part of the pro-government-controlled region, and Amran, situated slightly northwest of Sana'a, a Houthi-controlled territory. Both cities host large numbers of internally displaced Yemenis from other regions who have been subjected to bombing, shelling and/or armed fighting.

Majid,* 15 years old, outside his family's tent in a camp for displaced people in northern Iraq.

PHOTO: AHMAD BAROUD/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Key findings

"There is usually no one to share the pain we feel inside."

Rani,* 12–14-year-old boy, Egypt

As further detailed below, this study found that adolescents, across all age groups, genders and locations are overwhelmingly exposed to high levels of violence in all spheres of their life – at home, at school and in the community – and they often have no safe place or support network to turn to. In addition to experiencing physical and psychological violence at home, at school and in the community, adolescents are also highly vulnerable to a wide range of protection risks and regularly pursue unhelpful strategies to cope with or address situations. Many adolescents, especially girls, also spoke of how harmful social norms exacerbate the challenges they face.

In terms of what would make their situations better, most adolescents prioritised feeling safe at home and in their communities. Many also wanted to be better protected from drugs and to be able to freely express their views and beliefs without fear of violence. Adolescents also consistently reported that having access to education and health care is essential to helping them better manage the issues they face.

Exposure to high levels of violence

A striking finding of the study is the extent to which adolescents in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Yemen face violence in their young lives. We found that not only is violence highly prevalent in Yemen or Iraq, countries in active armed conflict, but that adolescents also face high levels of violence and discrimination in Egypt and Jordan, countries not directly affected by armed conflict. Adolescents across all contexts experience violence in every sphere of their lives including in their homes, schools and communities and at the hands of those who they should be able to trust the most – caregivers, teachers and authority figures.

Violence caused by armed conflict

Adolescents from Iraq and Yemen and Syrian refugees in Jordan all reflected on the violence they witnessed and experienced because of armed conflict. They spoke of losing close family members, friends and their homes and being forced to flee because of bombings, violence and the war. Syrian refugee children in Jordan discussed the traumatic events they have experienced due to conflict, such as seeing dead bodies in the street, soldiers killing people and family members being arrested. One girl said, *"The war's effect will remain strong in our hearts. When we witnessed how people were dying we were very hurt that we could not believe it. It was a shock for us. I feel a great pain every time I remember those days."* In Yemen, adolescent girls mentioned losing brothers to warfare and being constantly afraid of shelling and bombardment.

"The war's effect will remain strong in our hearts."

Zeinab,* 14-year-old girl, Syrian refugee in Jordan

Case study – Marwan,* 15-year-old boy, Yemen

"My name is Marwan, I'm 15 years old and from Aden governorate. I have one brother and three sisters. My father died three years ago during the conflict while he was trying to rescue our neighbour when a bomb landed near him. I got injured in my right knee and my friend lost his eyes while we were playing with our neighbours outside. My mother was forced to move from our house to my grandmother's house to live together because we had no income to rent a house after my father passed away. My older brother left school to work in a fish market for a daily wage.

"After the conflict, I couldn't go back to school due to my knee injury and indeed, I felt like not going to school any more. However, my mother was always encouraging me to continue school but I was feeling down and angry towards everyone around me. I was barely able to reach my classroom on the second floor and it took me one year to walk without crutches.

"Then, Save the Children came to our school and talked to my family and I received psychosocial support to help me to overcome this tragedy. Now I have finished grade nine and I'll continue my studies until I graduate from university to make my mother proud of me and to make her dream come true. But the worst thing that happened to me is when I saw my father burning in front of my eyes while he was trying to rescue our neighbour after the bombs fell on our neighbourhood."

Marwan,* 15 years old, from Aden governorate, Southern Yemen, with his younger sister Mona.*

PHOTO: NOORA NASSER/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Violence at home

Adolescents in all four countries regularly reported experiencing violence in their home lives, usually for the purposes of discipline. An adolescent girl in Yemen said, *"They can hit us to discipline us but it shouldn't be violent. It may be a simple smack on the hand,"* while another said, *"No. Parents shouldn't make it a habit… hitting is wrong. They should talk to us and teach us."* Another girl reflected on how this leads to a vicious cycle of violence. She said, *"When the child is always beaten by his parents he will grow up with many problems that will lead to violence and maybe this violence is going to be practised on his friends or even on his children if he got married."*

In Yemen, boys and girls reported violence at home as a key issue. For boys, it was reported that they often run away from home and join armed groups as a way to escape violence at home, especially from their fathers. Girls also reported physical violence as a widespread form of disciplining behaviour and mentioned beating with a stick, cutting of hair and food deprivation as forms of punishment.

> **"Parents neglect us and they use us for work and violence, [they] abuse us physically and verbally."**
>
> Afrah,* 12–14-year-old girl, Amran, Yemen

> **"No. Parents shouldn't make it a habit… hitting is wrong. They should talk to us and teach us."**
>
> Bushra,* 12–14-year-old girl, Amran, Yemen

Adolescents in Yemen and Egypt also spoke of how their caregivers' drug use and disciplining behaviours were related. In Egypt, adolescents reported high levels of violence and drug abuse inside the home, particularly from fathers struggling with drug addictions who beat their children and took the money they had earned through child labour. Key informants in Egypt also highlighted the scale of the problem of drug abuse among caregivers and the effect of this on children. One interviewee stated about an adolescent boy she worked with: *"He is getting used to having an addict father, so he decided to be an addict too, plus his father always hits him so badly if he didn't get the drugs or if he refuses to, so the child is being hit and his salary is being taken no matter what. For this reason, he said 'why don't I do drugs like him? At least I'll use my own money.'"*

Gender discrimination and harmful social norms were also shown to be key reasons for girls experiencing violence in the home. When role-playing, adolescent girls in Jordan often depicted their parents as lacking compassion and understanding towards them due to their gender.

Case study – Souad,* 13-year-old girl, Egypt

"In late 2014, my father beat my step-sister to death. She was the one helping me with my studies, and after what happened I stopped going to school. My father worked in casual minor jobs for a low daily wage, he was beating us continuously. I hated him and hated my mother for allowing him to live with us. I had no friends. I did not know how to deal with people. I even hated my younger sister because she was named after my step-sister. I used to beat her and tell her, 'I do not love you'."

After a full assessment was carried out by the project's case worker and psychologist, Souad was referred to a service provider to receive specialised mental health care. She has also participated in Save the Children's Healing and Education through Art and Resilience (HEART) programme.

"At the beginning, I was questioning myself, 'how am I supposed to sit with other children and participate in activities with them?' But now I am eager to participate in these activities. Now I love my young sister and I can drop her to school, going back with her and helping her with homework. I feel much stronger, able to communicate with others and take control over my life. I want to go back to school, get an education and rely on myself. I am confident that I can carry on with the belief that better days are still ahead."

Fathers and brothers were depicted as dominating at home and as perpetrators of violence against both mothers and girls. Some girls also noted that their mothers did not protect them and instead beat or punished them if they disobeyed their fathers or brothers.

Violence in communities

Adolescents across all four countries reported being subjected to high levels of violence in their communities, as well as witnessing criminal violence, kidnappings, killings and various forms of sexual violence.

Girls in Yemen and Egypt regularly expressed that the biggest risks they faced in their communities were kidnap and sexual assault, and girls in all four countries were regularly harassed on the street. In Yemen, many girls expressed fear of leaving their house because of harassment and rape on the street. Being kidnapped, largely due to tribal feuds, is also a key concern for many girls in Yemen. One girl said, *"We're scared… kidnappers, rape, harassment…. We're scared to go out on our own… We can't walk to school because we're scared of getting harassed."* Another girl spoke of her own kidnapping, *"We had a conflict between two tribes. Men came to our house and took me. I was scared. I cried. I asked them to take me to my mom. I was kept captive for seven months in central prison."* Others remembered a 14-year-old friend at school who was kidnapped, *"She used to regularly attend school, but one day she didn't show up. We asked for her, and the school started asking and we knew that she was kidnapped… they haven't found her yet."*

In Egypt, girls also reported that they were fearful of going out at sunset or after dark due to the risk of kidnapping. Girls noted that it was dangerous for girls to take tuk-tuks as there had been cases of drivers kidnapping and raping girls. One girl said, *"My friend was walking once and a tuk-tuk came and they took her and brought her back after one month. She looked terrible."* When she was asked if they took her organs, she said *"No not organs… they did something else."* One key informant noted that girls are harassed everywhere in Egypt, *"Today there is a campaign on Facebook with a hashtag 'the first time I was harassed, I was … years old'. This hashtag is terrifying… when you read the stories, some girls… got harassed when they were five or four or six years old. They talk about their brothers' friends, neighbours and relatives."*

"We had a conflict between two tribes. Men came to our house and took me. I was scared. I cried. I asked them to take me to my mom. I was kept captive for seven months in central prison."

