Advancing Child Protection in Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory and Syria

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Abstract: This paper starts by giving an overview of UNICEF’s approach to child protection. In line with the agency’s global child protection strategy, the three main pillars of its approach in the MENA region, improving knowledge management, strengthening child protection systems and promoting protective social change are then defined. Non-exhaustive examples of cooperation between UNRWA and UNICEF in Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory and Syria under these domains are provided, and used as a basis to suggest ways to advance child protection in the region. The piece concludes by highlighting UNRWA’s responsibility and ability to mainstream child protection into its operations and points out some of the issues the organization might want to consider with regards to an organization-wide child protection policy and the impact this would have on the way it is operating for the time being.
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A. Introduction

UNICEF considers that the overarching aim of child protection is that all children, girls and boys, grow up in a protective environment where they are assured their rights to protection particularly protection from violence, exploitation and unnecessary separation from family as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. Under this definition, child protection contributes to the broader protection agenda as adopted by UNRWA and other UN agencies, whereby economic and social rights associated with the agency core areas of service delivery; as well as civil and political rights are defined.

Child protection is an integral part of UNICEF’s contribution to the fulfillment of the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. Indeed, child protection issues intersect with every one of the goals, from poverty reduction to children’s education, from eliminating gender inequality to reducing child mortality. In that regard it is fair to say most of the MDGs will not be achieved unless failures to protect children are addressed. A protective environment for children boosts development progress, and improves the health, education and well-being of children and their evolving capacities to become parents, citizens and productive members of society. Harmful and abusive practices against children, on the other hand, exacerbate poverty, social exclusion and HIV, and increase the likelihood that successive generations will face similar risks.

UNICEF’s vision is to create a protective environment, where laws, policies, services, behaviours and practices minimize children’s vulnerability, address known risk factors, and strengthen children’s own resilience. Child protection provides a barrier against the web of risks and vulnerabilities underlying many forms of harm and abuse: sexual abuse and exploitation; trafficking; hazardous labour; violence; living or working on the streets; the impact of armed conflict, including children’s use by armed forces and groups; harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage; lack of access to justice; and unnecessary institutionalization, among others.

The protective environment is a human rights-based approach emphasizing prevention as well as the accountability of governments. It enhances aid effectiveness by supporting

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1 The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of UNICEF. The designations and terminology employed may not conform to United Nations practice and do not imply the expression of any official opinion whatsoever on the part of the Organization

2 “Incorporating Protection into UNRWA Operations”, Mark Brailsford, UNRWA
sustained national capacity for child protection. Finally, it reflects children’s own roles and resilience as agents of change and actors in strengthening the protective environment. This approach differs from earlier child protection efforts, which have traditionally focused on single issues such as child trafficking, street children, child labor, emergencies, institutionalization, or HIV/AIDS. Although such efforts have produced substantial benefits, this diffused approach often results in a fragmented child protection response, marked by numerous inefficiencies and pockets of unmet needs.

**B. The Protective Environment**

The Protective Environment Framework\(^3\) defines eight broad elements that are critical to good protection. These interconnected elements work both individually and collectively to strengthen protection and reduce vulnerability. UNICEF’s work in securing a protective environment, in line with human rights, is oriented towards reducing disparities in access to information, advice and services, irrespective of whether these disparities are based on geographic or economic obstacles or discrimination based on sex, age, ethnicity or other factors.

The eight protective environment elements are defined as follows:

| Governmental commitment to fulfilling protection rights: includes social welfare policies, adequate budgets, public acknowledgement and ratification of international instruments. | Children’s life skills, knowledge and participation: includes children, both girls and boys, as actors in their own protection through use of knowledge of their protection rights and ways of avoiding and responding to risks. |

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\(^3\) The Protective Environment Framework, set out in the 2002 UNICEF Operational Guidance Note
Legislation and enforcement: includes an adequate legislative framework, its consistent implementation, accountability and a lack of impunity.

Capacity, awareness of those in contact with the child: includes the knowledge, motivation and support needed by families and by community members, teachers, health and social workers and police, in order to protect children.

Attitudes, traditions, customs, behaviour and practices: includes social norms and traditions that condemn injurious practices and support those that are protective.

