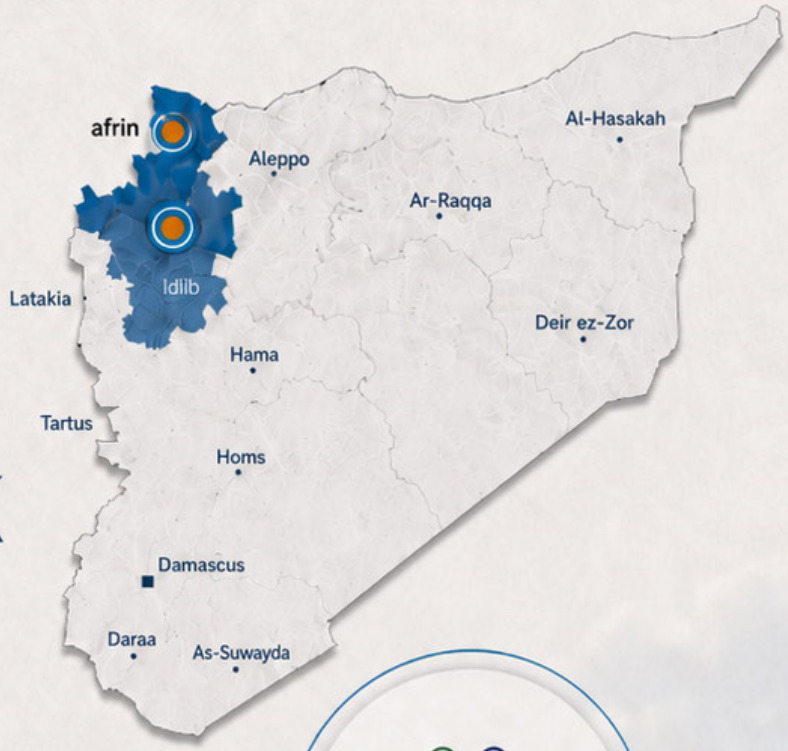
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Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe

BAHAR
REBUILDING COMMUNITIES

Protection Analytical Framework



Evolving Protection Risks and Compounded Vulnerabilities Affecting Communities in Northwest Syria

January 2026



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Executive Summary

Syria's crisis, now in its fifteenth year, continues to represent one of the most severe displacement and protection emergencies globally. In 2025, an estimated 16.5 million people inside the country required humanitarian assistance, including more than 6.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), while a further 3.9 million Syrians remain in neighboring countries. Protracted conflict, economic collapse, weakened rule of law, and repeated shocks have significantly increased exposure to protection risks, particularly for women and children. The political transition following renewed conflict in late 2024 has further exacerbated instability, disrupted services, and strained already limited protection systems.

Through the Protection Analytical Framework (PAF) process conducted by Bahar in partnership with Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH) and in close coordination with the Protection Cluster from the site selection phase through to the completion of the assessment, in Afrin district (Aleppo Governorate) and Sarmada sub-district (Idleb Governorate), five protection risks were identified as the most prevalent and severe, requiring immediate and prioritized attention.

Child, early or forced marriage: Emerged as the most critical protection concern. Findings indicate that economic hardship, displacement, and entrenched social norms are driving increased reliance on child and early marriage as a negative coping mechanism, particularly for girls. The perception of early marriage as a form of protection, combined with limited access to education and livelihood opportunities, continues to undermine girls' safety, rights, and long-term well-being. Children without parental care, especially unaccompanied children and orphans, face the highest risk.

Psychological and emotional abuse: Psychological distress and emotional harm emerged as widespread concerns across assessed communities, reflecting the cumulative impact of prolonged displacement, economic deterioration, loss, insecurity, and repeated exposure to crisis. Respondents reported increased levels of stress, anxiety, emotional exhaustion, social withdrawal, and hopelessness among both adults and children, particularly within households experiencing chronic economic and social pressure. Women, children, persons with disabilities, and caregivers were identified as particularly affected due to compounded responsibilities, disrupted support systems, and prolonged exposure to instability.



Findings also indicate that harmful coping patterns, family tension, and emotionally abusive behaviors have increasingly become normalized within some households and communities, reflecting the erosion of protective social structures and limited access to supportive services. Despite significant psychosocial needs, help-seeking behavior remains low due to stigma, limited awareness of MHPSS services, and insufficient availability of specialized and community-based mental health and psychosocial support interventions.
Theft, extortion, forced eviction, or destruction of personal property: They represent a pervasive protection risk, particularly for displaced and returnee households lacking secure tenure or legal documentation. Weak accountability mechanisms, ineffective responses from authorities, and limited access to legal and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) services exacerbate exposure to exploitation, secondary displacement, and loss of livelihoods.

Gender-based violence (GBV): (GBV) remains deeply entrenched and continues to affect women and girls disproportionately across assessed communities. As highlighted in the section on psychological distress and emotional harm, prolonged displacement, economic deterioration, and weakened social support systems have contributed to the normalization of harmful behaviors within households and communities. Within this context, psychological violence and deprivation of resources emerged as the most commonly reported forms of GBV, driven by entrenched gender inequality, economic pressure, and displacement-related stress. Barriers such as stigma, fear of retaliation, restricted mobility, and limited availability of survivor-centered services continue to constrain access to protection, reporting, and response mechanisms.

Child labor: It persists as a harmful coping strategy linked to poverty, loss of breadwinners, displacement, and school dropout. Children engaged in labor face heightened risks of exploitation, physical injury, and long-term psychosocial harm, further perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and exclusion.