Aisha,* 12–14-year-old girl, Amran, Yemen

In both Yemen and Jordan, girls reported that when females are harassed, parents often blame the girl and they are punished. A Syrian refugee girl in Jordan said that rather than blame the girl, parents should instead *"teach her how to react in a way that protect herself"*.

Boys also reported being exposed to various forms of violence in their communities. Boys in Yemen stated that they too are in constant fear of being kidnapped. They fear armed groups, who they said either forced young boys to fight or took their organs to sell on the black market. In Egypt, boys also reported a fear of being kidnapped for their organs (the illegal organ trade is a significant issue in Egypt,[58] although it is unclear to what extent children are targeted), and described regularly being exposed to violence in their communities. One adolescent boy reported how he had witnessed a violent attack in his neighbourhood: *"The guy held a knife and hit him with the knife on his head cutting [him] into two."* In Yemen, boys also mentioned being involved in attacks by armed groups with one boy reporting, *"The bus I was in was invaded by armed men so I jumped from the bus."*

Boys also reported experiencing violence and abuse at the hands of the police. In Egypt, the problem of police involvement in drug trafficking, including using adolescents or framing them for drug use or sale, was mentioned by adolescent boys. Boys in Egypt also reported that police officers either allegedly planted drugs on them or were physically violent and forcibly took them to the police station. One said, *"One time my cousin and I, the police took us and searched us, he held me and hit me. We went and played and then we saw the police in front of us the second day we were in the same place and the police shows up and also hit us."* Similarly, Syrian refugee boys in Jordan reported that the police had abused both boys and girls who sought their protection against harassment.

Violence at school

Boys and girls in all four countries also spoke of the violence they experienced in schools at the hands of their teachers. An adolescent boy in Jordan described an incident in a picture he drew, *"As you can see in this picture, a teacher is beating a student. This teacher brought his son with him to school once for a visit. It is not acceptable to beat us like this. Someone commented in class and made a bit of disturbance, leading to the teacher to tell his son to spit on the student who did that while beating him."* One project assistant in Egypt reported, *"For example, I took note one time of a teacher who was beating his students with a stick filled with pins. He would hit them until blood comes out. This is very normal; there is no school in Egypt that has no stick to hit the student or where the student is not verbally abused especially within boys' schools."*

The responses of older girls in Egypt also suggested that they fear the classroom, with one girl reflecting that *"no one wants to get the education they need… because they are afraid of learning"* and, overall, girls gave top priority to being able to freely express their views so that *"they can stop being afraid of answering the wrong question in school."*

Adolescents also reported that they are often too scared to complain about their treatment in the classroom due to fear of further punishment both at school and at home. They described how when they have reported incidents to their principals often nothing was done to rectify the situation and they feel a great sense of injustice about not being able to hold teachers to account. One boy in Egypt reported, *"I went to complain to the principal and instead of getting my rights back he hit me. This injustice makes me feel terrible. My self-esteem constantly declined."*

The research team in Jordan observed that while girls appeared quite shy during the workshop activities and gave the impression that they avoid conflict at home and in the community, they were more assertive when it came to talking about the injustices they face at school, including teachers forcing them to clean the playground and toilets or humiliating them in front of friends as forms of punishment.

Many adolescents also reported that their fear of the violence at school extended to facing repercussions at home. While some adolescents said they spoke to their caregivers about the issues they face at school and the caregivers would help to rectify the situation, others preferred not to tell their parents for fear that they would blame them and then beat them as well.

> **"Violence in schools results in many students dropping out of school. Many end up hating school and staying at home, others have psychological issues, others lie to their families and tell them they are going to school but they don't go because they're scared of violence there. And then they end up performing badly academically."**
>
> Hala,* 15–17-year-old girl, Jordan

In all four contexts, adolescents also spoke about discrimination from teachers in the classroom. In Yemen, adolescents reported that teachers showed preferential treatment to children of officials or other *"important"* people and did not encourage girls to learn. In Egypt, teachers were reported to fail students who did not take private lessons from them, while showing special treatment to those students with the means to pay. In Jordan, Syrian refugee students regularly reported that teachers were often unfriendly and aggressive towards Syrian students and *"spend most of their times on their phones instead of teaching"*. They no longer like going to school as they feel like they are *"being punished"* and *"aren't benefitting from school"*. In Iraq, girls noted that there is also gender discrimination at school with one girl reporting, *"There is a lot of failure at school. The girls are smart and they get high grades, but the teachers beat them and give them low grades… because of inequality and hatred."*

Syrian refugees in Jordan also frequently reported verbal and physical abuse by Jordanian peers on their way to and from school, with one boy

> **"No one wants to get the education they need… because they are afraid of learning."**
>
> Hala,* 12–14-year-old girl, Egypt

> **"I went to complain to the principal and instead of getting my rights back he hit me. This injustice makes me feel terrible. My self-esteem constantly declined."**
>
> Khaled,* 12–14-year-old boy, Egypt

explaining, *"Sometimes on our way back and forth to school, Jordanian guys mock us. Their schedule is during the morning, and ours is in the afternoon. When I get to school they start throwing rocks at us and scream shameful things about our backgrounds."* Another boy said, *"This [being hit by stones by Jordanians] is a daily situation. We sometimes leave with the teacher to avoid them. Once Jordanian students attacked us in the school with knives, but the police tried to control it."*

> **"There is a lot of failure at school. The girls are smart and they get high grades, but the teachers beat them and give them low grades… because of inequality and hatred."**
>
> Eman,* 12–14-year-old girl, Iraq

Highly vulnerable and at risk

Another finding of this study is that in addition to physical violence at home and school and physical and sexual violence in the community, adolescents in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen are also highly vulnerable to a range of other protection risks including child marriage, drug abuse, child labour, recruitment into armed groups and mental health issues.

While it came out clearly in discussions with adolescents, caregivers and key informants across all four countries that conflict and economic hardship have heightened adolescents' vulnerabilities, **gender discrimination and harmful social norms** were also shown to be key risk factors for adolescents' protection in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen.

Safaa,* 14 years old, in class in an IDP camp in northern Iraq

PHOTO: ©DARIO BOSIO/DARST

> "[Girls'] biological changes fool their families into thinking that they are ready for marriage and for taking on responsibilities. Early marriage has become more common during the current economic situation. Some of them are still kids who get married to men 20 years older, which leads to many health and mental issues. Some of these girls have died as a result of pregnancy or giving birth. Some of them were sent to hospitals due to the tearing up of their tissues and reproductive organs."
>
> University academic, Yemen

In addition to facing harassment and violence at home, at school and in their communities, girls across all four contexts regularly reported that **child marriage** was a key protection concern for them.

Key informants noted that child marriage has become more common as a result of conflict and displacement, largely due to caregivers' increased concerns about their daughters' safety and reputation or to economic factors, and many girls are expected to marry before they reach their teens. In Iraq, younger girls reported early marriage as a key problem in displacement camps with one girl saying *"some parents force their daughters into doing things they have never even thought about"* and that parents force children as young as five to wear a hijab despite the children protesting against it and saying *"they make us look like women"*.

While economic hardship is an important push factor for child marriage, many girls also spoke about how **conservative cultural norms around gender roles forced them into marriage and put their protection and rights at risk**. When it comes to deciding whether a girl should marry, girls reported that fathers do not listen to their daughter's opinion and will marry some girls off as early as 13 years old. They said that *"families*

Members of the Child Parliament in Yemen conducting a survey on the needs of displaced children in Amran.

