

## Syria International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment



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Baseline Report  
September 19, 2018

## **Acknowledgements**

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## ACRONYMS

CBO.....	community-based organization
IDELA .....	International Development and Early Learning Assessment
ISELA .....	International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment
PSS .....	psychosocial support
SEL.....	socio-emotional learning

## Executive Summary

The Syria International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA) baseline study set out to assess the levels of socio-emotional development of children ages 6 to 12 in five Injaz-supported child centers.<sup>1</sup> The centers are supported by the following community-based organizations (CBOs): Partner C (Locations 1 and 2), Partner I, Partner E, and Partner B. These child centers provide psychosocial programming and remedial education to internally displaced children in Raqqa Governorate in northeastern Syria.

### Sample Size and Characteristics

A total of 496 students ages 6 to 12 participated in the study, with a near-equal proportion of boys and girls (51 percent male and 49 percent female). Most students assessed (70 percent) fell into the 10- to 12-year-old age group, while 20 percent were 8 or 9 years old and 10 percent were 6 or 7 years old. Since many children were out of school during the ISIS occupation, and some had never attended school, nearly half of the students assessed were in Grade 1, and almost 90 percent were in Grades 1 to 3 (see Exhibit 3, page 6). Most students live in a tent (58 percent) or a house (40 percent), and had changed residences one to three times in the past year. While we assessed children in all five Injaz-funded centers, 60 percent of the students came from two centers: Partner C/Location 2 and Partner B.

### Instrument

We collected data using the most recent version of Save the Children's ISELA tool. ISELA measures key intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies across four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. These domains include seven subtasks: self-concept, anti-social/conflict behavior, stress management, perseverance, empathy, pro-social behavior, and relationships. Additionally, the socio-emotional learning (SEL) environment subtask assesses the school/center environment to determine if it is safe and supportive for the development of SEL competencies. We included two additional questions (see page 2) to better understand the most urgent concerns in students' environments and current emotional states.

The ISELA results are reported by subtask according to the specific scoring guidelines provided in the ISELA instrument. The results will be used to develop age-appropriate and context-relevant learning interventions for children in the five child centers we assessed, and may inform activities for other centers in Raqqa Governorate.

### Key Results

- **Relationships:** Children have an average of 11.7 people in their social network and access more than half of them when they need help dealing with an emotion or problem. The three people that children consulted most frequently were their mother, closest friend, and teacher. Fewer than 3 percent are secluded and do not access anyone in their network.
- **Stress management:** On average, children identified 1.76 strategies for coping with stress, out of three possible strategies. Thirty-six percent of children identified three strategies, and 18 percent could not identify any strategies.
- **Empathy:** On average, children answered 77.8 percent of the empathy questions correctly, with scores ranging from 57.3 percent to 97.4 percent correct.
- **Perseverance:** Most students (63 percent) attempted all three drawing activities. The average number attempts was 2.1.
- **Pro-social and anti-social behavior:** Children reported an average of 13.8 pro-social behaviors and 5.8 anti-social behaviors. The most common anti-social behavior reported was getting angry with other people, which occurred about 1.8 times in the last week, while the most common pro-

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<sup>1</sup> The Injaz project coined the term "child centers" to refer to CBO facilities that provide remedial and psychosocial programming to internally displaced children.

social behaviors were doing what adults told them to do and trying to be nice to others, which occurred an average of three times in the last week.

- **Self-concept:** Overall, the average percentage of items scored correctly out of a total of 10 items was 55 percent. Most children (71 percent) attempted the task of drawing their future self and were able to describe the scenes/details of what they had drawn, while 29 percent did not attempt the drawing.

Equity analysis did not reveal any major differences in performance based on socioeconomic status or risk factor, but did find several differences in sex, age, and living conditions. Girls and older children (9 to 12 years old) demonstrated slightly higher levels of empathy and pro-social behavior and lower levels of anti-social behavior. Self-concept progressively increased with age, and there was a small increase based on the number of homes in which students had lived.