Basic and Targeted Services: includes the basic social services, health and education to which children have the right, without discrimination, and also specific services that help to prevent violence and exploitation, and provide care, support and reintegration assistance in situations of violence, abuse and separation.

Open discussion, including the engagement of media and civil society: acknowledges silence as a major impediment to securing government commitment, supporting positive practices and ensuring the involvement of children and families.

Monitoring and oversight: includes effective systems of monitoring such as data collection, and oversight of trends and responses.

C. Core Commitments for Children

UNICEF developed Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Humanitarian Action\(^4\) as a global framework for humanitarian action for children undertaken by UNICEF and its partners. They apply to both acute sudden-onset and protracted humanitarian situations. They promote predictable, effective and timely collective humanitarian action. The CCC sector-specific programme commitments form part of a collective programmatic response for children affected by humanitarian crisis and are designed to support wider interagency cluster coordination. They include benchmarks, preparedness, response and early recovery activities.

Acknowledging that humanitarian situations both exacerbate existing child protection risks and create new ones, child protection specific CCCs aligned with the protective environment address the prevention and programmatic response to specific violations committed against children – such as the separation of children from their families; association with armed forces and groups; exposure to gender-based violence, landmines and unexploded ordinance; and psychosocial distress. Child protection specific CCCs are as follows:

\(^4\) Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, UNICEF, May 2010
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment 1: Effective leadership is established for both the child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) cluster areas of responsibility, with links to other cluster/sector coordination mechanisms on critical inter-sectoral issues. Support is provided for the establishment of a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) coordination mechanism.</th>
<th>Commitment 5: Violence, exploitation and abuse of children and women, including GBV, are prevented and addressed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment 2: Monitoring and reporting of grave violations and other serious protection concerns regarding children and women are undertaken and systematically trigger response (including advocacy).</td>
<td>Commitment 6: Psychosocial support is provided to children and their caregivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment 3: Key child protection mechanisms are strengthened in emergency-affected areas.</td>
<td>Commitment 7: Child recruitment and use, as well as illegal and arbitrary detention, are addressed and prevented for conflict affected children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment 4: Separation of children from families is prevented and addressed, and family-based care is promoted.</td>
<td>Commitment 8: The use of landmines and other indiscriminate or illicit weapons by state and non-state actors is prevented, and their impact is addressed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### D. Child Protection in oPt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. A Snapshot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>oPt</th>
<th>Syria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of domestic violence</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent child discipline</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child marriage among girls</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child labour</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8% for boys</td>
<td>6% for girls</td>
<td>5% for boys</td>
<td>3% for girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school age children out of school</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>15.7% for boys</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.9% for boys</td>
<td>16.9% for girls</td>
<td>6.3% for girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated number of displaced persons and</td>
<td>2,034,306</td>
<td>472,936</td>
<td>1,862,075</td>
<td>1,950,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Non-refugee specific country-wide data. Childinfo.org data updated by relevant UNICEF country offices
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>refugees</th>
<th>Countries reporting to UN Secretary General on grave child rights violations</th>
<th>Estimated number of social workers per 100,000 persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### E. UNICEF Child Protection Strategy

Successful child protection begins with prevention. The priority given to education, health and addressing gender discrimination in the Millennium Development Goals and in UNICEF work underpins this preventive strategy, including in emergencies. Child-sensitive approaches to social protection can make a major contribution: the renewed emphasis of UNICEF on policy advocacy, in tandem with its work in child protection, aims to intensify attention paid to children within national social protection systems and among international development actors. National legal frameworks that put an end to impunity and give children access to justice are also essential.

UNICEF strategy builds on the extensive international normative framework for child protection, and on relevant recommendations of the Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children\(^6\). It emphasizes knowledge management; addressing social exclusion; integrating child protection into all sectors, including health and education, and into emergency work; capacity-building of governments and other partners. In this strategy, UNICEF continues to emphasize the importance of partnerships at all levels, including with children themselves.