Across all identified risks, vulnerability is layered and intersectional. Children without parental care face the highest exposure to compounded protection risks, followed by women and girls, displaced and returnee families, persons with disabilities, and older persons. While protection response capacities exist across Syria, including community-based mechanisms, specialized GBV and child protection services, legal assistance, and MHPSS interventions, available services remain insufficient, unevenly distributed, and overstretched relative to the scale and severity of needs.

Overall, the findings underscore the urgent need for protection responses that address immediate harm while tackling structural drivers of vulnerability. Strengthening community-based protection mechanisms, improving access to inclusive and survivor-centered services, and linking protection interventions with education, livelihoods, and psychosocial support are essential to mitigate risks, reduce negative coping strategies, and support longer-term recovery and resilience in northwest Syria.

1. Context and Background

Since widespread protests in 2011 were met with brutal government repression, Syria has endured more than a decade of conflict that dismantled state institutions, shattered livelihoods, and created one of the largest humanitarian emergencies in modern history. Years of armed fighting displaced millions internally and externally, with over 13 million people forced from their homes since the outbreak of the conflict, and neighboring countries hosting millions of refugees before the political transition in late 2024 . Persistent violence, economic collapse, and destroyed infrastructure have weakened social protection systems and increased exposure to violence and exploitation across all segments of the population.
Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 and the establishment of a transitional government, the security landscape remains volatile. Large numbers of people continue to be internally displaced and newly displaced by sporadic clashes, sectarian reprisals, and residual conflict . Conditions in areas of return are far from secure or conducive, raising concerns about premature or unsafe returns.

Protection risks in Syria remain extreme and multifaceted. Years of conflict, economic hardship, disrupted services, and widespread displacement have driven families toward negative coping mechanisms such as child labor and early marriage, which are widely documented across affected governorates, particularly in Aleppo and Idlib . Economic insecurity and displacement increase families' reliance on these harmful strategies, making children more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and neglect .
Children face acute threats from violence and explosive remnants of war: more than 5 million children are at risk from unexploded ordnance , with tens of thousands of casualties documented. Reports indicate multiple deaths and injuries due to explosive hazards since late 2024, including in Aleppo governorate where incidents were among the highest nationwide. Children out of school, estimated at over 2.4 million, are at increased risk of child labor, child marriage, trafficking, and recruitment .

Gender-based violence remains widespread, exacerbated by socio-economic pressures and community protection breakdown. Assessments in northern Syria noted pervasive GBV, including physical and sexual violence, psychological violence, denial of resources and early and forced marriage , often compounded in displacement settings.

Psychological and emotional distress is widespread across all age groups, particularly among children and adolescents exposed to prolonged conflict, loss of family members, displacement, and repeated shocks such as earthquakes. Reports from relief agencies note high rates of mental health concerns among unaccompanied and separated children, particularly in Aleppo and Idlib, with community members reporting increases in child marriage and other negative coping mechanisms following the 2023 earthquake.

In addition to these generalized protection risks, severe incidents of ethno-sectarian violence and reprisals have been documented in 2025, including mass civilian killings and collective punishment campaigns against Alawite communities in Latakia, Tartus, Hama, and Homs governorates . Thousands of civilians, a significant number of whom were non-combatants, have reportedly been killed in violence linked to operational shifts after the regime's collapse, including documented extrajudicial killings and sectarian targeting. Such incidents have further intensified fear, displacement, and reluctance to report protection violations among affected communities.

Efforts to address protection needs derive from a mix of local, regional, and international actors. United Nations agencies, including UNHCR, continue humanitarian operations inside Syria and through cross-border deliveries, working to provide basic services, legal assistance, and protection programming for IDPs, returnees, and host communities. The "Syria is Home " digital platform launched by UNHCR aims to centralize information on legal documentation, services, and rights to help families make informed decisions about return and reintegration.

Child protection programming by various humanitarian actors focuses on education access, psychosocial support, and explosive hazard awareness, while protection clusters coordinate data collection, referrals, and community-based support networks. Despite these efforts, gaps in funding, humanitarian access, and security constraints limit consistent service delivery, and protection concerns , including GBV, child labor, early marriage, trafficking, and explosive hazards, remain elevated across the country.

Despite the protracted crisis and ongoing instability, a range of protection response capacities continues to operate across Syria, led by national actors, United Nations agencies, and international and local NGOs. According to recent United Nations and Protection Cluster reporting, protection activities remain a core component of the humanitarian response, though coverage and quality vary significantly by location and access conditions.

The Protection Cluster, through its Areas of Responsibility (AoRs), coordinates child protection, Gender-based violence, housing, land and property (HLP), and mine action interventions across multiple governorates. These efforts include case management services, community-based protection mechanisms, legal awareness activities, psychosocial support (PSS), and referral pathways for individuals at heightened risk. UNHCR and protection partners continue to support legal assistance, civil documentation, and HLP-related services for internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, and host communities, particularly in areas affected by displacement and tenure insecurity.



GBV and child protection actors provide specialized services such as survivor-centered case management, safe spaces, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), with a focus on women, girls, and children without parental care. However, multiple assessments highlight that these services remain insufficient to meet the scale and severity of needs, with limited geographic coverage, funding shortfalls, and persistent barriers to access, including stigma, mobility constraints, and security risks.

Education, livelihoods, and social protection interventions contribute indirectly to protection outcomes by addressing some of the underlying drivers of negative coping mechanisms, including child labor and early marriage. Nevertheless, United Nations reporting consistently notes that weakened public institutions, fragmented governance structures, and reduced humanitarian funding have constrained the ability of existing systems to provide sustained and comprehensive protection responses.