## Socio-Emotional Learning Environment

A supportive SEL environment is one that protects the child's rights, dignity, and wellbeing to ensure an optimal learning experience. Thirty-six percent of children felt afraid in their center/school, and 39 percent felt afraid while traveling to their center/school. An astonishing 30 percent of children reported feeling unsafe because an adult had hit, kicked, or threatened to hurt a child in their center/school. Slightly fewer than half (45 percent) reported that an adult screamed or yelled at a child. This is an issue of child protection and child rights that requires an urgent response.

Physical and verbal violence occurs not only between adults and children, but also among children. Over half of the children (67.5 percent) reported that children in their center/school have gotten into a physical fight with other students, and 51 percent of children reported bullying within the center.

On average, children reported 42.7 percent of the seven negative SEL environment factors existed in their center/school. Older children (9 to 12 years old) reported slightly lower occurrences compared to younger children (6 to 8 years old), and this difference was statistically significant.

## Additional Questions

We added two questions to the ISELA instrument to better understand the context and children's current emotional state. The first additional was, "What do you consider to be the most challenging/pressing issue in your community?" The second additional question was, "Which of the below feelings could apply to how you feel right now: a) feeling loved and appreciated, b) feeling physically safe, c) feeling emotionally safe, d) feeling a sense of hope, or e) feeling insecure?"

According to the children interviewed, the most pressing concern in their community involves safety-related issues, likely due to the conflict or threat of conflict. The second most important issue is limited access to basic resources, followed by psychosocial issues. A higher percentage of girls reported limited access to basic resources. A higher proportion of younger children reported safety-related issues as the main concern. Older children (9 to 12 years old) reported psychosocial issues as the most pressing challenge.

In terms of their current emotional state, most children (more than 70 percent) feel loved and appreciated, physically safe, and emotionally safe; 70 percent feel a sense of hope.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The ISELA results showed that children had high degrees of empathy (78 percent correct) and perseverance (63 percent of students attempted all three drawings). Children reported higher levels of pro-social behaviors (13.8) than anti-social behaviors (5.8). Overall, children showed lower levels of self-concept (55 percent) compared to other subtasks. Injaz programming should continue to build on these skills to continue improving their SEL competencies.

Considering the hostile SEL environment and feeling of insecurity, Injaz must undertake significant psychosocial support (PSS) and child protection programming in all child centers, including child

protection training, development of a child protection plan,<sup>2</sup> and establishing a reporting mechanism that is anonymous, well-publicized, and easily accessible to children of all ages. To address the issue in schools, Injaz staff should share findings with the local school authorities (local councils) and promote a dialogue around addressing child protection issues.

Second, conflict behavior (e.g., bullying and fighting) among children should be addressed through appropriate SEL programming. Injaz should support CBOs in developing child-friendly SEL centers that provide a safe, nurturing environment free of conflict. They should train center staff in conflict mitigation, positive discipline, and anger/stress management strategies that they can model and teach.

Third, based on the challenges in administering the tool, we recommend continued testing of ISELA with a larger sample of students and with participation from all stakeholders. An adaptation workshop, piloting, and enumerator training with guidance from Save the Children and stakeholder participation can ensure an age-appropriate and context-relevant instrument. Training assessors in standardized use of the tool and conducting inter-rater reliability testing during training and data collection is also very important for reliable administration.

Additionally, since the sample disproportionately represented older students (10 to 12) who performed better on some of the more challenging subtasks, we recommended piloting the tool with more children in the younger age group (6 to 8) — which may include children outside Injaz-supported centers — to further adjust the tool to the target age groups. Many children in the younger age group had difficulty executing the drawing exercises, envisioning their future selves, and describing their current emotional state; we therefore recommend further adjustments to these subtasks.

