

WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT ABOUT? The principle of impartiality requires that humanitarian aid and action be provided solely on the basis of need, without discrimination. The number of persons in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria continues to outstrip available resources. This document provides guidance for humanitarian actors on how to consider protection, vulnerability, and prioritization of those limited resources, so they go to populations in Syria who are most in need.

DEFINITION OF VULNERABILITY

The terms “vulnerable” and “vulnerability” are common terms in the humanitarian aid and development sectors, but their use can be vague, often being seen as substitutes for “poor” and “poverty.” Vulnerability has to be defined in terms of what it is that a population is vulnerable to. The definition of vulnerability therefore requires specificity.

A person is **not** vulnerable from birth, but life circumstances (e.g. education, socio-economic status) and/or discrimination may impact on the ability to enjoy equal access to human rights; some persons may be more vulnerable due to these circumstances and/or discrimination. E.g. a poor, teenage girl without family is not “vulnerable” per se; she is, however, more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and other protection risks.

- 1) People are, or become more vulnerable due to a combination of physical, social, environmental and political factors, and vulnerability is not a fixed category. Not everyone with the same characteristics will experience the same level of vulnerability.
- 2) Responding to specific needs of the elderly, chronically ill, persons with disabilities, lactating or pregnant women, and the displaced to meet their human rights to shelter, food, health and education often requires humanitarian actors to have a stronger analysis on these groups or individuals considering the circumstances which make them more vulnerable to rights violations and protection risks.

IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITISING THE MOST IN NEED BASED ON VULNERABILITY

There is no generic list that prioritises one population group or set of risks over another. Each humanitarian actor must analyse population groups and vulnerability risks and considerations for each project at the planning stage before the response is initiated.

CRITICAL ASPECTS

Determining “vulnerability” and “vulnerable groups” typically requires analysis of multiple dimensions based on age, gender, diversity, specific needs (which can be location specific), displacement status, and other characteristics.

- **AGE:** Children, adolescents and older persons are often excluded from formal decision-making structures and, consequently, the specific risks that they face are often not taken into account.
- **GENDER:** This refers to the socially constructed and assigned characteristics, roles and responsibilities of women and men.
- **DIVERSITY:** Members of minority groups often face specific protection risks.
- **LOCATION SPECIFIC NEEDS:** People living in besieged and militarily-encircled areas, areas controlled by certain parties to the conflict, those living in camps, collective centres, and stranded at borders.
- **DISPLACEMENT STATUS:** IDPs, Refugees, and Returnees are disproportionately affected due to their profiles, status, and disrupted support networks.
- **HEALTH CONDITIONS:** Those with chronic illnesses, disabilities, injuries, and mental health conditions have specific needs making them more vulnerable to exclusion.

ASPECTS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING TO ASSIST PEOPLE MOST IN NEED

Assessments and surveys must ensure that data and details related to vulnerable groups are at minimum gender, age, disability disaggregated, and aim to collect information from representative samples of the wide array of population groups in order to best identify their respective needs.

Community participation must be broad based (**men/women/disabled/elderly/children**) in all phases of the program: (i) assessment phase of **who** to support; (ii) in deciding **what type** of assistance; (iii) **when** and **how** information is shared with beneficiaries; and (iv) during implementation.

SYRIA RESPONSE: PROTECTION, VULNERABILITY, AND PRIORITISING THE MOST IN NEED

The below highlights some key factors, risks, and groups to consider when planning and prioritizing (the list is in no specific order and is by no means exhaustive).



CHILDREN

- who are unaccompanied and separated.
- engaging in child labour or recruited by parties to conflict.
- living with older or disabled caregivers.
- living in crowded spaces (collective centres, with host families) may be at greater risk of domestic violence.



YOUTH

- Adolescent girls at risk of early or forced marriage.
- Male youth who need safe and appropriate livelihood opportunities.



ELDERLY

- Specific needs in regards to security, shelter, access to services, health, NFIs, WASH facilities, etc.



WOMEN AND GIRLS

- May face particular risks due to their gender and situation, including harmful survival mechanisms (e.g. early marriage), trafficking, SEA.
- Unaccompanied girls and survivors of violence require targeted and specific attention.
- Specific needs in regards to security; women can be more susceptible to violence in crowded spaces like collective centres and aid distribution sites.
- Specific needs for access to services, health, WASH facilities including for pregnant and lactating women.
- Female-headed households, including war widows and women in need of legal support for inheritance, custody and family law related issues.



PEOPLE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS, DISABILITIES AND INJURIES

- Specific needs in regards to security, shelter, access to services, health, NFIs, WASH facilities, etc.
- Difficulty in accessing needed medicine, healthcare, food/nutrition.



MINORITY GROUPS

- Risks of isolation and discrimination by the host communities or parties to the conflict.
- Lack of social support networks.



DISPLACED PERSONS

- Reduced support networks.
- Short-term displaced, Long-term displaced.
- Susceptibility to discrimination, including based on where they live: camps, collective centres, urban, rural or hosted by others.
- Refugees, including Palestine refugees, who have weakened support networks and limited economic opportunities.
- Returnees and displaced are exposed to conflict and disputes due to potential housing, land and property issues.



POPULATION HOSTING DISPLACED PERSONS

- Tensions with displaced communities.
- Reduced living space.
- Socio-economic hardships.



PEOPLE IN ACCESS-RESTRICTED AREAS

- Denial of basic rights, including restricted freedom of movement and access to adequate food, water and health care.
- Infrequent or non-existent humanitarian assistance, including blockage of urgent medical evacuations.



PEOPLE LIVING IN AREAS CONTAMINATED WITH EXPLOSIVE HAZARDS

- Men and adolescent boys involved in rubble clearance and reconstruction work.
- Children are at particular risk of explosive hazards.



PEOPLE WITH NO DOCUMENTATION

- Reduced access to assistance.
- Denial of basic rights, including freedom of movement and access to services and employment.
- Jeopardized rights to property, inheritance and child custody.



PEOPLE WITH SOCIO-ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

- Lack of means to meet basic needs.
- More susceptible to exposing family members to protection risks to make ends meet (e.g. child labour, sexual exploitation).