Overall, while protection capacities are present and actively responding, they remain overstretched and unevenly distributed. This gap between needs and available services underscores the importance of targeted, context-specific protection programming that strengthens community-based mechanisms, enhances coordination, and links immediate response with longer-term prevention and resilience-building efforts.
In addition to humanitarian actors operating through formal coordination mechanisms, local authorities, community leaders, religious figures, local councils, and informal community-based networks continue to play an important role in responding to protection concerns across assessed communities. These actors contribute, with varying levels of capacity and influence, to mediation efforts, dispute resolution, community awareness, referrals, and support to vulnerable households, particularly in areas where formal services remain limited or difficult to access.

However, engagement with these stakeholders remains inconsistent and often constrained by limited technical capacity, fragmented governance structures, resource limitations, and the absence of standardized protection approaches. Strengthening collaboration with local duty bearers and non-traditional community stakeholders could contribute to more sustainable, locally grounded, and accessible protection responses.

2. Assessment Overview and Methodology

Purpose and Use of the Protection Analytical Framework

The Protection Analytical Framework serves as a structured analytical tool designed to identify, assess, and prioritize protection risks, vulnerabilities, and response capacities in complex humanitarian settings. The primary purpose of the PAF is to support evidence-based decision-making and strengthen the design of protection interventions that are context-specific, risk-informed, and aligned with the needs of affected populations. The assessment aimed to contribute to timely, appropriate, and protection-centered interventions that address identified gaps and align with evolving realities on the ground.

The PAF is intended to inform a wide range of stakeholders, including humanitarian actors, protection partners, donors, and coordination mechanisms such as the Protection Cluster and its Areas of Responsibility (AoRs). It aims to guide programmatic prioritization, enhance coordination, and support advocacy efforts by providing a shared understanding of key protection concerns and their underlying drivers.



In addition, the PAF contributes to identifying gaps in service delivery, highlighting at-risk population groups, and promoting integrated, multi-sectoral responses that link protection with other sectors, including education, livelihoods, legal assistance, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Ultimately, the framework seeks to strengthen both immediate protection responses and longer-term strategies for prevention, resilience, and recovery.

Against this backdrop, Bahar, in partnership with Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, conducted a Protection Analytical Framework assessment between September and November 2025,in two locations: Afrin (Aleppo Governorate) and Sarmada (Idleb Governorate).

While data collection for this assessment was conducted between September and November 2025, the report was finalized within a rapidly evolving operational and political context. Given ongoing population movements, changes in humanitarian access, and fluctuating protection conditions across Syria, some context-specific dynamics may have evolved since the time of data collection. Nevertheless, while the intensity and manifestation of specific risks may continue to evolve, the analysis indicates that the broader structural drivers of vulnerability and the identified protection trends remain highly relevant across the assessed areas.

Methodology

The assessment adopted a qualitative and participatory methodology, building on existing secondary data and previous assessments. Data collection was structured around four thematic areas:

- Protection risks, threats, and vulnerabilities
- Protection responses, capacities, and self-protection strategies
- Protection stakeholders, programs, and activities
- Existing capacities and priority recommendations

Sampling

This sampling approach supported the collection of qualitative and contextualized data, enabling an in-depth analysis of differentiated protection risks, access to services, and coping mechanisms among diverse population groups.

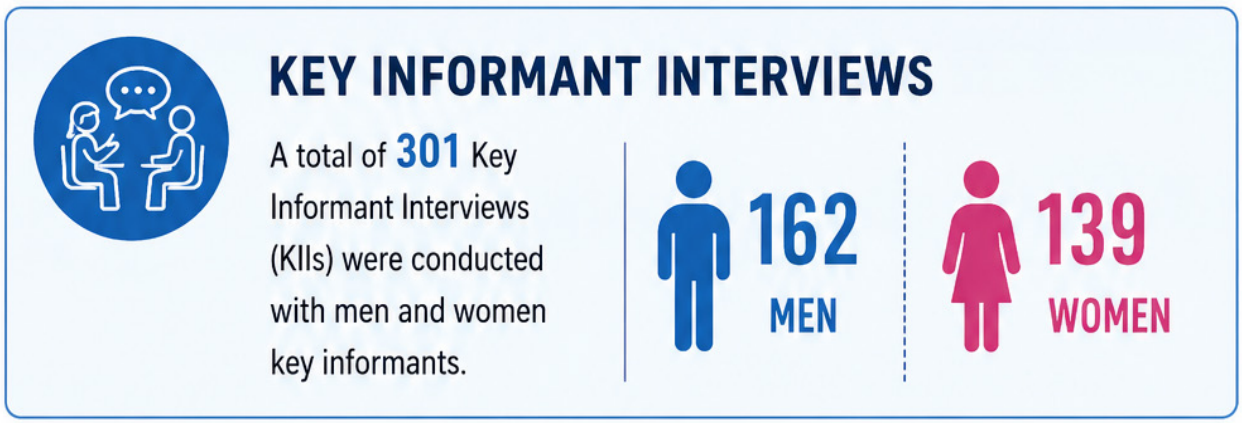
The assessment adopted a purposive sampling approach to ensure representation of population groups most exposed to protection risks in Afrin (Aleppo Governorate) and Sarmada (Idleb Governorate), while accounting for geographic location, age, gender, displacement status, and levels of vulnerability.