PHOTO: MOHAMMED AWADH/SAVE THE CHILDREN

> **"Some parents force their daughters into doing things they have never even thought about."**
>
> Lina,* 12–14-year-old girl, Iraq

are ignorant about this issue… they wouldn't do that if they were educated and aware". In one girl's story, her parents needed money as they had no food or clothes and so her father married her off. She faced many problems in her marriage and her children were born with disabilities. Her parents now attribute this to her becoming pregnant too young and so they have not pursued early marriages for their other daughters.

As discussed in further detail below, **girls in each context reported seeing child marriage as their only means of escape from what they termed their *"imprisonment"* at home due to strict cultural customs and beliefs**.

> **"I am in grade 9 and I never go out. My friends would help me and my dad used to yell at me. I stopped speaking to them. My friends used to always visit me and my parents didn't like it. They said I was causing trouble. I would get mad and I often felt imprisoned."**
>
> Reem,* 12–14-year-old girl, Yemen

One girl in Jordan likened girls' confinement at home to another type of violence and when speaking about her friend's situation said, *"She's like a tool in the house, like any other appliance there, her dad never allows her to leave the house, she just has to stay home cleaning and cooking."* When reflecting on being home-bound, a Syrian refugee girl said, *"I am a body without soul".*

Girls in Jordan also regularly addressed the topic of gender discrimination and cultural norms in their role-playing. They acted out scenarios that showed fathers and mothers not protecting them against

> **"I am working on a case in which the girl wanted to get married only to escape her home. A man 10 years older asked to marry her and [she agreed] only to leave the house, because her father forced her to wear the hijab and she didn't want to and he forced her to leave school. In fact, there are many similar cases regarding the hijab."**
>
> Rund,* case worker, partner organisation, Egypt

the challenges they face in society and criticised their parents' lack of compassion and understanding for them. One girl said *"We are living in a patriarchal society so the mothers should protect their daughters' rights,"* and another girl reflected that, *"Our society prefers men over women because women have no role in economic life."* In Iraq, one girl noted that *"Parents do not give us our rights because we are girls. We are discriminated in this camp."*

In Jordan, it was observed that older Syrian refugee girls were likely to be more conservative and conforming to customs than younger girls. For example, when it came to facing harassment in the street, older girls said that they should go home and that it was their own fault for being out on the street. Similarly, discussing a situation in which a brother gets angry at his sister for not serving him, they said *"It is the least we can do if our brother is coming from work all day and we should serve him!"* The younger girls, on the other hand, did not accept that serving their brother was their duty.

Adolescents in Egypt and Jordan also linked high levels of **drug use** amongst caregivers to increased risks to their protection, particularly violence at home. When discussing what would improve their lives while undertaking the human rights card ranking activity, boys and girls often debated whether they placed a higher priority on being protected from drugs or from violence.

> **"She's like a tool in the house, like any other appliance there, her dad never allows her to leave the house, she just has to stay home cleaning and cooking."**
>
> Sarah,* 17-year-old girl, Zarqa, Jordan

"I am a body without soul."

Reem,* 15–17-year-old girl,
Syrian refugee, Zarqa, Jordan

Adolescents noted that drug abuse affected their protection in a range of ways – they reported their caregivers' drug use made them more violent and, in Yemen, some adolescents reported they had heard of people drugging snacks and giving them to children, so *"we can't trust what we're handed"*. Girls in Egypt also talked about how young boys are frequently targeted to buy, use and sell drugs. Syrian refugee boys in Jordan noted protection from drugs was vital because drugs *"will destroy the mind and the personality"*.

Due to family economic hardship, many adolescents in all four countries are involved in **child labour**, often in exploitative and harmful environments. Adolescent boys in Jordan reported discrimination and unsafe conditions where they work and boys in Yemen also reported abusive conditions and the risk of being recruited at work into armed groups. Girls in Egypt noted that they often work during their school holidays at shops or factories and reported facing harassment in the workplace. During discussions with girls and key informants in Egypt, sexual exploitation was mentioned as a negative coping mechanism for girls to earn money, suggesting that they are also exposed to sexual violence and assault.

While the research did not directly assess the **mental health and wellbeing** of adolescents, their responses suggest that many of them continue to suffer psychologically from their experiences of war. Adolescents from armed conflict contexts regularly reported that they are still haunted by their experiences and exhibit signs of ongoing mental distress. A girl in Yemen, whose brother left to fight in Syria and died, shared, *"So far I have not gone beyond my problem; it was a strong shock because he was everything in my life."* **Others described the emotional toll of living in constant panic and *"always afraid from hearing about someone you know or you love is dead"*.** Some voiced that they still suffer emotionally, *"My reaction toward this problem was full of sorrow and grief. The nightmare of losing one of my family members didn't leave me, which affected me a lot."* Another girl said her reaction to crisis *"was crying, shouting, astonished"*. In Iraq, girls

PHOTO: ALI ASHWAL/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Samira,* 14 years old, in her house in Amran, Yemen.

Case study – Samira,* 14-year-old girl, Yemen

"My name is Samira, I am 14 years old, and I'm from Amran governorate. I do not go to school because I have to work on potato farms to earn money for my family. I wake up at six o'clock, get dressed and go to work without having any breakfast. I go with my 11-year-old brother and my neighbour.

"We have to walk for an hour to get to the farms. Once we reach the farms, we ask the owners whether they will let us work in return for some potatoes. It's quite rare for them to say yes, and sometimes the owners will shout at us or ask their labourers to throw stones at us to force us to leave. Despite all the risks, I keep trying to work because I know that my family needs the money. So I feel fortunate when I find work, as the money I earn will mean that my family can eat.

"I feel afraid when I work on the farms because often people gather and bother us by saying bad words. I don't like to be there – I feel sad and scared, and just wish I was back in my school. I always feel sad when I remember that I have to go back to the farms the next day. I do not have enough time to play at home because I do domestic work when I come back from the farms.

"I was in Grade Five at school before I left to work on the farms. If I didn't work then my younger sister would have to work, but thankfully she can still go to school. I don't see my sister when she goes to school, as I have to leave so early to get to the farms. I don't feel like a child any more. I feel very sad when I see my friends and classmates go to school when I cannot. I meet them when I'm walking to the farms every morning. But if I stop going to work, my family will not have food to eat.

"Sometimes I go to my neighbours' wedding parties to dance and have fun, otherwise I stay at home alone. I always keep thinking of tomorrow, when I will be so tired from work and the bad people will throw stones at me. I wish tomorrow will not come. Sometimes I come home crying because people at the market and the farms are so mean to me.

"My father does not force me to go to work but I help him because he is sick. I am not like other children because they go to school and I work, and they have new clothes but we can't afford them. If I was the president of Yemen, I would encourage children to go to school and stop child labour.

"I visit the Child Friendly Space with my sisters where I play, learn and have fun. The Child Friendly Space has changed my life. I like to do drawings and sewing in there. I do not like the war because of the airstrikes that kill innocent people. I feel scared when I hear the sounds of planes and I worry that the bombs will hit my house.

The future is so scary because of the war, but if it stops my life will be better as my father could receive his salary and I could go back to my school instead of going to work."

> **"No one cares about our feelings", "We are stressed and tired", "We even lost our memories."**
>
> Khadiyah, 15–17-year-old girl and Nour, 12–14-year-old girl, Iraq

expressed feelings of isolation, neglect and fear, that *"no one cares about our feelings"*, *"we are stressed and tired"* and *"we even lost our memories"*.

Beyond their conflict experiences, adolescents' exposure to high levels of violence and distressing experiences at home, at school and in their communities is also likely to have an impact on their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. Key informants in Egypt reported that living with conflict at home, in the streets and at school has resulted in adolescents turning to drugs, developing depression, living in chronic fear and *"develop[ing] feelings of hatred towards their parents and wish[ing] death upon them"*. They noted that girls were more likely to be introverted, think suicidal thoughts or run away.

As discussed further below, some of the negative behaviours adopted by adolescents as a means of coping with their current situations – such as repressing their feelings, using drugs or engaging in violence – also suggest that they are suffering emotional distress and may need mental health and psychosocial support.