## Next Steps

Injaz project staff plan to review findings with partners and facilitate consultations to determine how best to respond to the issues and recommendations raised in this report. Injaz will also present findings to donors and implementing partners (many based in Amman, Jordan) operating in northeast Syria. Addressing the child protection, conflict mitigation, and SEL issues will require a coordinated response.

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to working with centers to highlight key safety and security issues in and around the center and then developing mitigation strategies to prevent and respond to threats.

## Background Context

The conflict in Syria has devastated local governance, access to education, and provision of life-sustaining services. According to UNICEF, Syria is the world's biggest producer of both internally displaced people and refugees, and more than 1 million Syrian children lack access to education.<sup>3</sup>

Raqqa, ISIS' former stronghold in Syria, was liberated in October 2017. During ISIS' occupation, secular schools were closed and replaced with ISIS schools focused on incitement to jihad. This major shift in the education system resulted in a large out-of-school population. Access to formal education is still limited, with only 2 percent of schools operating in Raqqa Governorate.<sup>4</sup> Children returning to school or nonformal education must overcome obstacles that include trauma, difficulty integrating into the classroom, insufficient literacy and numeracy competencies for their grade level, lack of instructional materials, and instructors with varying levels of teaching experience and certification.

Children also suffer trauma and emotional stress from internal displacement and the daily threat of violence. In the first two months of 2018 alone, 1,000 Syrian children were reportedly killed or injured.<sup>5</sup> Symptoms of emotional distress include fear, difficulty sleeping, grief, depression and withdrawal, aggression, nervousness, hyperactivity and tension, speech problems or mutism, and somatic symptoms.

Recognizing the conflict's effects on children's well-being and education, the Injaz project, funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, provides informal<sup>6</sup> remedial education to in-school and out-of-school children and youth in northeast Syria, mostly in Raqqa Governorate.

Injaz child centers' holistic approach provides structured remedial literacy and numeracy along with PSS to address children's learning and socio-emotional needs. As teachers use more inclusive, child-centered teaching approaches to improve learning of remedial skills, both learners and teachers undergo improvements to their psychosocial well-being. In turn, students' improved psychosocial well-being fosters greater learning.

All remedial activities are designed to prepare children to enter or re-enter formal schools managed by local councils. One Injaz-supported CBO also provides remedial literacy instruction to teachers in five formal schools. Thus, Injaz targets both internally displaced children (mostly living in camps) who attend child centers and students in formal schools, which are managed by local councils.

The Injaz project has the following goals:

- Provide remedial literacy and numeracy education and self-learning materials to children and youth in child centers as a path to formal education
- Provide PSS for children, teachers, parents, and the broader community
- Train teachers on strategies for helping emotionally distressed students through tailored PSS activities that can be incorporated in the classroom
- Train teachers on remedial education and self-learning materials, and provide textbooks
- Create a safe physical environment for learning through school rehabilitation
- Support local initiatives in technical and vocational education and training for youth

To date, no assessments to measure children's socio-emotional competencies have taken place in Raqqa Governorate. This baseline assessment is intended to better understand students' psychosocial

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<sup>3</sup> UNICEF USA, "Syrian Crisis." <https://www.unicefusa.org/mission/emergencies/child-refugees/syria-crisis>. (Accessed August 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Assistance Coordination Unit. (2017). "Schools in Syria: Thematic Report." Retrieved from <http://wos-education.org/uploads/reports/Schools-in-Syria-2017-ACU-IMU-EN.pdf>. (Accessed August 2018.)

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF USA, "Syrian Crisis."

<sup>6</sup> Unlike nonformal education, which is a state-recognized basic education curriculum, informal education refers to education that is not based on the formal basic education curriculum. Instead, it focuses on remedial education and preparation for entry into the formal education system, and is viewed as a necessary component of the educational system to reach out-of-school students.

needs. The children enrolled in Injaz-supported centers have been benefiting from PSS interventions for at least two months. Thus, the baseline assessment will help fine-tune approaches to students' social and emotional learning needs, as well as identify ways to improve the SEL learning environment.