Assessment Sample Overview:

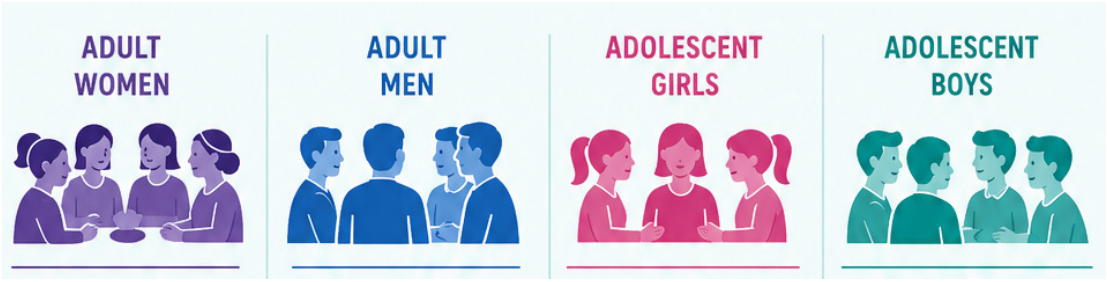
Data Collection Method	Number Conducted
Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)	301
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	124
Household Interviews	386
Total Engagements	811

Participants included women, men, girls, and boys from host communities, internally displaced populations (IDPs), and returnee households across Afrin and Sarmada. The assessment prioritized participation of highly vulnerable population groups, including children without parental care, female-headed households, returnees, and persons with disabilities.

Among Key Informant Interview participants



Focus Group Discussions were conducted separately with adult women, adult men, adolescent girls, and adolescent boys to ensure safe and age-appropriate participation.



Household interviews were equally distributed between male and female respondents (193 each).



Data collection and analysis

Primary data were collected through:

- 301 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), were conducted as part of the first pilot round of Protection Monitoring under the Protection Cluster. The data was collected to support the initial implementation of protection monitoring activities across Syria, in coordination with of the Cluster.
- In coordination with the Protection Cluster, Bahar Organization was provided with a copy of the raw data collected by its team, as a contribution to the Protection Monitoring activity and as part of the PAF activity.

- 124 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs),The tool was developed collaboratively by the DKH and Bahar teams, with data collection carried out by the Bahar team.
- 386 Household Interviews, the tool was developed collaboratively by the DKH and Bahar teams, with data collection carried out by the Bahar team.

Key Informant Interviews were conducted with individuals selected based on their direct experience and in-depth knowledge of the local context, including community leaders, service providers, and humanitarian actors. This approach aimed to capture nuanced perspectives on protection risks, existing response mechanisms, and gaps in service provision.

Focus Group Discussions were organized according to age and gender criteria, with separate groups for women, men, boys, and girls, to ensure a safe and enabling environment for open and meaningful discussion. Priority was given to participants from population groups directly affected by protection risks, including displaced households, children without parental care, and other highly vulnerable community members.

Household interviews were conducted using a purposive approach complemented by elements of convenience sampling, targeting communities and locations with higher levels of vulnerability and reported protection concerns. Efforts were made to include displaced and returnee households, female-headed households, and households including persons with disabilities or children at heightened risk, in order to reflect diverse protection experiences across the two locations.

Data analysis

Data collected through KIIs, FGDs, and household interviews was cleaned, coded, consolidated, and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches.

Quantitative data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel to identify frequencies, prevalence levels, trends, and comparative patterns across assessed protection risks, population groups, locations, gender, age categories, and displacement status. Basic analytical functions and comparative tabulation techniques were used to support data interpretation and consistency checks.



Qualitative data collected through FGDs and KIIs was reviewed thematically through comparative analysis and protection-focused interpretation to identify recurring concerns, contextual drivers, coping mechanisms, vulnerabilities, community perceptions, and response gaps. Analysis was informed by protection principles and sectoral expertise to support contextual understanding of the findings.

Triangulation was applied across the three data collection methods to strengthen the reliability and consistency of findings and to identify converging or diverging trends between different respondent groups and locations.

Findings were analyzed using a Protection Analytical Framework (PAF)-informed approach, linking contextual dynamics, protection threats, affected population groups, coping strategies, and existing response capacities.

Limitations



The assessment adopted a purposive and community-based sampling approach focused on populations identified as highly exposed to protection risks. As a result, findings are intended to provide contextual and analytical insights into protection trends and vulnerabilities rather than statistically representative results for the broader population.



Data collection relied partially on self-reporting and community perceptions, which may be influenced by underreporting, stigma, social desirability bias, fear of disclosure, or normalization of certain harmful practices, particularly in relation to GBV, psychological harm, and protection incidents occurring within households.



To mitigate these limitations, information was triangulated across KIIs, FGDs, and household interviews, while separate group discussions by age and gender were conducted to support safer participation and improve the reliability of sensitive disclosures.



The assessment findings should also be interpreted in light of the evolving operational and political context in Syria, as outlined earlier in the methodology section. While context-specific dynamics may continue to shift over time, the analysis remains relevant in highlighting broader protection trends, vulnerabilities, and structural drivers affecting assessed communities.

3. Protection Risks Analysis

Building on the evolving context and existing protection response capacities across Syria, the Protection Analytical Framework analysis highlights how prolonged displacement, economic deterioration, and weakened protective systems have reshaped the nature and severity of protection risks in Afrin and Sarmada.

The following section examines the five priority protection risks identified through the assessment, analyzing their prevalence, key drivers, affected population groups, impacts, and existing response gaps. This analysis adopts a PAF-informed approach, linking contextual factors to observed harm and identifying critical entry points for prevention, mitigation, and response.

Risk 1: Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

Child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) emerged as the most critical protection risk across the assessed communities in Afrin and Sarmada, with 93% of respondents perceiving early marriage as highly prevalent.

The practice is overwhelmingly gendered, disproportionately affecting adolescent girls, particularly those from economically vulnerable, displaced, or returnee households. Children without parental care, especially unaccompanied children and orphans, face the highest exposure to this risk. Economic hardship was identified as the primary driver, compounded by displacement, loss of livelihoods, school dropout, and limited access to safe income opportunities. Entrenched social norms and the perception of early marriage as a protective strategy in insecure environments further reinforce the practice, particularly where rule of law and service availability remain weak.