Some of the mental health concerns reported or exhibited by adolescents may also be linked to conservative cultural norms, which discourage adolescents from fully expressing their opinions and emotions or seeking help. As discussed further below, adolescents regularly reported repressing their feelings or not seeking help because of fear of punishment or cultural expectations around how boys and girls should behave. The research team also observed in several contexts that boys and girls often struggled with sharing their emotions or expressing themselves. In Yemen, facilitators noted that discussions with male adolescent groups in both Aden and Amran were often short and abrupt with boys providing virtually no in-depth explanations of the problems they face in life and how they feel. In Egypt, facilitators commented that all girl groups were very shy and it was evident that they were either unfamiliar with expressing themselves or did not want to discuss the problems they face at home. Instead, they often copied and repeated each other's answers. When asked about their coping mechanisms, the girls all mentioned ignoring and avoiding the problem even if it was not their fault, or wishing it had never happened. This initial shyness among adolescents was anticipated by the research team, which is why a range of activities, particularly role play, were used to help them feel comfortable to share more.

In search of support

> **"There is usually no one to share the pain we feel inside."**
>
> Ahmad, 12–14-year-old boy, Egypt

Considering the high levels of violence and significant protection risks adolescents face in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen, another key finding of this research is that they also feel they have no one to turn to for support. Most significantly, many adolescents reported not turning to their primary caregivers for support – on the contrary, they feared that they would not be listened to and would face further punishment from their caregivers. Instead, they feel they must constantly negotiate their way with their parents, teachers and authority figures and often distrust or avoid adults who they should be able to turn to for support.

It is only in times of active warfare – during airstrikes, bombings or artillery fire – that the majority of boys and girls felt they could turn to their parents for support and that they were sources of solace and comfort. One girl in Yemen said, *"My father and my mother are the people that helped me to overcome the nightmares and hallucinations of losing family members and home and dying."* Girls in

Yemen reported that their mothers helped them cope with the war, with one girl remembering, *"My mother would lie to me and tell me that the sound of the rockets was the sound of the wind."* She found comfort when her mother would read to her from the Holy Qur'ān and then sleep next to her. Some parents also sought professional help by taking their daughter to a psychotherapist.

In stark comparison, the extent to which adolescents feel supported or seek support outside active conflict situations is significantly reduced.

> **"When it comes to me I don't let anyone solve a problem I face. If it is my fault I go and fix the problem myself. Even if a big problem happens I don't let my parents interfere."**
>
> Mai,* 15–17-year-old girl, Egypt

In cases of harassment, girls often reported they were afraid to tell their parents, especially their fathers. One girl reflected, *"The father should not get mad at his daughter in such situation [harassment] because it is not her fault but the guy's fault."* Girls in Yemen and Egypt who did speak to a family member preferred to speak either to their mother, sister or a female relative. In Egypt and Yemen, adolescent boys were only likely to seek support from their parents, usually their mothers, in cases of sadness caused by a death in the family. In other cases, they reported not saying anything to anyone or, at most, they spoke with a friend. Some adolescents spoke of talking to community members and said that elders often played an important role in solving and mitigating conflicts. Overall, however, adolescents rarely reported turning to community members for support; rather, as described above, they are more likely to distrust people in positions of authority, such as teachers and the police, who they should be able to turn to for help, and are instead vulnerable to exploitation. Boys and girls across all four contexts reported that they would most likely turn to their peers for support or deal with their problems alone, if at all.

Through the workshops with caregivers, it also became clear why adolescents are less likely to turn to their parents for support. While some caregivers recognised the daily pressures adolescents face and support them to deal with the problems they encounter in school and the community, many caregivers perceived adolescents to be difficult and blamed them for the problems they experienced, while others saw adolescents dealing with their problems on their own as a positive coping strategy. In Yemen, one caregiver claimed that some adolescents quit school because *"the teachers are hard on them for not doing their homework"*, not recognising the severity with which children are treated at schools. In Egypt, caregivers reported that adolescents, especially boys, preferred to deal with their issues on their own to *"prove their maturity"* and that they will be *"called cowards for depending on their parents in solving their problems"*. In Jordan, some caregivers reported that their adolescent children did not appreciate their parents' difficult economic situation and are embarrassed and angry that they do not have what their peers do.

Key informants who work with adolescents in Egypt also talked about parents' inability to deal with teenagers due to their conservative and traditional parenting style. They reported that parents treat their children as if they are private property and enforce socially-constructed gender roles which force boys to become men and girls to become women at a very early age. The parents' inability to constructively engage with their adolescents leads to emotionally immature youth who are unable to express their opinions and suffer from low self-confidence.

For children, supportive relationships with caregivers and their extended networks, including relatives, peers and community members, become increasingly important during adolescence. This is especially the case for adolescents who have experienced conflict or other trauma and live in stressful and protracted situations. It is essential for their mental health that they have someone to turn to for support, either at home or at school, to help them to manage the difficult emotions that come as a natural response to adversity and to protect them against the distressing impacts of conflict, war and other violence.

Negative ways of coping

As outlined above, not only do adolescents have very few places to turn for support, they also struggle to express their emotions and are more likely to repress or avoid their problems. As a girl in Jordan reflected, *"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 my problems."* Across all four contexts it appears that boys are less likely to express their emotional struggles and will deal with their issues alone or not at all, most likely due to cultural expectations that males should appear strong and in control. In Jordan, older Syrian refugee girls reported not having anyone trustworthy to confide in and that they tended to deal with their problems on their own, usually doing nothing, ignoring the problem or trying to forget it. Older girls in Egypt talked about how when a problem is between friends they seek dialogue but when it appears to be *"outside of their power"*, they avoid the problem and pretend it does not exist.

In all four countries, when adolescents were asked how they dealt with their problems, many reported turning to negative coping mechanisms instead. One boy in Yemen observed that, *"Girls resort to*

Case study – Sarah,* 17-year-old girl, Syrian refugee living in Jordan

"Because of my family's financial situation and the constant fear I had because of what I experienced in the war in Syria, I didn't go to school for two years. I was only fourteen. I just thought this would solve my psychological problems and it would also help my family financially if I was no longer a burden to them. But soon I realised that it was wrong and I was able to break off my engagement.

"What made me realise? Well my mum made me enrol in this project in Zarqa. I didn't want to go because I really didn't get along with my mum and I felt so sad and stressed all the time, I didn't want to go anywhere. But I'm glad I went, I got psychosocial support. You know, I was just a child when I witnessed war and the terrible scenes that are part of it, and we had just arrived in a new country with new culture and traditions. It was very hard for us to socialise with people. The psychosocial support helped me learn more about Jordanian culture and how to deal with people here. The organisation helped me to enrol back into school and I also received financial support for some time after that. When I went back to school I knew that it was the right place for me. I felt less stressed and found happiness as I realised this was the place I would figure out my future. Also my relationship improved with my parents. When we first arrived they were biased and treated me differently to my brothers but then they took part in the awareness sessions within the programme and they changed their attitude.

"The project was for mothers and daughters so my mum and I were in separate groups, but they explained to both groups what parents' and children's rights and responsibilities are. With time we started practising what we had learned at home and it really helped our relationship and boosted my self-confidence. Both girls and their parents need these educational awareness courses so they all know what their rights and responsibilities are and girls can fight for their rights when necessary.

"I thought of marriage as a solution when I was younger. All the girls around me used to talk about it, maybe because they believed this was what would bring them happiness. I was a child and I got influenced by their thoughts and I wanted to go through that experience. Most people in our society treat boys different to girls, and this destroys girls' characters. One of my friends is my age and she's married with a daughter. When she sees me going to school she says how lucky I was because I could fight and get my right to education whereas she was forced to get married. A lot of girls in our society are also not allowed to go to school – the reasons behind that are not convincing to me – like some families say our traditions don't allow for girls to study, but education is a mandatory thing in all religions. No one can deny a child, whether they're a girl or boy, their right to education."

marriage, and some boys join gang groups… others get brainwashed that bombing themselves would take them to heaven."

Adolescent girls regularly reported that they saw marriage as the only way of escaping their home situations, even though they recognised that married life is sometimes no better than life at home with parents. Girls living in displacement camps in Iraq spoke of feeling *"imprisoned"* in their family's tents as they are not allowed to go out and are *"forced to study at home"*. Early marriage, especially to a man living in the host community, was often seen to be a means of escape.

"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 my problems."

Amira,* 15–17-year-old girl, Syrian refugee, Zarqa, Jordan

Boys regularly reported resorting to violence when "fighting injustices" at school, in the streets or at work. Some boys also claimed that fighting in the street was the way to gain respect in the community and that they like to watch fights to

Sarah,* 17 years old, is from Syria and lives in Zarqa, Jordan.