## Purpose of Assessment

The ISELA assessment addresses two key research questions:

1. What socio-emotional competencies do children between the ages of 6 and 12 demonstrate in the four ISELA domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationships?
2. What contextual factors are associated with children's socio-emotional development?

The study will highlight children's strengths and areas for improvement, and assess the SEL learning environment. The results will be used to develop age-appropriate and context-relevant psychosocial interventions for children in Injaz's centers.

## Sample Size and Characteristics

We selected a representative sample of students in the five child centers for participation. The target sample size was 494 students (see Exhibit 1). By the end of data collection, we had assessed 496.<sup>7</sup>

**Exhibit 1. Target and Actual Sample Size**

Name of Center	Target	Actual
Partner C/Location 1	88	88
Partner C/Location 1	200	201
Partner I	28	28
Partner E	80	79
Partner B	98	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>496</b>

**Sex.** A near-equal proportion of boys (51 percent) and girls (49 percent) participated in the assessment.

**Age and grade.** 10 percent of participating children were 6 or 7 years old, about 20 percent were 8 or 9 years old, and 70 percent were 10 to 12 years old (Exhibit 2).

**Exhibit 2. Distribution of Sample by Age**

Student Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
6	5	1.01%	1.01%
7	42	8.47%	9.48%
8	47	9.48%	18.95%

<sup>7</sup> At Partner B, enumerators collected data on 100 students instead of 98 due to a miscalculation. The two extra students did not affect overall results and thus were kept in the data set.

Student Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
9	54	10.89%	29.84%
10	114	22.98%	52.82%
11	104	20.97%	73.79%
12	130	26.21%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Because children are grouped according to competency rather than age, 47 percent of students were in Grade 1, 73 percent were in Grades 1 to 2, and 88 percent were in Grades 1 to 3 (Exhibit 3). This is unsurprising, since many were out of school during ISIS' occupation from August 2013 to Spring 2017.

### Exhibit 3. Distribution of Sample by Grade

Student Grade	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
1	215	47.25%	47.25%
2	121	26.59%	73.85%
3	64	14.07%	87.91%
4	35	7.69%	95.60%
5	10	2.20%	97.80%
6	9	1.98%	99.78%
7	1	0.22%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Center distribution.** 60 percent of students came from two centers: Partner C/Location 1 and Partner B (Exhibit 4). Only 6 percent represented Partner I.

### Exhibit 4. Distribution of Sample by Center

Child Center Name	n	Percentage	Cumulative
Partner C/Location 3	88	17.74%	17.74%
Partner C/Location 1	201	40.52%	58.27%
Partner I	28	5.65%	63.91%
Partner E	79	15.93%	79.84%
Partner B	100	20.16%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Language spoken.** All students speak Arabic at home.

**Living conditions.** Nearly all children (97 percent) live in a tent or a house (Exhibit 5, next page). They reported moving often: about 75 percent have changed residences one to three times in the last year.

### Exhibit 5. Students' Current Living Conditions

Where do you currently live?	n	Percentage	Cumulative
Tent	285	57.46%	57.46%
House	199	40.12%	97.58%
With family members	2	0.40%	97.98%
Abandoned ruins/house	3	0.60%	98.59%
Collective Centers	7	1.41%	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**Household assets.** As a proxy for student wealth and socioeconomic status, we surveyed students on the household assets they are likely to possess (Exhibit 6). The most common assets were a bathroom/toilet, a mobile/cell phone, a tin roof, running water from a faucet, and a separate kitchen. About 40 percent had electricity, a fan, a television, a satellite dish/cable TV connection, a refrigerator, and a motorcycle. Students' households had an average of 6.4 of the 15 listed assets.