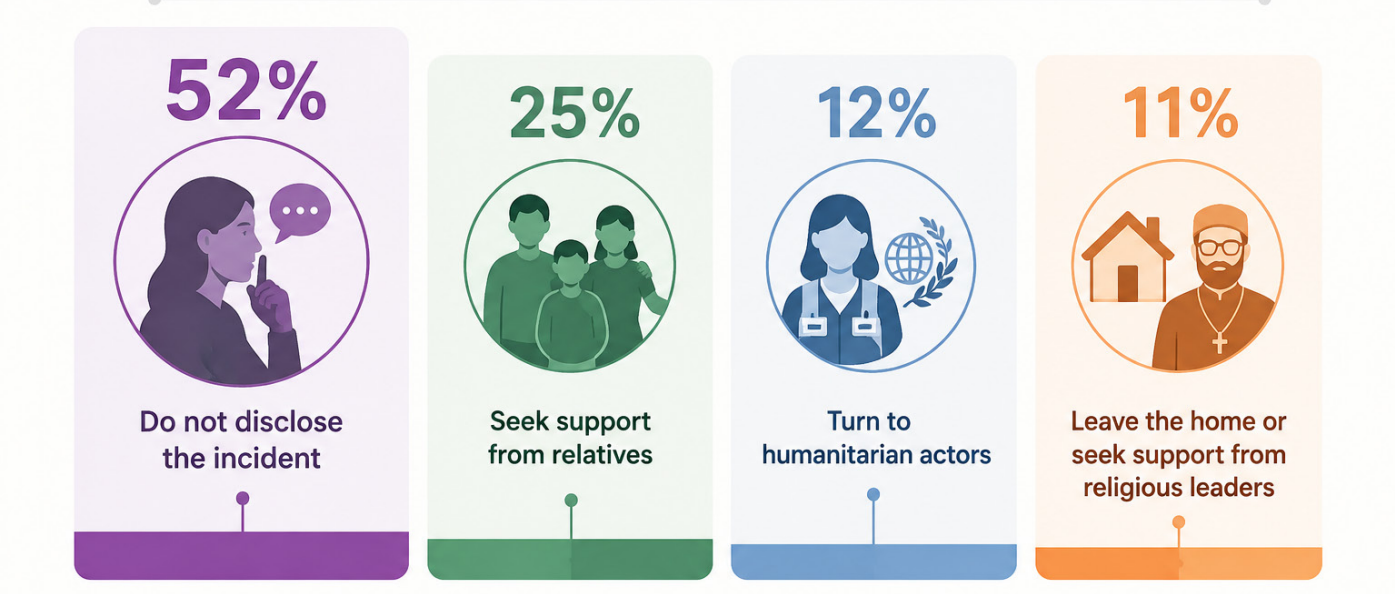
The consequences are severe and long-lasting, including increased exposure to domestic violence, early pregnancy and associated health risks, psychological distress, school dropout, and long-term economic dependency. Although limited awareness and case management services exist, the majority of respondents reported insufficient specialized support, including limited engagement by local authorities, often constrained by weak institutional capacity and inconsistent service availability, highlighting significant gaps in prevention, protection, and structural response mechanisms.

Risk 2: Psychological and Emotional Abuse

Psychological and emotional abuse emerged as one of the most prevalent and socially normalized protection risks across the assessed communities, with 55% of respondents reporting an increase over the past year.

This form of abuse occurs primarily within the household and is closely linked to entrenched power imbalances, prolonged displacement, economic stress, and the erosion of traditional support networks. Fathers and husbands were most frequently identified as perpetrators, as reported across different respondent groups, including women, men, and key informants, with common manifestations including verbal humiliation, threats, neglect, social isolation, and constant criticism.

High levels of perceived social acceptance, with 65% of respondents considering this form of violence socially acceptable, indicate the normalization of non-physical violence, often perceived as a legitimate form of discipline or control. Women were identified as the most affected group, with 47% of household respondents reporting this, followed by children, persons with disabilities, and older persons.Children exposed to sustained psychological abuse face compounded risks, particularly when combined with poverty, displacement, or the absence of parental care. The impacts include depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and, in some cases, aggressive behavior, undermining individual well-being and reducing help-seeking behavior. Coping mechanisms are largely characterized by silence, with 52% reporting that incidents are not disclosed. Others, 25%, reported seeking support from relatives, 12% turning to humanitarian actors, or 11% leaving the home or seeking support from religious leaders.



While MHPSS and protection services are available in some areas, stigma, weak reporting mechanisms, and uneven geographic coverage limit effective response, leaving significant gaps in prevention and early interventio.

Risk 3: Extortion, Forced Eviction, and Destruction of Property

Extortion, forced eviction, and destruction of property constitute a widespread and persistent protection risk in Afrin and Sarmada, with 75% of respondents reporting these violations as highly prevalent. These risks are closely linked to insecure tenure, lack of civil documentation, limited access to legal recourse, and fragmented governance structures, particularly affecting displaced and returnee households.

Economic hardship and power imbalances further exacerbate vulnerability, while fear of retaliation and low trust in authorities contribute to significant underreporting.Displaced and returnee families, women-headed households, and individuals lacking documentation are disproportionately affected, often facing coercion or informal demands to vacate housing or surrender property without effective means of redress. Among those affected, 50% reported experiencing violence or threats during these incidents. The impacts include loss of shelter and livelihoods, accumulation of debt, psychological distress, and secondary displacement.

The destruction or loss of personal documentation further restricts access to services, legal protection, and durable solutions. Although legal assistance and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) support are provided by some actors, including humanitarian organizations and legal assistance providers, respondents reported extremely limited availability and accessibility of services, underscoring major gaps in accountability, prevention, and response mechanisms.