As per UNICEF global strategy on child protection\(^7\), the above mentioned protective environment’s elements together describe two pillars, national protection systems and social change. National protection systems comprise elements for which the State bears primary responsibility for action: government commitment, legislation, service provision, monitoring, and building human capacity. On the other hand, open discussion, social norms and the engagement of children themselves require strong support from communities and civil society, and are addressed here as Social Change. In the MENA region, it has been found helpful to define a third pillar to the strategy, around issues of evidence-building and knowledge management. In practice, these approaches are heavily intertwined: Legislation contributes to changes in social norms (for example, in attitudes towards child labour), and

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\(^6\) UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children (2006)
\(^7\) UNICEF’s Global Child Protection Strategy (2008-2018)
regulations and training aiming to reduce violence in schools are more effective when backed by social consensus. Categorizing these approaches has helped to communicate the key actions UNICEF can take to support protective social norms and the up-scaling of protection capacity, legislation and services to benefit children and families.

The following sections on knowledge management, child protection systems and protective social change describe how UNICEF strategy is currently operationalised in the five fields where UNRWA operates in Jordan, Lebanon, occupied Palestinian territory, and Syria. Each section ends with examples illustrating cooperation between the two agencies and a few suggestions to advance child protection. This document is not an attempt to systematically review cooperation between the two agencies or to explore in-depth child protection opportunities within UNRWA work.

1. Improving knowledge management

An overview of available data on protection risks and harmful situations that expose children to violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse in MENA underscores the extent to which children are exposed to a range of inter-related protection risks, thus affecting their development. However, available information is still limited in both breadth and depth. It is also recognised that in many situations, disparities exist within countries (urban/rural/camps, geographical, male/female, age...) that are not evident from available data. It is therefore critical to ensure that collection of child protection data in the future is linked with the efforts on strengthening gender mainstreaming in data collection. Finally, in many cases data is not readily available. Building and reviewing the evidence base on child protection is vital to the design and the strengthening of the elements of the protective environment, in particular the policies, the laws, to enhance their implementation and the social change measures.

a. Mainstreaming child protection in broad information systems

UNICEF’s approach is two pronged: supporting the inclusion of a limited set of child protection indicators within broader data collection initiatives, as well as the establishment of child protection specific databases. Including child protection indicators in national data collection systems and monitoring mechanisms is potentially the most efficient means of ensuring the sustainability of child protection data collection efforts. Household surveys are one of the most common approaches to data collection. Through Demographic Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and national household surveys, information on typical child protection issues (child labour, child marriage, child discipline, birth registration…) is compiled and analyzed8. UNICEF routinely assists government counterparts in carrying out such surveys currently on-going in Jordan, oPt, Syria and Lebanon. Specific tools have recently been developed as part of MICS 4 to allow compilation

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8 http://www.childinfo.org/protection.html
of data on a wider range of child protection issues\(^9\). Even though data on these indicators does not give the whole picture, and fails to capture the situation of children who are not part of any household (e.g. street children, children in institutions…), it documents some core issues on large samples, allow for comparison within and across borders, over time, thus helping measuring the impact of the responses offered through time.

Child Rights Observatories are meant to collect and disseminate data on children, as well as monitor public policies and expenditure on children. They also promote citizen’s participation in monitoring child rights and/or public policies targeting children. Although recommended under the CRC, Lebanon is probably the only country with an effective and functioning observatory\(^10\). Observatories usually do not function as stand-alone initiatives, but rather build on the existence of government, occasionally civil society, -run anterior information systems e.g. health, education, justice, alternative care. Observatories are instrumental in ensuring governments and civil society periodic reporting to the CRC and CEDAW Committees covers comprehensive information on child protection issues and the status of the protective environment, and data disaggregated (by gender) to the maximum extent possible.

Well established mainstream sectors such as health and education, whether governmental, civil society of UN run, traditionally operate comprehensive information systems able to generate information on a range of child protection issues (e.g. cases of violence or neglect requiring the intervention of health professionals, school dropout rates, occurrences of violent episodes in schools…). CP actors have here an opportunity to significantly strengthen the knowledge base in ensuring child protection indicators are incorporated into existing systems through sensitization and capacity building thus fostering an inter-sectoral approach to child protection by ensuring these two sectors play their part in preventing, detecting, and referring cases of violence, abuse and neglect. The size and the diversity of the populations served also means that data generated through these systems is quite representative of the situation in the entire population and complements information obtained through other means.