### Exhibit 6. Household Assets

Does your house have:	n	Percentage
A bathroom/toilet	416	83.9%
A mobile/cell phone	329	66.3%
A tin roof	325	65.5%
Water from a faucet	320	64.5%
A separate kitchen	288	58.1%
Electricity	223	44.9%
A fan	206	41.5%
A television	195	39.3%
A satellite dish/cable TV connection	195	39.3%
A refrigerator	195	39.3%
A motorcycle	192	38.7%
A car or a van	119	23.9%
A bicycle	99	19.9%
A radio	52	10.5%
A landline telephone	33	6.7%

**Risk Factors.** Enumerators asked students about risk factors they may have experienced. Exhibit 7 (next page) illustrates the percentage of children who reported having experienced each of these factors at baseline.

## Exhibit 7. Children’s Reported Experience of Risk Factors

Question	n	Yes
Do you feel like your parents/guardians really know what you are doing when you are away from home?	307	63.8%
Have you ever had to miss school for longer than a month?	279	56.7%
Have you ever lived in a home where an adult regularly smoked?	277	56.3%
Have you ever had to work to earn money to support your family?	183	37.2%
Has anyone in your family been away from home for more than six months?	172	35.2%
Have you ever lived in a home where people yell, insult, or humiliate each other?	171	34.8%
Have you ever lived in a home where people push, slap, or throw something at each other?	164	33.4%
Have you ever gone hungry because there wasn’t enough food at home?	144	29.3%
Has your family ever had to depend on neighbors or community members for food?	132	26.8%

## Assessment Methodology

### What Is ISELA?

ISELA is an assessment tool that provides a picture of children’s social support networks, empathy, pro-social behavior, conflict behavior, approaches to learning, and understanding of the SEL environment.<sup>8</sup> Save the Children has used ISELA in a variety of countries to assess the effect of social and emotional well-being programs on children between the ages of 6 and 12, and to gauge their SEL competencies.

ISELA measures key intrapersonal and interpersonal skills across four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. The domains include a total of seven subtasks (Exhibit 8). In addition, the instrument assesses the SEL environment to determine if the center/school is safe and supportive of the development of SEL competencies.

### Exhibit 8. ISELA Domains and Subtasks

Domains	Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Relationships
Subtasks	Self-concept	Anti-social/conflict behavior Stress management Perseverance	Empathy	Pro-social behavior Relationships: ● Composition ● Saturation ● Seclusion

The questions for each subtask are scored according to the following guidelines:

- **Yes/no questions:** For yes/no questions, 1 is marked for “yes” and 0 for “no.”
- **Correct/incorrect:** For questions in which students are asked to identify something specific, 1 is recorded for a correct response, 0 for an incorrect response, and 999 for no response.
- **Multiple response:** On the anti-social and pro-social behavior subtasks, the frequency with which behavior occurred is recorded up to a maximum of 10 responses. On the SEL environment subtask, there are up to a maximum of six responses.

<sup>8</sup> Save the Children, “Global Education Research.” <https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/global-programs/education/research>. (Accessed September 2018).

## Adaptations to ISELA

We translated and adapted ISELA to suit the local language and context. The original English-language tool was translated into Levantine Arabic. We then shared the translated tool with local Syrian Injaz field staff and CBO partners from the region to modify the tool to the Syrian context. Based on their feedback, we made the following adaptations:

- Two questions were added to the background information section to identify where the children lived and how long they had lived there.
- A question referring to alcohol in the background section assessing risk factors was removed, based on cultural considerations and in line with ISELA adaptations in other countries in the Levant and North Africa.
- The list of languages spoken at home was modified for languages spoken in northeastern Syria.
- The subtasks and response options were not modified. However, a picture of a boy crying was added to the empathy subtask to ensure gender inclusivity.
- Additional questions were appended to help understand the most pressing issue in children's community, as well as their current emotional states.