Risk 4: Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a deeply entrenched and pervasive protection risk in the assessed communities of Afrin and Sarmada, consistent with broader United Nations and protection sector reporting that identifies GBV as a critical and underreported concern across Syria. Assessment findings indicate that 74% of households perceive GBV as a major risk affecting women and girls, as reported across different respondent groups, including women and men within households, reinforcing national-level analysis.

Psychological violence and deprivation of resources were identified as the most prevalent forms reported over the past 12 months, driven by entrenched gender inequality, patriarchal norms, displacement-related stress, and economic hardship. Secondary reporting further highlights how overcrowding, lack of privacy, weakened community protection mechanisms, and limited access to services in displacement settings heighten exposure to multiple forms of violence and normalize harmful practices.

Incidents were reported to occur primarily within the household, followed by public spaces such as markets, workplaces, and, to a lesser extent, schools and service centers Husbands were identified as the primary perpetrators, followed by fathers and male members of the extended family, with some reports also indicating involvement of armed actors. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, with adolescent girls facing compounded risks including early and forced marriage, psychological abuse, and restrictions on mobility.



GBV results in severe and long-lasting consequences, including psychosocial distress, physical harm, school dropout, restricted livelihood opportunities, and social isolation. Despite the presence of specialized services such as survivor-centered case management, safe spaces, and MHPSS. Existing response capacities include services provided by humanitarian organizations, such as survivor-centered case management, women and girls' safe spaces, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and limited engagement of local authorities and community-based mechanisms. Both assessment findings and sector reporting point to significant gaps in coverage, accessibility, and sustainability, while stigma, fear of retaliation, mobility constraints, and limited geographic reach continue to suppress reporting and restrict access to timely and appropriate support.

Risk 5: Child Labor

Child labor remains a prevalent protection risk across Afrin and Sarmada, with 69% of respondents reporting it as a common coping strategy linked to prolonged economic deterioration, displacement, and repeated shocks that have weakened household resilience.

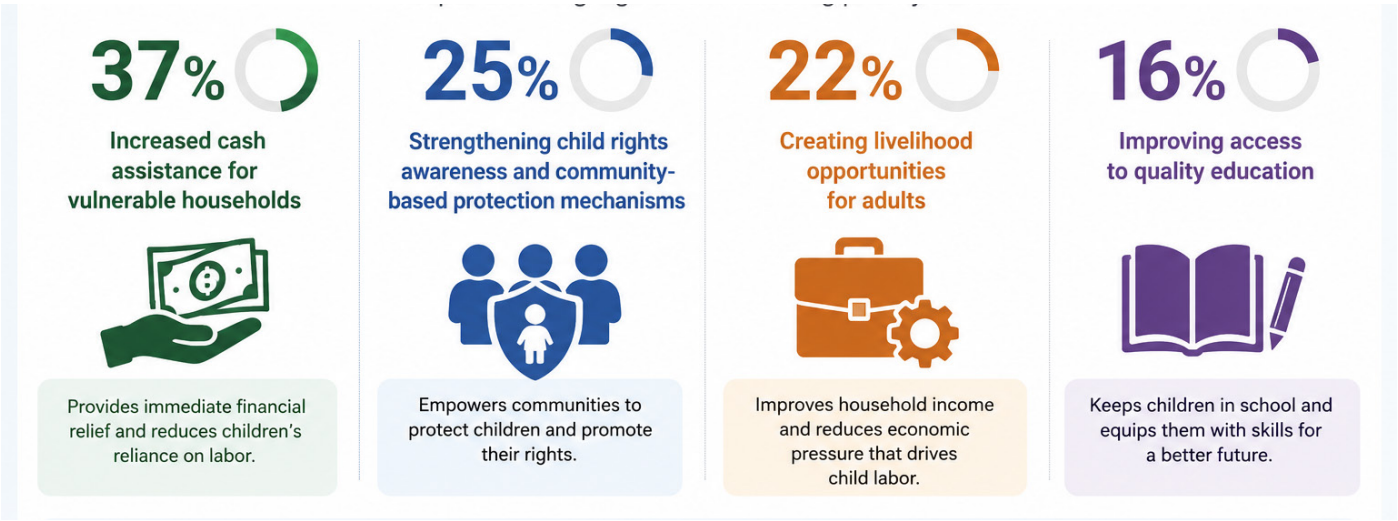
Poverty and the absence of a breadwinner were identified as primary drivers, compounded by school dropout and limited livelihood opportunities for caregivers. The growing number of returnees is placing additional pressure on Syria's already fragile protection systems, further straining local services and household coping capacities and increasing reliance on harmful strategies such as child labor.

Boys are more frequently engaged in hazardous or exploitative labor in agriculture, workshops, factories, and informal trades, while girls may be involved in domestic or less visible forms of work that often remain underreported.



Children from displaced, returnee, and economically vulnerable households, as well as children without parental care and those who have dropped out of school, face the highest exposure.
Engagement in labor results in school dropout, physical injury, exploitation, and long-term psychosocial harm, limiting children's development and increasing vulnerability to additional protection risks, including early marriage and violence.

While education support, child protection services, and protection-sensitive livelihood interventions exist, 37% of respondents highlighted that reducing child labor requires increased cash assistance for vulnerable households, 25% that strengthening child rights awareness and community-based protection mechanisms would be needed, 22% that creating livelihood opportunities for adults is necessary, and 16% that access to quality education must be improved.



While coverage remains insufficient relative to the scale of need, and weak referral and follow-up mechanisms continue to constrain effective prevention and response.