United Nations Common Country Assessments (CCA) and the UN Development assistance Frameworks (UNDAF) are processes through which the national development situation and identify key development issues is analyzed with a focus on the MDGs, and that provide a collective, coherent and integrated United Nations system response to national priorities and needs. Usually repeated every five years, they offer an opportunity to review information available on child protection, and ensure specific information gaps are being addressed in a coordinated manner by the different actors, whether governmental, civil society and UN agencies.

\textit{b. Strengthening child protection specific information systems}

\(^9\) Birth registration, child labour, school attendance, violent discipline, child marriage, polygyny, spousal age difference, female genital mutilation, attitudes towards domestic violence, and orphans

\(^{10}\) http://www.childoflebanon.com/indexen.htm
On Juvenile Justice, UNICEF works within the framework of the ‘Inter-Agency Panel on Juvenile Justice’ to coordinate data collection and monitoring efforts at national level. Jordan, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory, and Syria are in the process of strengthening and/or establishing a juvenile justice information system using the 15 globally agreed upon UNODC / UNICEF indicators, meant to help improve protection of children in conflict with the law. Indeed the availability of such data is enabling child protection actors to better understand the scope of the problem, to document children experience with the judiciary system and to evaluate the extent to which key protection principles are applied (e.g. prevention, child friendly environment, detention as a measure of last resort, alternative measures…). As to alternative care, UNICEF and the Better Care Network are promoting the utilization of standard formal care indicators that are used to monitor policy and practice, to improve individual care services, to guide programme development and budgeting, and to demonstrate national commitment to globally accepted measures of formal care.

With regards to child rights violations in conflict, monitoring and reporting efforts in the region are guided by the UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 focusing on the six most common child rights violations\textsuperscript{11} occurring in conflict situations. Both oPt and Lebanon are under scrutiny, and have been requested to contribute to the UN SG report on CAAC in 2009. An inter-agency Israel/oPt working group on grave child rights violations exists in oPt since 2007, and UN staff from both countries undertook a training of trainers in Jordan on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism guidelines this month. Participating UN agencies are expected to mobilize their resources to ensure all violations committed by all parties are systematically documented and reported to the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG/CAAC). In oPt, information is also being fed into sectoral groups to inform advocacy and adequate programmatic response.

\textit{c. Topical child protection studies and research}

Knowledge gaps with regards to specific child protection issues and the relevance of the responses in the form of policies, legislation, services and social change activities also need to be tackled through focused in-depth studies. Indeed a number of child protection issues e.g. street children, migrant children, child recruitment, and children in contact with the law will not be documented through household surveys or sectoral information systems such as health or education. Specific studies aiming at measuring the prevalence of such issues, at assessing the responses offered or understanding root causes, trends, factors of change are usually required. For example in the oPt, UNICEF is working with Defense for Children International (DCI) on a comprehensive and analytical study of Israeli detention of Palestinian children. The study to be launched later this year is meant to inform both programme response and evidence-based public advocacy by documenting lack of due process with regards to arrest and detention, trial, sentencing, administrative detention and reintegration amongst others.

\textsuperscript{11} killing or maiming, recruitment or use of children, sexual abuse, abduction, attacks against schools or hospitals and denial of humanitarian access.
On-going cooperation
Several Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys (MICS) are either completed (MICS 3), on-going or about to start with Palestinian refugees. A MICS 4 is on-going in oPt and in Syria, it will soon be initiated in Lebanon.
In Jordan, the two agencies are jointly addressing data gaps regarding school drop-outs through a larger initiative on youth employability.
Grave child rights violations are under scrutiny in oPt and in Lebanon\(^\text{12}\). In oPt, UNRWA participates to the UNICEF led inter-agency Israel-oPt working group on grave child rights violations. UNRWA staff from both Gaza and West-Bank joined the regional training of trainers organized by UNICEF this month in Amman in cooperation with OSRSG Children and Armed Conflict.

Opportunities to advance child protection
- UNRWA protection, health, education personnel amongst others participate in the design, the planning and the implementation of all up-coming household surveys in all concerned countries.
- UNRWA protection, health, education personnel amongst others join in the up-coming country based data monitors trainings on grave child rights violations in oPt and in Lebanon. Their role within the working groups on violations is reviewed and redefined, taking advantage of the size of the agency’s workforce in both countries, and its excellent geographical coverage.
- Child protection indicators are incorporated into UNRWA health and education information systems in all concerned countries.