Our Syrian subcontractor, Partner L, and Injaz staff reviewed the adapted tool and finalized it prior to the enumerator training. The tool was further modified during enumerator training, and a final version was developed for data collection. Therefore, two tools were developed: one for training, and a final version for data collection.

## Enumerator Training

We recruited 31 enumerators for ISELA/IDELA<sup>9</sup> data collection. Their qualifications included experience working in education, working with students, or administering surveys.

The enumerator training workshop took place from May 28 to May 31, 2018. The facilitators trained 31 enumerators to administer ISELA/IDELA, with scoring guidelines provided by Save the Children. In consideration of security concerns, facilitators conducted the training remotely from Berlin with enumerators in Raqqa using Jitsi Meet open-source video conferencing software. Jitsi Meet was deemed the best platform to use given limited internet connectivity in the area.

During the four-day workshop, enumerators learned about the tools' objectives, domains, subtasks, and scoring procedures. The workshop also included simulated sessions with observation and feedback.

## Training Challenges and Recommendations

One challenge we faced during the workshop involved its timing and duration. The sessions took place during Ramadan, when workdays are often abbreviated due to daytime fasting and feasts at sunset. We therefore adapted the workshop's timing and content to allow no more than three hours of training per day over the course of four days. Additionally, due to the remote nature of the training and poor internet connectivity, it was not possible to interact with each enumerator individually and oversee the role-playing simulations between enumerators. Enumerators also lacked opportunities to practice one-on-one administration with children in a child center or school setting, because we could not locate a control group of students and schools were closed for Ramadan. Instead, training facilitators requested three parents to bring one child to the training site for a mock assessment and only one parent responded, so the mock assessment took place in a group format. We also eliminated planned inter-rater reliability testing due to time constraints.

In the future, we recommend conducting practice ISELA sessions in a child-care setting so that enumerators can practice one-on-one administration. We also recommend that training workshops take

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<sup>9</sup> The study took place in tandem with one that targeted children ages 3.5 to 6 using the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA). Both collected data from the same centers.

place in better conditions — not during Ramadan or extreme weather — and over the course of five days, allowing time for inter-rater reliability testing and center visits.

## Data Collection

Chemonics engaged the Syrian subcontractor Partner L for data collection. Data collection took place over the course of four days, from June 4 to 7, 2018. Enumerators spent three days in Partner C/Location 3, Partner C/Location 1, and Partner I, and two days in Partner E and Partner B. Each enumerator completed four assessments per day.

Supervisors and trainers provided enumerators with frequent guidance during data collection through WhatsApp calls and emails. Child center managers also shared their feedback, and the team advised enumerators on how to ensure that students had a quiet, safe, and conducive environment for carrying out the assessment tasks.

At the end of data collection, enumerators had reached the target sample size in all five centers.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Although Injaz project staff, CBO representatives, and enumerators reviewed and contextualized the ISELA instrument, enumerators reported that it was hard to administer with the target population, and that the instrument and guidance could be improved for future assessments. They reported that some of the questions were too repetitive or beyond children's grasp, particularly those pertaining to children's personality or emotions. The self-concept subtask, which requires children to draw a picture and describe their future self, was particularly challenging for the 6- to 8-year-old age group, and allowed insufficient time.<sup>10</sup> Children in the younger age group also had difficulty responding to the additional questions, which asked about the most pressing issue in their community and their current emotional state. Unfortunately, the tool was not piloted to identify alternative approaches prior to data collection.

We asked all five CBOs to review the tool and provide feedback, but due to time constraints only three responded. In the future, an adaptation workshop involving all stakeholders that uses guidance from Save the Children might be more effective. These suggestions are directed toward future Injaz administrations of the tool, and may also be helpful as Save the Children continues to test the tool with various contexts and populations. Further guidance for adapting the tool to high-risk contexts may be necessary.<sup>11</sup>

WhatsApp proved an efficient tool for troubleshooting issues during data collection, and we received excellent technical support from the evaluation supervisors. Child centers also provided daily feedback to supervisors on improving administration, which was communicated to the enumerators; this, in turn, improved the data's quality and reliability.