4. Recommendations

Based on the assessment findings, the following strategic recommendations are proposed to inform protection programming, coordination, and advocacy efforts in Afrin (Aleppo) and Sarmada (Idleb). These recommendations prioritize prevention, mitigation, and response to identified protection risks, while addressing underlying drivers and structural gaps.

Risk I: Child, Early, and Forced Marriage

- Strengthen community-based prevention mechanisms led by NGOs in coordination with community structures and relevant local authorities, addressing child, early, and forced marriage, with a specific focus on high-risk groups, including children without parental care, displaced families, and adolescent girls. This includes establishing and supporting community-based protection committees, conducting regular awareness sessions and caregiver dialogues, training community focal points to identify and refer at-risk cases, and engaging religious and community leaders to promote protective norms and early identification of risks.

- Expand access to safe,inclusive education opportunities and support school retention for girls, back-to-school campaigns, provision of learning materials and transportation support, establishment of safe learning spaces, and conditional or unconditional cash assistance to support school attendance. Education interventions should be linked with protection services to ensure follow-up for girls at risk of dropout.
- Promote sustained community engagement initiatives including community dialogue sessions, awareness campaigns, peer group discussions, and engagement with religious and community leaders, aimed at addressing harmful social norms and perceptions that frame early marriage as a protective strategy. These efforts should prioritize dialogue with caregivers, men and boys, and influential community actors to support behavior change and shared responsibility for girls' protection.
- Strengthen case management and referral pathways for girls at risk of or affected by early and forced marriage, ensuring timely access to psychosocial support, legal assistance, and child protection services, particularly for unaccompanied and separated children.
- Integrate protection interventions with livelihoods and economic support for vulnerable households to reduce reliance on negative coping mechanisms, while ensuring that economic assistance is complemented by community-based prevention and awareness activities.
- Advocate for improved access to legal frameworks and protective services that uphold the rights of girls, targeting relevant local authorities, de facto governance structures, and coordination platforms, through joint advocacy efforts, policy dialogue, and coordination with the Protection Cluster and its AoRs, to support prevention and response to early and forced marriage.

Risk 2: Psychological and Emotional Abuse

- Increase community awareness and recognition of psychological and emotional abuse as forms of violence with serious and long-term psychosocial consequences. Awareness activities should be culturally sensitive and tailored to address the normalization of non-physical violence within households and communities, and may include NGO-led community awareness sessions, interactive theatre and storytelling activities, school-based awareness initiatives, and engagement through local media and social media platforms, implemented in coordination with community leaders and local structures.
- Integrate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) across protection and child protection interventions to address the cumulative impact of chronic stress, displacement, and emotional abuse. This includes embedding basic psychosocial support within community-based activities and ensuring referral pathways to specialized services when needed, through training of frontline staff and community volunteers, establishing mobile MHPSS teams, and integrating psychosocial support into education and community centers, led by NGOs in coordination with health and protection actors.
- Promote positive parenting approachesand non-violent coping strategies through caregiver-focused interventions, recognizing the role of prolonged stress and economic hardship in shaping harmful household dynamics, including structured parenting sessions, peer support groups for caregivers, home visits for high-risk families, and the use of digital or audio-visual tools to reinforce positive practices, implemented by trained facilitators and community-based organizations.

- Strengthen confidential, safe, and accessible reporting and referral mechanisms for individuals experiencing psychological and emotional abuse, with particular attention to women, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons, including the establishment of community-based complaint and feedback mechanisms, confidential helplines, and safe entry points within community centers and service facilities, managed by protection actors and trained service providers.
- Enhance the capacity of community-based protection mechanismsand frontline service providers to identify, respond to, and follow up on cases of psychological and emotional abuse in a survivor-centered and age-appropriate manner, through structured training programs, on-the-job coaching, development of standard operating procedures (SOPs), and regular supervision and mentoring, led by specialized protection and MHPSS actors.

Risk 3: Extortion, Forced Eviction, and Destruction of Property

- Strengthen community-based protection mechanisms to prevent and respond to extortion, forced eviction, and property-related violations, through NGO-led establishment and support of community protection committees, community-based complaint and feedback mechanisms, and awareness sessions on HLP rights, as well as training community focal points to identify and refer cases to legal and protection service providers.
- Expand access to legal assistance and Housing, Land and Property (HLP) support for displaced and returnee households, through mobile legal clinics, legal aid desks in community centers, and provision of legal counseling and representation, with a focus on individuals lacking civil documentation, women-headed households, and other groups at heightened risk of eviction and exploitation, implemented by legal aid organizations in coordination with protection actors.
- Enhance legal awareness and information-sharing initiatives to improve understanding of tenure rights, documentation processes, and available dispute resolution mechanisms, through targeted awareness campaigns, distribution of simplified information materials, community workshops, and engagement with local leaders, particularly in areas experiencing high levels of displacement and return.
- Advocate for improved accountability and more effective responses from relevant authorities and local governance structures, in coordination with protection and HLP actors, to address property-related violations and reduce impunity, through coordinated advocacy efforts, engagement with local councils and de facto authorities, case documentation and evidence-based reporting, and participation in coordination platforms such as the Protection Cluster and HLP AoR
- Integrate protection interventions with livelihoods and emergency assistance to mitigate the economic drivers of eviction and extortion, through cash assistance, rental support, and livelihood opportunities for at-risk households, while ensuring that assistance is delivered in a protection-sensitive manner and linked with case management and referral systems.

Risk 4: Gender-based violence

- Scale up comprehensive, survivor-centered GBV prevention and response services that are safe, confidential, and accessible, including case management, psychosocial support, and referral pathways. implemented by specialized GBV actors and NGOs in coordination with health and protection partners, through fixed and mobile service delivery, safe spaces, and outreach teams. Services should prioritize women and girls at heightened risk, particularly in displacement and return settings.