PHOTO: AHMAD MUHSEN/SAVE THE CHILDREN

PHOTO: AHMED BIALLY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Syrian adolescents participate in an emotional awareness exercise organised by Save the Children in Greater Cairo, Egypt.

learn new techniques. A key informant noted that boys who run away from home join street gangs to show their families they are independent and strong.

While many boys and girls expressed their wish for peace and reconciliation, they also wished they could have fought to defend their countries. Some key informants also noted that adolescents may join armed groups as a way to find purpose and agency in their disempowered circumstances.

The use of drugs by adolescents also came up repeatedly, particularly in Egypt and Jordan. Girls in Egypt talked about how older boys give younger boys drugs to sell in order to avoid being arrested themselves, and about how the police use drugs as well. They reported that drugs are also present in schools and are sometimes used by girls, who sell them too because they need money. They also mentioned that in some cases parents give drugs to their children to sell or use drugs in front of their children and that that has become a normal thing to do. Younger Jordanian boys reported that drug use was high among their age group. In Jordan, caregivers reported that breakdown in family structures and lack of parental supervision led to adolescents getting involved with *"bad people"* and taking drugs or engaging in other destructive behaviours, whereas key informants saw high levels of school drop out as a reason for the high prevalence of drug use in adolescents. An education community mobiliser in Iraq also reported that the pressure on boys to *"be men"* is immense, and that some engage in what they see as *"manly"* behaviour, such as smoking, from an early age.

> **"We get offered a lot of drugs. Some students smoke normal cigarettes in school and then do drugs directly afterwards. They get so addicted they'd work in anything to get the money for it."**
>
> Tarek,* 12–14-year-old boy, Egypt

Adolescents still live in hope that things will get better

Despite adolescents reporting that they faced significant challenges and risks in their daily lives, some also demonstrated that they have a vision for their rights and are resilient in their hope for change and their desire to contribute. **Most boys and girls aspire to *"live in peace"* so that life can go back to normal and they can finish their schooling and find good jobs.** Additionally, even though boys and girls believe their caregivers and teachers fail to protect them, they have not lost all hope, maintaining a vision of how they should be treated by adults and believing that those who mistreat them should be held accountable.

What adolescents want and the solutions they prioritise

The research also provides key insights into what adolescents prioritise most in their lives. From the results of the human rights card ranking activity – where adolescents in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen[59] were asked what rights would help them to better cope and deal with the conflicts they face – the majority of adolescents prioritised being safe at home and in their communities.

Many adolescents also prioritised protection from violence and access to education and health care because, as it was put by boys and girls in Yemen, securing these rights would help them in their struggles to survive. At the same time, adolescents often went back and forth on whether they thought being protected from violence or being protected from drugs was more important, which suggests that drug use is a serious and pervasive issue in their homes and communities.

> **"If all these factors were made available, we will be living perfectly fine. Life will be beautiful."**
>
> Abdulkarim, 15–17-year-old boy, Yemen

Being safe at home and in the community

In Yemen, Egypt and Jordan, many girls prioritised being safe at home and in their community. For girls who prioritised safety, many saw it as a gateway to their other rights, which could not be achieved if they are not protected. For the majority of girls in Egypt, protection from drugs and safety trumped education in their ranking order, with some girls explaining that they cannot learn in an environment of fear, corruption and violence. Conversely, while Syrian refugee girls in Jordan placed being safe at home and in their community in their top three priorities, many gave education top priority because *"if we don't get educated, we can't do any of the others on the list"*.

> **"When we set our minds to something, we can accomplish it. We need to depend on ourselves. We can build our future with power of will and determination. […] We should be independent and don't let any obstacles affect us."**
>
> Nour,* 12–14-year-old girl, Yemen

Syrian refugee boys in Jordan also prioritised being safe at home and in the community. One boy argued that *"we shouldn't beat small children"* because it would *"teach them violence"*, while another noted that protection is critical because *"most individuals get beat up, and they should be protected"*. All groups of Jordanian adolescents also gave top priority to being safe at home and in their community, with one young boy saying, *"The most important right is safety because if there is no safety there are no rights."*

When adolescents were discussing protection, they often debated whether protection from harm at home and in their communities or protection from drugs was a more important priority. Many adolescents, particularly in Egypt and Jordan, talked about how both violence and drugs were key issues in their homes and communities and found it difficult to decide which issue most needed to be addressed in order to solve the problems they face.

Being able to learn or go to school

Many adolescents in all three contexts also prioritised access to education. Most boys in Yemen prioritised education as it *"helps us get good jobs"*. Syrian refugee boys in Jordan also prioritised education because it is *"the base for every single idea in the world"*, *"it helps us learn new methods and standards"*, *"we can tackle all of our other needs"* and it *"encourages us to express our opinions freely without fear"*. One group of boys also described education as *"our weapon"*.

> **"Sometimes I face barriers and challenges but I use my inner strength to overcome them. I've been through a lot but a lot of things give me hope, like the thought of going back to Syria well-educated and being able to give back to my homeland. I can study here and then go back and fight with my pen and diplomas. I'd like to study media and journalism but my family want me to study medicine."**
>
> Sarah,* 17-year-old girl, Zarqa, Jordan (see case study on page 30)

While most girls ranked being safe over education, as noted above, they explained this is not because they see education as less important; rather they feel that they need to feel safe first in order to fulfil their other rights, such as access to education. The barriers girls face in accessing their right to education, as well as reaping its benefits, were also noted by girls during the human rights card ranking activity. In Yemen, girls regularly spoke of the importance of education, which they said many girls do not get to enjoy. On girl in Yemen said, *"My problem was that I dropped out of school because no one was motivating me to learn. Education is my right and I wasn't aware enough of its importance."* Older girls in Egypt also reflected that if they do go to school, the time they have invested in their learning yields little result as they end up staying at home after they graduate and waiting to be married rather than entering the workforce.

The right to medical care

In all three contexts, but especially in Jordan and Yemen, access to medical care (sometimes referred to as 'health insurance') was often prioritised by adolescents. From workshop discussions, some groups considered good health, like education, as essential to their enjoying other rights; others prioritised medical care due to personal experiences (such as family members failing to access adequate medical care); while Syrian refugees in Jordan said they prioritised access to medical care as they were not currently able to access it, presumably due to their refugee status. While the workshop transcripts did not provide any detail on why adolescents prioritised access to medical care in Yemen, their rankings may have been influenced by the impact of the conflict on civilians and hospitals, which has restricted access to medical care and supplies.

The right to freely express their thoughts and beliefs

Adolescents often ranked "freely express my thoughts and beliefs" in their top three priorities and it was a theme that came up regularly in the workshops. Adolescents often demonstrated a drive to express themselves by saying they wanted to learn more about how to share their opinions with others and how to deal with feelings, and to engage more in creative activities such as theatre and drawing.

Adolescents also often linked expression of opinions with violence – noting that they wished they could express their opinions at home and at school without fear of punishment.

While adolescents sometimes expressed a desire to support the war efforts in their respective countries in order to bring about peace, they more often recognised the power and potential of dialogue for resolving conflicts and understandings. In Yemen, during the role-playing activity, most adolescents emphasised communication and allowing for everyone to express their opinions as the preferred way to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings. They clearly stated their disapproval of violent methods of discipline when they emphasised that parents and teachers should treat children well and *"convince us logically… they shouldn't force us to do anything"*.

Being able to play and relax

Being able to play and relax was regularly given a low priority across both genders and age groups. Adolescents in Egypt talked about play only happening when *"all the work is done"*; Syrian refugee girls in Jordan said *"there is no time to play; we have house duties that we need to finish"*; Jordanian adolescents consistently referred to play as *"entertainment"*, *"not a daily necessity"* and said that *"there are much more important priorities"*; and in Yemen adolescents talked about play only being possible in safe environments. One boy from Yemen noted, *"[We don't have] any means of entertainment for children, and this makes children enter a miserable state and they go out in public where they can be an easy prey for armed forces."*

Some adolescents saw play as important, with one boy group in Yemen noting that it *"provides opportunities to express oneself and even gather new information using the internet"* and another Syrian refugee boy in Jordan noting that it helps them to *"discharge our energy"*.