## Data Analysis and Limitations

Because each subtask is scored according to a different metric, we present results by subtask. In most subtasks, we report on the percentage of students who demonstrated each skill. Where items have correct or incorrect responses, we give the percentage of correct scores for each skill and a composite score that represents children's average performance across all skills (such as stress management). Our statistician performed regression analysis according to equity factors such as age, sex, socioeconomic status, and risk factors. In most cases, we saw no variation across these factors. We note variables for which we found statistically significant relationships; however, relationships were generally not strong.

There are also some limits to our findings' generalizability. Due to the evaluation's non-experimental nature, we cannot generalize results beyond the five centers studied. Additionally, the SEL subtask was not adapted to a specific setting, so we do not know whether answers pertain to centers, schools, or both. Since the assessment took place in child centers, which are the target of Injaz's efforts, we assume responses largely represent the SEL environment in centers.

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<sup>10</sup> Save the Children has guidance on adapting the subtask so that it does not require a drawing.

<sup>11</sup> Save the Children has a seven-step adaptation process that could be helpful in the future.

# ISELA Subtask Results

This section presents the results of the entire sample on the seven social and emotional learning subtasks: relationships, empathy, perseverance, pro-social behavior, conflict behavior, self-concept, and stress management. We report any differences across equity factors under each subtask.<sup>12</sup>

## Relationships/Social Support

A child's social support network consists of family members, friends, and other community members that he or she can confide in and go to for help. This network is an important component of a child's social and emotional development. The relationships subtask helps illustrate children's social networks, and whether children turn to their networks for support in managing issues and problems that they face.

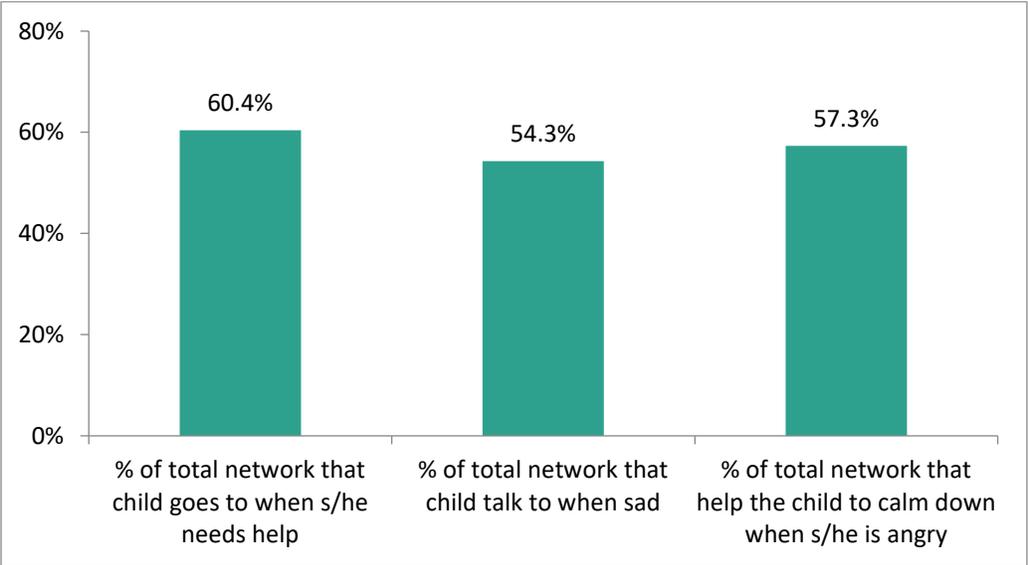
Enumerators asked children to reflect on how they use their social network. This subtask provides us with three types of information about the child's social network:

- **Composition:** the people who make up children's social networks, and the network's size
- **Saturation:** how much of their network children access when they need help or support
- **Seclusion:** children who do not access any of their network for help and support

**Composition.** The average size of a social support network was 11.7 people, comprising 4.3 household members, 4.9 friends, and 2.5 community members. We found no significant differences in the size of the network based on equity factors, such as sex, age, socioeconomic status, and risk factors.