2. Strengthening child protection systems

Child protection systems are comprised of laws, policies, and services across social sectors including social welfare, education, health, security and justice. These interconnected elements of the protective environment for which the State bears the primary responsibility, in addition to government commitment, monitoring and oversight, work individually and collectively to strengthen child protection and reduce vulnerability. One should note the complexity of the situation of Palestinian refugees as these elements are not placed under the authority a single entity across the region (e.g. UNRWA - national governments in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan; UNRWA – Palestinian Authority – Gaza Authorities in oPt).

a. Policy and legal frameworks

With respect to political commitment at the highest level, UNICEF advocates for child protection to be included on national development and poverty reduction agendas. Within the

\(^{12}\) Children and Armed Conflict. Report of the Secretary General. 13 April 2010
context of its global study on poverty, UNICEF and its partners have highlighted some of the links between child protection and poverty when it comes to education, health, social protection, youth planning and budgeting. These efforts help monitor and assess the cost-efficiency of the amounts invested in child protection and provide the evidence for advocating for adequate budget allocations and effective child friendly planning.

All MENA countries are signatories of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and a few have yet to ratify its protocols on Children and Armed Conflict as well as on the Sale of Children and Child Prostitution (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates). UNICEF engages government counterparts and civil society on the issue of national legislation compliance and reservations to the CRC itself, its Optional Protocols, the CEDAW, as well as the CRC Committee concluding observations. MENA countries’ reservations on the CRC mostly relate to articles that are perceived to conflict with Islamic Law on issues of adoption (including on Kafala), freedom of religion and of expression. UNICEF has mobilized the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Conference towards lifting their member states’ reservations.

At country level, the CRC’s concluding observations guide UNICEF’s efforts towards the establishment of legal frameworks compliant with the Convention. Two broad options are generally discussed with government counterparts, academia, and civil society, including religious leaders: an all encompassing Child Protection Law, or alternatively, a Child Act that focuses on defining both children's rights and principles governing services to be provided, distinct from specific juvenile justice legislation. It should be noted that while National legal frameworks apply to Palestinian children in Syria and Jordan, Lebanon differs. Indeed the Lebanese legislation does not apply within the refugee camps where there is no formal written framework. UNICEF Jordan and the Ministry of Social Development have worked on several drafts of the Childhood Act, the Juvenile Law and the Guidelines for Protection from Domestic violence in consultation with practitioners, academia and law makers. The Draft Juvenile Law is expected to be revised soon to emphasize diversion and community based solutions. In oPt, an amended version of the 2004 Child Law endorsed by the Council of Ministers, is now awaiting the endorsement of the President.

Beyond the CRC’s articles 37 and 40 (detention as a measure of last resort only, measures consistent with the promotion of the child’s sense of dignity, reintegration and constructive role in society), with regard to justice for children, UNICEF generally supports the review of existing legislation and procedures in order to advance national legislation alignment with specific international norms and standards. As per the Secretary General’s Guidance Note on Justice for Children, UN entities, civil society, financial institutions and governments are encouraged to include children’s issues in governance, human rights and rule of law initiatives. These may include anything from a reform of the judiciary, to access to justice programmes to be covered in UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) and poverty strategies. Efforts in this sector should aim at protecting children who come in

13 Beijing, Riyadh rules, UN rules on Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, and the UNSG guidance note on Justice for Children
contact with the law as victims, witnesses and alleged offenders. Beyond the traditional approach to justice for children, the legal empowerment of children and their caregivers to improve access to justice with regards to birth registration, family name, inheritance, nationality or refugee status for instance should also be promoted.

**b. Essential services – Social welfare and justice for children**

UNICEF assists government counterparts in ensuring legal and policy framework’s provisions are reflected at community level, and benefit children exposed to protection risks in an effective, efficient and respectful manner. Children with health, educational and child protection problems (victims, witnesses, and alleged offenders) should be offered preventive and protective measures that require cooperation between NGOs, local authorities, Ministries of Health, Education, Interior, Justice, and Social Affairs’ most decentralised echelons. UNICEF programmes initiate and scale up, document and evaluate these responses, thus informing policy reform in terms of protocols of cooperation, range of services offered, outreach, target populations, effectiveness and efficiency (including cost-efficiency), opportunities for scaling up, and capacity of the local mechanisms to address emergency related issues.