Caregivers and key informants also observed that adolescents do not have enough safe spaces to play and stressed the importance of involving them in activities, including peace-building, sports, arts and small projects and initiatives.

"There is no time to play; we have house duties that we need to finish."

Iman,* 15–17-year-old girl, Syrian refugee, Zarqa, Jordan

Putting adolescents at the centre

As the adolescents consulted in this study have made clear, young people living in the MENA region in contexts affected by conflict and violence face complex and acute challenges at a crucial time in their development. They need greater protection and support from their caregivers, their schools and their communities, as well as the international community, to better cope with their situations and successfully transition to adulthood.

Ensuring adolescents affected by armed conflict are protected

For most adolescents in this study, armed conflict is the root cause of the challenges they face. They suffer disproportionately from its consequences, whether they are directly targeted, suffer from indiscriminate military action or are indirectly affected by the disruption of public services. As a first order priority, much more needs to be done to end the conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

States, militaries and all actors with influence over the lives of adolescents in conflict situations must also commit to improve their protection by preventing adolescents from being put at risk, upholding international laws and standards and holding violators to account. Every effort must also be made to rebuild young people's shattered lives through the provision of key services including psychosocial support; education; family strengthening and support; access to income; and improved child protection mechanisms.

PHOTO: MOHAMMED AWADH/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Rana,* 14 years old, outside the house her family is renting in Sana'a, Yemen

Integrated programming with adolescents to address the complex cycle of conflict and violence affecting their lives

The myriad of issues affecting adolescents have complex causes and therefore complex solutions. We know single-sector programming for adolescents is less effective and that integrated programmes providing multi-faceted solutions are essential.

Safe spaces to learn and connect with peers

Save the Children provides safe spaces where adolescents can interact with each other, attend life skills sessions and participate in education and learning opportunities. In these safe spaces they lead on projects and activities of their choosing and practice the skills they have learned. These spaces offer both structured and non-structured activities – as adolescents also need to just 'hang out' and connect with their peers. These spaces also provide a safe haven where adolescents can forget, at least for a while, the environment of violence they are constantly exposed to. Their participation in these safe spaces can help reduce their sense of isolation, find support in peers, and feel a sense of purpose when leading on activities and projects they have chosen. These spaces are particularly important in situations of conflict and violence, as they provide a sense of safety for adolescents, temporarily freeing them of the restrictions they face in their daily lives.

Drop-in centres for working adolescents

In Jordan, Save the Children has been providing flexible activities for refugee adolescents who are working to support their families. These adolescents, mostly boys, live in camps and are out of school, with no time to attend structured learning or recreational activities. The drop-in centres provide them with the opportunity to just 'show up' when they have a break or when they are free, as they can join the activities at any time. They can participate in informal education, arts and crafts, recreational and other activities, and interact with peers, which assist in renewing their sense of normalcy. They can also engage in structured educational and self-awareness activities, ranging from dance performances to sessions teaching them about child rights.

PHOTO: MOHAB ELSHENAWY

Youth members of the "Speak Up" campaign in Cairo, Egypt, after a session about how to fight sexual harassment and raise community awareness in their district.

Creating a protective and supportive family environment

As adolescents and key informants told us, many caregivers are failing to protect their children due to conflict-related stressors, poverty, drug use or their strict adherence to harmful social norms. Caregivers need more support to ensure home environments are safe and supportive spaces for adolescents. The root causes of violence and discrimination in the home are varied and a holistic, multi-faceted response to supporting caregivers is needed. They need targeted support to manage financial and mental stress and advice on how to positively parent their children as they transition through this crucial stage of their development in crisis-affected circumstances.

Parenting without violence: an evidence-based approach

This approach is implemented by Save the Children and our partners across the MENA region, and it builds on Save the Children's widely-tested Positive Discipline programme. It aims to prevent children and adolescents from experiencing physical and humiliating punishment in the home. Initiatives work with fathers, mothers and caregivers where they gain increased understanding of child and adolescent development, child rights, and positive parenting. It strengthens partner and parent–child relationships based on principles of non-violence, non-discrimination and gender equality, and it empowers girls and boys to express their views and feelings in the home.

Ensuring school is always a safe space

The classroom should always be a safe haven for children. For those who are living in crisis or in challenging home environments, school is an important place to find respite, access support and, through continuing their education, remain hopeful that they have a future beyond their current circumstances. Considering the extent to which adolescents reported that they instead experience high levels of violence and discrimination at school, significant efforts need to be made to ensure schools are violence-free.

Schools as Zones of Peace

Schools as Zones of Peace is a Save the Children-led project implemented in the MENA region that aims to secure girls' and boys' protection at school, and to avoid disruption of their education due to armed conflict. The project builds on the Schools as Zones of Peace model that was successful in ensuring children's access to education in Nepal during the civil war, using components from this while linking it to the Safe Schools Declaration. In the project, we work with children, school management and local communities, and seek to influence local, national and global policies. Locally, the project aims to secure protective learning environments in conflict and post-conflict situations, raise awareness among communities, school management and children, and build local and national level engagement to protect education. This includes using participatory tools and methods to engage children. This is a way to implement – or encourage the endorsement of – the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines on Military Use of Schools through a bottom-up approach by engaging local schools and communities. Where the context allows, we work through partners to engage armed non-state actors among others to not disrupt education.

Social and emotional learning in schools

In situations of conflict and violence, the ties between social, emotional, and academic skills grow stronger as adolescents struggle to cope and survive in unstable and often life-threatening environments. Based on Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence*, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is becoming an integral part of education. Save the Children is promoting this approach in the MENA region, where children and adolescents from grade 1 to 11 learn five important life competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Research shows that SEL can reduce aggression and emotional distress and improve interpersonal skills, how adolescents view themselves, and their academic achievement.[60]

Strengthening community support and accountability

The capacity for communities to support each other and ensure accountability for young people's protection at home, on the street and in schools needs to be harnessed. Strong communities are often disrupted and destroyed by conflict and displacement and in times of crisis and economic stress people focus their efforts and resources on their immediate families and home environment. As a consequence, community support and accountability mechanisms can be weakened and corruption goes unchecked. As adolescents have told us, they feel as if there is no one to turn to for help, not even institutions they should be able to trust such as school and the police. It is important that communities are supported to lead on rebuilding their protective functions and promoting a culture where violence against children at home, at school or in the street is not tolerated and where children feel confident they can turn to community members and people in authority for support.

Addressing community violence: Safe Cities anti-harassment campaign in Egypt

Save the Children started implementing the Safe Cities initiative in Egypt in 2016. The programme aims to address the frequent harassment of adolescent girls in urban settings in Egypt. It pilots different approaches to improve protection and reporting mechanisms for adolescent girls, as well as build capacities of young people, local institutions and community leaders to tackle harassment. Activities are explicitly oriented to address barriers at multiple levels, including developing skills and capacities of young people to respond to harassment and changing attitudes and behaviours of caregivers, community members, service providers and duty bearers at local level. One key component is the youth-led initiatives where adolescents and youth design interventions to combat sexual harassment.

Supporting young people's freedom of expression and participation

Children form and express views from an early age, but the extent to which they participate in the decision-making that affects them increases with their age and evolving capacities. As children move into adolescence and become young adults, their capacities develop, their world view broadens and their need to have a voice and develop an identity intensifies. Supporting adolescents to exercise their right to be heard and participate in decision-making that affects them at this stage of their young lives is crucial to their overall development. There is a growing body of evidence that taking children's views and experiences into account – at home, at school and in other settings – helps develop children's self-esteem, cognitive abilities, social skills and respect for others.[61] An adolescent's right to express views and have them taken seriously is also a powerful tool through which they can challenge situations of violence, abuse, threat, injustice or discrimination. If they are encouraged to voice what is happening to them and provided with the necessary mechanisms through which to raise concerns, it is much easier for violations of rights to be exposed.[62] When children are prevented from expressing their views or feel as if they are not listened to or valued, their self-esteem and confidence is likely to be affected and they may become withdrawn and depressed or resort to harmful ways of coping to address their problems or express themselves.

Adolescent-led radio and social media campaign in Mosul, Iraq

Mosul has been one of the areas worst affected by the conflict in Iraq. Save the Children is supporting adolescents living in Mosul to tell stories in their own voices through the local radio station. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness about the protection of children and adolescents and will be child-led.