- Strengthen community-based GBV prevention initiatives that address harmful gender norms, power imbalances, and the normalization of violence against women and girls. through NGO-led community dialogues, peer-to-peer group sessions, engagement of men and boys as change agents, and innovative approaches such as community theatre, storytelling, and social media campaigns. These initiatives should engage men and boys, caregivers, and community leaders as key actors in prevention and behavior change.
- Improve access to GBV services by addressing barriers such as stigma, fear of retaliation, mobility constraints, and lack of information. through confidential helplines, mobile outreach services, transportation support, and establishment of safe and discreet entry points within communities. This includes expanding outreach activities and ensuring that services are culturally appropriate and inclusive.
- Enhance coordination and information-sharing among GBV, protection, health, and psychosocial actors to ensure continuity of care and timely referrals for survivors, while adhering to confidentiality and survivor safety principles, through regular coordination meetings, joint case conferencing (with consent), shared referral pathways, and participation in coordination platforms such as the GBV AoR.
- Integrate GBV risk mitigation measures across sectors, including education, livelihoods, and humanitarian assistance, to reduce exposure to violence and ensure that services do not inadvertently increase risks for women and girls, through safety audits, gender-sensitive service design, staff training on GBV risk mitigation, and inclusion of protection safeguards in program implementation.

Risk 5: Child Labor

- Reduce household economic pressure through protection-sensitive interventions that address the underlying drivers of child labor, including poverty, loss of breadwinners, and displacement. Economic assistance should be linked with child protection monitoring and follow-up to prevent unintended harm.
- Strengthen access to safe, quality education and alternative learning opportunities for children engaged in or at risk of child labor, recognizing education as a key protective factor. Education interventions should be flexible and adapted to the needs of displaced and working children.
- Support and reinforce community-based child protection mechanisms to identify, refer, and monitor cases of child labor, ensuring timely access to appropriate services and follow-up support.
- Enhance case management and referral pathways for children exposed to exploitative or hazardous labor, with a focus on long-term protection outcomes, psychosocial well-being, and reintegration into education or safe livelihoods.
- Integrate child labor prevention and response measures across sectors, including livelihoods, education, and humanitarian assistance, to reduce reliance on child labor as a negative coping strategy.

5. Cross-cutting Recommendations

- Apply age-, gender-, and disability-inclusive approaches across all protection interventions to address intersecting vulnerabilities.
- Strengthen community outreach and participation to improve trust, reporting, and uptake of protection services.
- Enhance coordination with education, livelihoods, and health actors to support integrated, multi-sectoral responses.
- Invest in protection risk monitoring and context analysis to track emerging trends and adapt interventions accordingly.
- The above recommendations inform the development of detailed programmatic and results-based frameworks, which are available upon request.



6. Conclusion

This Protection Analytical Framework (PAF) highlights an evolving and increasingly complex protection environment in Afrin (Aleppo) and Sarmada (Idleb), shaped by protracted conflict, economic deterioration, repeated displacement, and weakened protective systems. While protection response capacities continue to operate across Syria, the scale and severity of needs far exceed available services, resulting in persistent gaps in prevention, mitigation, and response.The analysis identifies child, early, and forced marriage as the most critical protection risk, alongside widespread psychological and emotional abuse, pervasive gender-based violence, property-related violations, and child labor as a harmful coping mechanism.

These risks are interconnected and reinforced by structural drivers, including poverty, displacement, entrenched social norms, and limited access to legal, educational, and psychosocial services.

Children without parental care, women and girls, displaced and returnee families, and persons with disabilities face compounded vulnerabilities and significant barriers to accessing timely and appropriate support.Findings also underscore the normalization of violence and underreporting of protection violations, which continue to undermine accountability and

effective response. Despite the presence of community-based mechanisms and specialized services, gaps in coverage, accessibility, and sustainability constrain their impact, particularly for the most vulnerable population groups.



The evidence generated through this assessment provides a critical foundation for targeted, protection-centered programming grounded in the Protection Analytical Framework. Addressing identified risks will require integrated, multi-sectoral approaches that link protection with education, livelihoods, legal assistance, and mental health and psychosocial support, while strengthening community-based prevention and referral mechanisms. Sustained investment in protection risk monitoring, coordination, and inclusive service delivery will be essential to mitigate harm, reduce reliance on negative coping strategies, and support longer-term recovery and resilience in northwest Syria.

Beyond immediate protection risks, the findings point to a gradual normalization of harmful practices and coping mechanisms within affected communities, driven by prolonged crisis conditions, economic instability, and weakened institutional structures. This normalization reflects not only increased exposure to risk but also a shift in social perceptions, where certain forms of violence and exploitation are increasingly tolerated or perceived as necessary for survival. This trend has significant long-term implications for social cohesion, protection outcomes, and the effectiveness of future interventions.

The analysis further highlights that protection risks are not isolated phenomena but are deeply interconnected and reinforced by structural and systemic factors, including poverty, displacement, lack of access to services, and gaps in governance and accountability. As a result, single-sector responses are unlikely to achieve sustainable impact. Instead, addressing protection risks in northwest Syria requires integrated and multi-sectoral approaches that simultaneously tackle both immediate needs and underlying drivers of vulnerability.

In the longer term, strengthening local systems and community resilience will be critical. This includes investing in community-based protection mechanisms, enhancing the capacity of local actors, and improving coordination between humanitarian, development, and governance structures.

Without sustained and coordinated efforts to address both the symptoms and root causes of protection risks, negative coping strategies are likely to persist, potentially leading to further deterioration of protection conditions and limiting prospects for recovery and durable solutions.

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