With regards to social welfare, UNICEF and the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs are piloting Child Protection Networks providing detection, referral and case management to children at risk with the involvement of the other relevant Ministries and NGOs in Gaza and West-Bank. These institutions are represented by social workers, school counselors, police officers and psychosocial workers who offer direct services to children but also contribute to policy development. Indeed the model tested is part of a long-term development project meant to go to scale once the necessary adjustments have been made, and the required resources allocated and the policy framework revised accordingly. In Jordan, UNICEF strengthens the health sector’s capacity to combat violence against children at central level through the establishment of section at the Ministry of Health and a specialized National Committee, as well as with the establishment of Family Protection Committees in hospitals and health centres.

In the field of justice for children, the MENA region has successfully set-up a number of local cross-sectoral mechanisms. In partnership with the Lebanese Ministry of Justice, the police and civil society organizations, UNICEF pilots juvenile justice alternative measures on a small scale. Unfortunately, due to the complexities of the situation of Palestinian refugee in Lebanon to date, these do not apply to Palestinian children in conflict with the law. These measures are intended to reduce the risks of abuse, of re-offending, to decrease costs and to promote reintegration through the provision of alternatives to detention, including community work, health and education services and job placement and follow-up. In oPt (West-Bank), pilot child protection units within the police are being established, with police officers trained as trainers on the social and legal aspects of child protection and Child Rights, in parallel with the training of prosecutors on child-friendly legal processes underway. In Jordan,
juvenile units within the Police have been established and are handling and resolving juvenile cases outside the court system through mediation.

c. Essential services – Human resources

While social protection has been emerging as a priority for governments, donors, UN agencies and partners, social welfare ministries tend to suffer from a lack of capacity to lead, to coordinate, to oversee and to partner with the wide range of stakeholders in the sector. The complexity, the sensitivity and the multi-layered nature of the child protection issues to be addressed have added to the challenges encountered. Both a cause and an outcome of this situation, the poor quality and insufficient quantity of human resources especially in the social work sector, as well as inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems, have been hindering stakeholders’ responses to child protection issues. If a few universities in the region (e.g. Birzeit in Palestine, University of Jordan…) have started developing social work training curricula, issues of minimum standards, code of conduct, competencies, status within the civil service, the role of the civil society in this sector, the geographical coverage of the territory have yet to be resolved.

UNICEF encourages government and civil society partners to improve coverage in the areas with the most vulnerable children through outreach social services, governmental/civil society institutions, education/health/justice sectors. Child protection management capacity is also looked at through organizational development, planning, evaluation and budgeting skills. Capacity needs are tackled through secondment, mentoring, study tours, thematic training, as relevant. Addressing their government partners needs in respect of social policy and institutional strengthening, UNICEF oPt posted consultants within the Ministry of Social Affairs, working on a range of issues including gender based violence and psychosocial programming. The early involvement of counterparts in designing terms of reference, recruitment, and a clear definition of roles, responsibilities and reporting channels appear to have played a role in the success of these initiatives. The capacity building component needs to be well thought through from the onset as the intent is not to substitute counterpart staff with consultant. In response to Jordan Ministry of Social Development limited funding and expertise, UNICEF has invested in an information system that enables counterparts to take informed decision based on data. Moreover, UNICEF is supporting efforts towards the professional development of social workers including through the creation of a code of ethics.

On-going cooperation

In Jordan, UNRWA and UNICEF cooperate in view of strengthening school counselors and social workers capacity to offer psychosocial support to children and families, but also to identify, manage and refer cases of violence, abuse and neglect. Furthering the legal protection of refugee children and women, lawyers have been trained on child protection, child rights and women refugees’ rights under the international law and UN conventions. Through cooperation between UNRWA and the Ministry of Health, health workers are equipped with the knowledge and the skills required responding to protection cases including early diagnosis and referral.
In Lebanon UNRWA schools, UNICEF supports education for children with learning difficulties through the intervention of assistant teachers and the provision of remedial classes outside of school hours. UNICEF is also introducing a newly developed teaching curriculum for kindergartens’ staff including in UNRWA run facilities.