The children's stories are also turned into cartoons to present them visually in a child-friendly way. These are then shared on social media and the voices of children are amplified by influencers.

Empowering young people to become agents of change

The potential of young people to bring about social, economic and political change must be fostered. More efforts need to be made to improve their education and readiness for employment and active citizenship, and to promote a culture of prosocial behaviour and non-violence. Adolescents must be given opportunities to actively participate and take responsibility in their communities, build life skills and learn non-violent approaches to conflict resolution.

In UNHCR's global review of their engagement with displaced youth, young people often reported experiencing a sense of political marginalisation and social exclusion, as a result both of their displacement and the impact this had on their political, ethnic and religious identity, and of the lack of rights that many encountered in their

Participatory action research with adolescent girls in Egypt

Adolescent girls in greater Cairo, Egypt, who had fled the Syria crisis, led a participatory action research initiative supported by Save the Children and the Issam Fares Institute–American University of Beirut. They explored issues affecting themselves and other girls in their community and identified their own solutions. The girls decided on topics to research, conducted outreach to other girls, collected the data, analysed the findings and proposed actions to respond. They then implemented community projects, fully led by themselves. The project provided guidance and training on participatory research methodologies and supported the girls throughout all steps, with the girls taking the lead in all components.

When asked what they had gained from participating in the initiative, the girls shared that their participation served as an outlet for their creativity and their voices. The girls also felt that the project facilitated integration between Egyptians and Syrians and helped them realise that they are the same. The project also helped them work together better as a team and improved collaboration and cooperation between them. They appreciated finding someone to listen to them and to help them solve their problems. The girls enjoyed that they were contributing to their communities, that community members were responsive and made them feel welcome, and that they made new friends within their communities.[63]

Girls preparing for a community performance as part of the Participatory Action Research project with adolescents in Egypt.

Mohammad,* 15 years old, from Syria, plays with his friends near Dohuk in Iraq.

PHOTO: AYTUNC AKAD/PANOS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

host country. Young people's exclusion from decision-making processes was also found to be an issue. Young people said adults – including elders and international agencies – "did not take their opinions into account consistently in decision-making" and did not involve them "in programme action regularly", which left young people with "limited opportunities to develop their skills and improve their lives". Key informants saw these factors as "major constraints to peace and security."[64]

Instilling hope: supporting adolescents' mental health and wellbeing

Adolescents expressed feelings of hopelessness as a result of the violence and abuse they face at home, at school and on the streets and their sense of entrapment in their situations. Many adolescents reported resorting to high-risk ways of coping, placing their health, wellbeing and development in jeopardy.

While supporting adolescents to foster a sense of identity and agency at this crucial stage in their development will contribute to their overall mental health and wellbeing, they may also be suffering from mental health issues as a result of the violence they have seen or experienced during conflict, displacement or in their everyday lives and need targeted support.

Mindfulness for adolescents affected by conflict and violence

MHPSS programming for adolescents is an area Save the Children has identified as a priority given the unique considerations for mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of this age group. Currently, in partnership with the Center for Mind Body Medicine, Save the Children is piloting mind–body skills groups that intend to address the detrimental impact of conflict on the lives of children, adolescents and caregivers by teaching self-care and group support, utilising mindfulness, breathing exercises, psychoeducation and movement techniques. Save the Children Jordan is running a mind–body skills group for adolescent girls in the Za'atari refugee camp and Save the Children Yemen is running several groups – one mixed for girls and boys and two for adolescent boys.

Putting a special focus on girls

For many girls living in conservative cultures, adolescence is a time when their worlds start to shrink, their opportunities become more limited and their vulnerabilities increase.[65] In crisis situations, strict cultural traditions often become even more constricting and gender inequality and gender-based discrimination are exacerbated. As a consequence, humanitarian crises disproportionately impact adolescent girls[66] and they are at heightened risk of child marriage, exploitation and physical and sexual violence.

Homebound girls in Jordan

The refugee crisis fuelled the phenomenon of 'homebound girls', where girls under 18 years of age either independently withdraw from school, or are withdrawn by their families, and instead remain at home. This isolation affects the girls' socio-emotional and educational development, which in turn jeopardises their path to a positive and stable future. To address this problem, Save the Children provided a comprehensive programme targeting the girls and their mothers. Girls received structured life skills sessions covering team work, interpersonal communication skills, problem solving and decision making. They also received information on reproductive health. Mothers participated in complementary sessions, where they learned side by side with their daughters, and gained knowledge in financial literacy and how to start micro-home-based businesses. Mothers and daughters designed and carried out home-based projects together with the support of small grants. Results included improved mother–daughter relationships; girls encouraged to go back to school; and participating girls started to go out of the house more and participate in external activities.

PHOTO: TRACY MANNERS/SAVE THE CHILDREN

(Left to right) Farah,* Lely* and Amira* attend the HEART project in Zaatari refugee camp, Jordan, where they undertake activities and classes. The project encourages children and adolescents to share and understand their experiences and emotions.

Conclusion and recommendations for action

Adolescents in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen are facing unspeakable levels of violence in every sphere of their lives – not only due to war but also at the hands of their caregivers and in their schools and communities. Through this study they have told us clearly what key challenges they face and what support they need to overcome them.

The international community needs to start listening to adolescents in the MENA region and to recognise the urgent need – and humanitarian responsibility – to address their specific vulnerabilities as well as fostering their unique potential to drive positive change in the MENA region.

We call on national governments, donors, humanitarian actors and the international community to:

- Protect adolescent girls and boys living in humanitarian contexts against all forms of violence, including armed conflict and violence at home, at school and in the community, by working with caregivers, communities and institutions to change how they see adolescents. Support adolescents in their agency so that they are better equipped to navigate their violent and conflict-prone environment.
- Recognise that adolescent girls and boys living in humanitarian contexts have needs that are distinct from those of younger children and adults, and support and increase programming approaches targeted specifically at adolescents that are responsive to their diverse needs. Invest in age disaggregation in all programmes, and ensure humanitarian structures are age-sensitive and inclusive of adolescents.
- Prioritise programming for adolescents that is flexible; culturally sensitive; innovative; multi-sectoral; and integrated to ensure that adolescents' distinct needs in humanitarian contexts are met and that they are supported in successfully transitioning to adulthood. In particular, more adolescent-targeted programming must be developed that focuses on a combination of the following:
  - **Participation** – creating more opportunities for adolescents to build their capacities to express their views, engage in decision-making processes and contribute to their communities.
  - **Protection** – strengthening community-based systems and institutions to ensure that adolescents are protected from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect within and outside the home, they are empowered to report abuse and they can trust authorities to hold perpetrators to account.
  - **Education** – expanding initiatives to ensure adolescents can continue their education by supporting their access to quality, safe and inclusive learning opportunities, including access to secondary education, non-formal education, skills building and job training;
  - **Mental health and psychosocial support services** (MHPSS) – improving adolescents' access to MHPSS to help them process negative experiences and teach them skills to manage their emotions and find positive ways of coping, build resilience and foster mental wellbeing. MHPSS that incorporate access to creative activities, play and other forms of self-expression should also be prioritised.

  - **Livelihoods** – in tandem with supporting adolescents to continue their education or pursue further training or skills building, ensure that they can access safe and adequate employment and livelihood opportunities.

- Support caregivers in humanitarian contexts to positively parent their adolescent children by providing livelihoods assistance, mental wellbeing and parenting support and by strengthening community-led child protection and accountability mechanisms.
- Ensure institutions that interact with adolescents, including schools, government departments and enforcement agencies, protect adolescents and act in their best interests.
- Ensure that adolescent-focused programming is evidence-based and address the significant gap in data and research on adolescents living in humanitarian contexts by funding improved data collection, disaggregated by age and sex, and targeted research – conducted *with* rather than *on* adolescents – to ensure adolescent programming is evidence-based and fit for purpose.
- Listen to adolescents and respond to their challenges and priorities – adolescents must be provided with meaningful opportunities to communicate the challenges and risks they face, voice their ideas on solutions, engage in decision-making processes and develop their leadership potential. Adolescents must also be supported to build their capacities to express themselves, know their rights and feel safe and confident to advocate for themselves at home, at school and in their communities.
- Support the development of adolescent-focused programming policies, guidelines and training materials to assist the appropriate targeting and implementation of interventions.

Amani and Maha (centre and right), 13-year-old members of the Children's Parliament in Yemen, drafting their own ideal United Nations Security Council Resolution for the war in Yemen.

Annex A: Human rights card ranking activity results

The following table presents results of the human rights card ranking activity (see Methodology, page 14, for further detail) conducted during workshops with adolescents in three of the four countries of data collection: Egypt, Jordan and Yemen. Due to time constraints, the activity was not undertaken with groups in Iraq or some groups in Egypt and Jordan (as specified below).

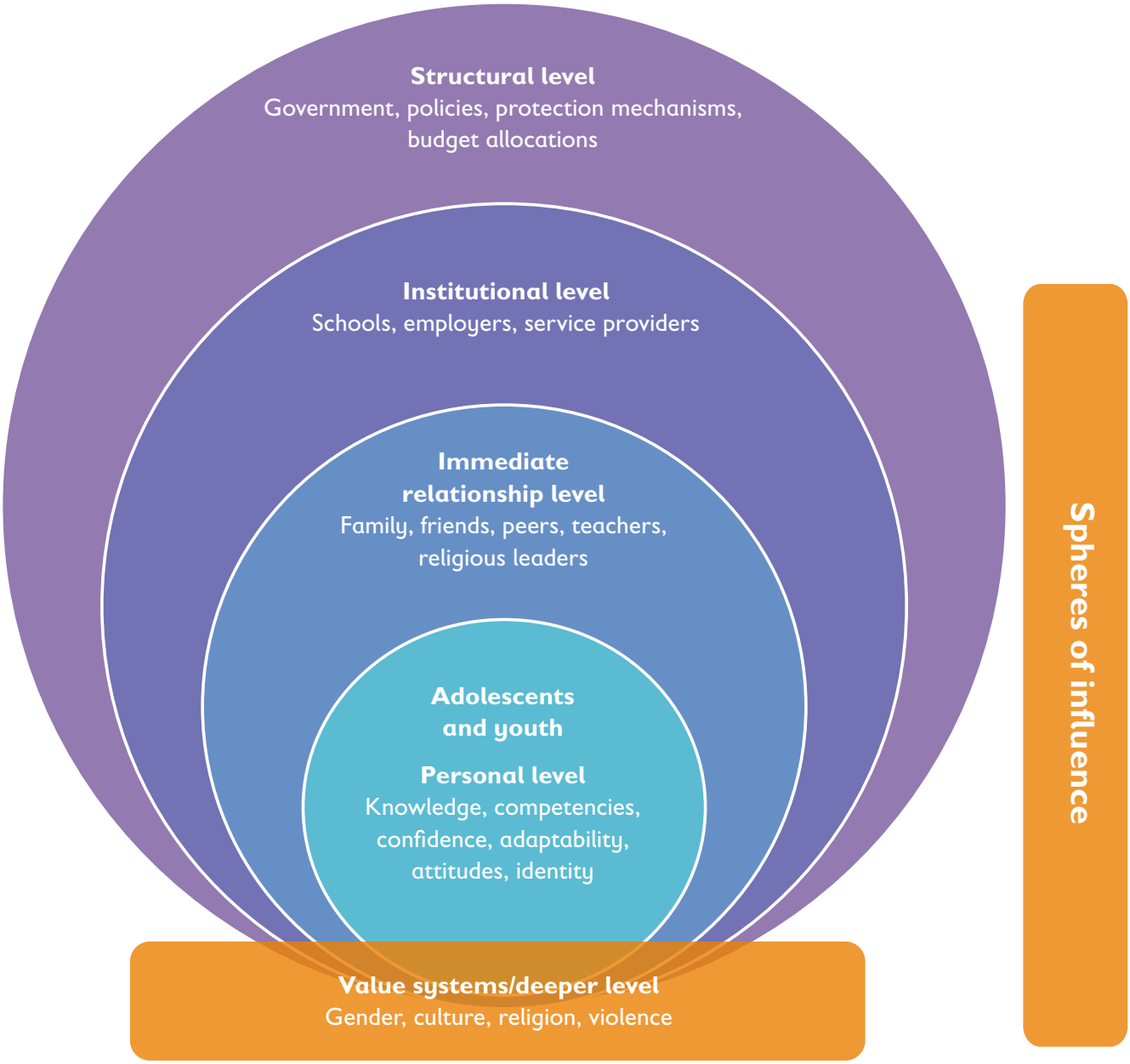
Each group's rankings are colour coded as follows:

- = first priority
- = second priority
- = third priority

	Learn or go to school	Get medical care when I am sick	Play and relax	Protection from being beaten, hit or harassed	Being safe at home or in my community	Protection from drugs	Freely express my thoughts and beliefs	Access information through TV, radio and internet	Meet friends and join groups and clubs outside my home
Adolescents in Egypt									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 1									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 2									
Girls aged 15–17 Group 1									
Girls aged 15–17 Group 2									
(Boys aged 15–17 did not complete exercise)									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 1									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 2									
Adolescents in Jordan (Ma'an)									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 1									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 2									
(Girls aged 15–17 did not complete exercise)									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 1									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 2									
Boys aged 15–17 Group 1									
Boys aged 15–17 Group 2									

	Learn or go to school	Get medical care when I am sick	Play and relax	Protection from being beaten, hit or harassed	Being safe at home or in my community	Protection from drugs	Freely express my thoughts and beliefs	Access information through TV, radio and internet	Meet friends and join groups and clubs outside my home
Adolescents in Jordan (Zarqa)									
(Girls aged 12–14 did not complete exercise)									
Girls aged 15–17 Group 1									
Girls aged 15–17 Group 2									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 1									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 2									
Boys aged 15–17 Group 1									
Boys aged 15–17 Group 2									
Adolescents in Yemen (Aden)									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 1									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 2									
Girls aged 15–18 Group 1									
Girls aged 15–18 Group 2									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 1									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 2									
Boys aged 15–18 Group 1									
Boys aged 15–18 Group 2									
Adolescents in Yemen (Amran)									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 1									
Girls aged 12–14 Group 2									
Girls aged 15–17 Group 1									
Girls aged 15–17 Group 2									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 1									
Boys aged 12–14 Group 2									
Boys aged 15–17 Group 1									
Boys aged 15–17 Group 2									

Annex B: Save the Children regional framework for adolescents and youth



Annex C: Save the Children regional guidance for adolescent programming in humanitarian contexts: ten core approaches

Guiding principles

- Long time horizons
- Flexibility and patience
- Holistic, multisectoral
- Protection and wellbeing
- Deep local engagement
- Tolerance for risk

Key considerations

- Age
- Gender
- Disability
- Literacy
- Conflict and violence

Ten core approaches

Endnotes

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I WISH TOMORROW WILL NOT COME

Adolescents and the impact of conflict on their experiences: an exploratory study in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen

In 2017 Save the Children conducted a participatory study with 571 adolescent girls and boys, caregivers and community members in Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen. We wanted to hear directly from adolescents how conflict affects their lives, what challenges they face and what they see as the solutions.

The research found that in all contexts and across age and gender groups, adolescents are exposed to high levels of violence in all spheres of their lives, and often have no safe place or support network to turn to. Boys and girls reported using harmful coping strategies – marrying young, taking drugs, fighting – to escape their situations. Many adolescents expressed how they overwhelmingly feel that nobody listens to them.

Adolescents have been overlooked by humanitarian and development actors in the MENA region. At a crucial time in their lives, adolescents face multi-layered vulnerabilities made worse by a context of conflict and violence. Neither cared for as the children they still are nor respected as the young adults they are becoming, they feel neglected and dismissed.

Despite this, participants in the study showed a desire to change things around them – they are aware of their rights and feel a deep sense of injustice when these are not respected, and they want to see conflicts – both political and personal – resolved peacefully and through dialogue.

Much more needs to be done to create visionary, long-term, holistic programming and policy that follows adolescents affected by conflict through their childhood and protects and empowers them as they become young adults. It is time for all actors to listen to what adolescents are saying, intensify efforts to protect them and provide them with the opportunities they need to thrive.

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"When we set our minds to something, we can accomplish it. We need to depend on ourselves. We can build our future with power of will and determination. [...] We should be independent and don't let any obstacles affect us."

Nour,* 12–14-year-old girl, Yemen