In both West-Bank and Gaza, decentralised child protection networks responding to cases of neglect, violence and abuse through case management and referrals associate multi-sectoral partners including government, NGOs and UNRWA social services.

At policy level, the two agencies have started developing a Youth policy in Syria, while a discussion along the same lines has started in Jordan.

**Opportunities to advance child protection**

- Efforts to combat violence in community and schools are coordinated; policies and models (e.g. child friendly schools) are developed and implemented jointly by UNRWA and UNICEF in both host and refugee communities to ensure consistency and effectiveness.

- UNRWA health, education and social services personnel is systematically introduced to child protection, their role with regards to identification, management and referral of cases of violence, abuse and neglect is ascertained within the framework of the services and resources available to both host and refugee communities.

- Decentralised multi-sectoral child protection networks responding to cases of neglect, violence and abuse are established under the leadership of UNRWA social services, ensuring maximum geographical coverage. Links between these, services and actors operating within host and refugee populations are strengthened to foster efficiency, address gaps and overlaps.

- Refugee children access to justice is evaluated, UNRWA, government, NGOs social services are mobilised to ensure existing prevention and response measures benefit them.

### 3. Promoting protective social change

As highlighted in the UNICEF Global Child Protection Strategy, for the protective environment to be effective, there needs to be a social consensus against the norms and values that underpin the neglect, the violence and the abuse children are confronted with. These often find their roots in economic, cultural, political and gender dynamics one needs to untangle in order to address them effectively. Emergencies, whether conflict or natural disasters related, are known to erode protective norms and to exacerbate children’s vulnerability of all sorts, including abuse, recruitment and displacement. In a highly politicized region where youth participation sometimes leads children and young people to take part to radical political activism, offering positive, constructive models of civic engagement is critical. Responses build on home-grown positive behaviours and attitudes, make reference to child friendly principles, and secure the support of respected agents of change to achieve social change.
For UNICEF and partners to tackle effectively what is probably the most challenging dimension of child protection, it appears essential to increase anthropological knowledge on social norms and values, at family, community and national levels, whether protective of children or not. These need to be documented as part of the UN led broad situation analysis exercises, taking into account the role played by the emergency context when relevant. Such efforts need to examine the dynamics of the production of social norms and values, as well as the role played by the different stakeholders in this process, and ensure outcomes are fed into broad, multi-layered, staggered, behavior change initiatives aiming at, for example, reducing violence against children, child marriage, child labor or domestic violence to name a few issues prevailing in the region. Genuine participation is to be considered from the inception to the implementation in terms of definition of priorities, tools, approach, children’s and parents’ roles, in both conflict affected and non-conflict affected countries. The potential protective role of children themselves, families, communities and society should be built upon, as children cannot be seen as stand-alone objects but as agents of change and a part of the family unit.

Illustrating this approach, UNICEF and its NGO partners in oPt offer a range of community based psychosocial services to the affected population. Indeed, the on-going conflict causes acute levels of stress, fear and insecurity amongst children and their caregivers. The loss of life, the injuries, the destruction, as well as high levels of violence within the society itself add to the severity of the situation. While children are at the heart of the intervention, they are considered within their family environment. Professionals and volunteers, including adolescents and youth, target both children and their parents through group and individual psychosocial sessions and a toll free line. Parents acquire a better understanding of their children’s stress and anxiety, as well as the skills and knowledge to protect them from the consequences.

Initially targeting the conflict affected Iraqi refugees in Syria, UNICEF and its NGO and institutional partners are now expanding their community based psychosocial programming to Syrian children and mothers. The population benefits from a network of child friendly spaces, mothers’ groups, adolescents’ empowerment groups and multidisciplinary child protection and psychosocial support units. Both referral and direct services are offered, including psychological assessment, recreational activities, parenting skills, awareness raising and behaviour change. The network monitors closely the child protection situation using wellbeing indicators developed earlier, and contributes to building the capacity of the implementing partners.

Acting upon the results of a national study on violence against children in Jordan showing high prevalence of both verbal and physical violence against children in schools, UNICEF and Ministry of Education together with a wide range of partners embarked on a three-year campaign (Ma’An) aiming at dramatically reducing violence by teachers and educators in all public schools by the end of the cycle. The campaign launched in 2009 under the Patronage of HM Queen Rania encourages teachers in adopting non-violent disciplinary methods and
has already resulted in significant amendments of the Ministry’s policy with regards to its teachers.
On-going cooperation
UNRWA contributes fully to the Jordan Ma’an campaign to combat violence against children at school. The agency’s staff took part in developing the guidelines and the training materials for teachers, school counsellors and other personnel. Rules and regulations regarding school councils and student parliaments have been revised to allow for greater adolescents’ and parents’ participation. Youth facilitators have been trained to work with younger children and help them build self-esteem and protect themselves. Along the same lines, families and children are made aware of child rights issues, thus becoming actors of their own protection. UNRWA and UNICEF also promote safe spaces as part of UNRWA women program centers where adolescents acquire life skills through a participatory approach, including knowledge on child rights and better parenting.
In Lebanon, UNRWA, UNICEF and other partners have focused on strengthening youth understanding and capacity with regards to peace building and conflict resolution amongst refugee and host communities.
In Syria, UNICEF works with UNRWA on introducing education personnel to the principles of school based child protection, child friendly spaces, positive disciplining and child participation. Several toolkits and training courses have been developed in that respect equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills required to apply these principles. In partnership with MoH, UNRWA health clinic staff has been trained to improve youth access to health care. As a result of UNRWA recognition of the needs of youth a specialised section was established within its Social Services focusing on vocational training, school and health clinics.

Opportunities to advance child protection
- Social norms detrimental to child protection (e.g. violence against children, domestic violence, child marriage...) are to be prioritised and addressed in an inter-agency manner thus fostering synergies, efficiency and maximizing coverage.
- Specific studies aiming at measuring the prevalence of such issues, at assessing the responses offered or understanding root causes, trends, factors of change are required in order to roll out broad, long term, multi-level behaviour change initiatives likely to impact on attitudes in a sustainable manner.

F. Conclusion
Child protection concerns for Palestinian children in the region remain prevalent, whether in oPt or within host communities in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The prevention and the response to these risks requiring inter-sectoral efforts, and in view of its mandate vis-a-vis the Palestinian refugee population, UNRWA bears a unique responsibility in ensuring child protection is mainstreamed into its operations. On the basis of this limited exercise, the opportunities to advance child protection and to strengthen synergies with UNICEF appear to be numerous. Indeed, under each pillar of the child protection strategy, whether the improvement of knowledge management, the strengthening of child protection systems, or the promotion of protective social change, UNRWA has already taken significant steps to position it-self as a key child protection actor. Through its five main programmes (education,
health, relief and social services, micro-finance and infrastructure and camp improvement), the agency provides services through which specific child protection concerns can be effectively prevented, monitored and addressed provided issues are acknowledged, the personnel is equipped and supported in playing its part in coordination with other relevant protection actors, and existing models taken to scale. With regards to social norms, the agency’s efforts to respond to violence in schools and to gender-based violence show a willingness to tackle harmful behaviours at all levels, through community mobilization, the establishment of referral mechanisms as well as the development of legal and policy frameworks.

However, for these efforts to bear fruits, the agency might have to consider the following. As UNRWA has embarked in operationalising its protection mandate, it could be useful to define an agency-wide strategy ensuring child protection concerns are systematically taken into account at all levels. This could be justified by the contribution of child protection to the realization of economic and social rights on the hand, and civil and political rights on the other hand. In view of the role social norms, policy and legal frameworks play in the protective environment, the organization will have to carefully weigh the pros and cons of over-arching and country specific approaches. Moreover, applying its advocacy principle, UNRWA could also decide to engage with the relevant authorities on the review, the development and the implementation of legal and policy frameworks pertaining to Palestinian children’s life and in line with international legislation. Finally, the potential impact a renewed interest to sensitive child protection issues could have on the relationship between the organization, the communities it serves and their leaders should not be underestimated. Concerns from a cultural, religious or political nature might be expressed similar to reservations to the Convention of the Rights of the Child voiced by some governments in the region. However, the accumulated experience and regional expertise, the mutual understanding, the appreciation UNRWA benefits from the Palestinian refugees should allow potential challenges to be anticipated and addressed in a culturally appropriate, creative and constructive manner.