**Saturation.** We asked children which members of their networks they approach when they need help, when sad, and when they are angry and need help calming down (Exhibit 9). The average number they go to when they need help is 60.4 percent, when sad is 54.3 percent, and when angry is 57.3 percent. We found no significant differences in saturation based on equity factors.

**Exhibit 9. Children's Access to Social Networks**



<sup>12</sup> Given the differences in sample size across centers, we did not disaggregate the results by child center. In fact, there was very little variation across centers apart from Partner I, which performed higher on a few subtasks — which could be attributed to the small sample size there.

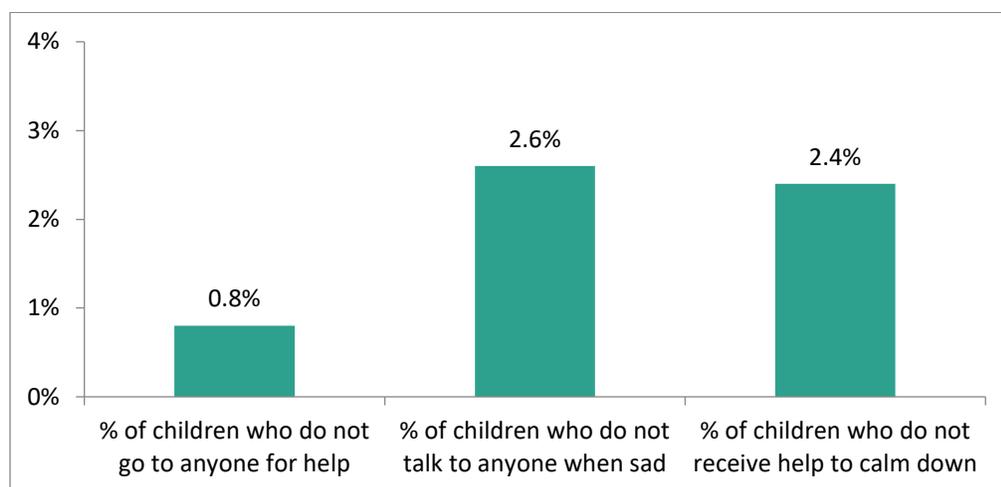
The three people children were likeliest to consult were their mother, closest friend, and teacher (Exhibit 10). Between 60 and 69 percent also consulted their father.

**Exhibit 10. Most Consulted Members of Children’s Social Networks**

Person in Network	Child goes to when s/he needs help	Child talks to when sad	Helps the child calm down when angry
Mother	82.9%	79.0%	83.5%
Father	69.2%	59.3%	65.9%
Brother	51.4%	47.4%	52.2%
Sister	51.4%	50.2%	54.8%
Grandmother	14.5%	12.3%	13.9%
Grandfather	8.3%	9.5%	9.1%
Another female person	5.2%	5.6%	5.8%
Another male person	4.2%	3.4%	3.8%
Friend no. 1	86.3%	80.2%	83.1%
Friend no. 2	69.8%	62.9%	65.1%
Friend no. 3	54.8%	47.2%	52.0%
Teacher	71.1%	59.7%	62.9%
Facilitator	14.8%	13.3%	14.3%
School manager	36.9%	31.7%	32.3%
Neighbor	36.9%	30.0%	31.7%
NGO/community worker	4.0%	3.2%	2.8%
Another person	9.1%	7.5%	8.9%

**Seculsion.** Fewer than 3 percent of children show signs of seclusion, not seeking help from anyone in their social network (Exhibit 11).

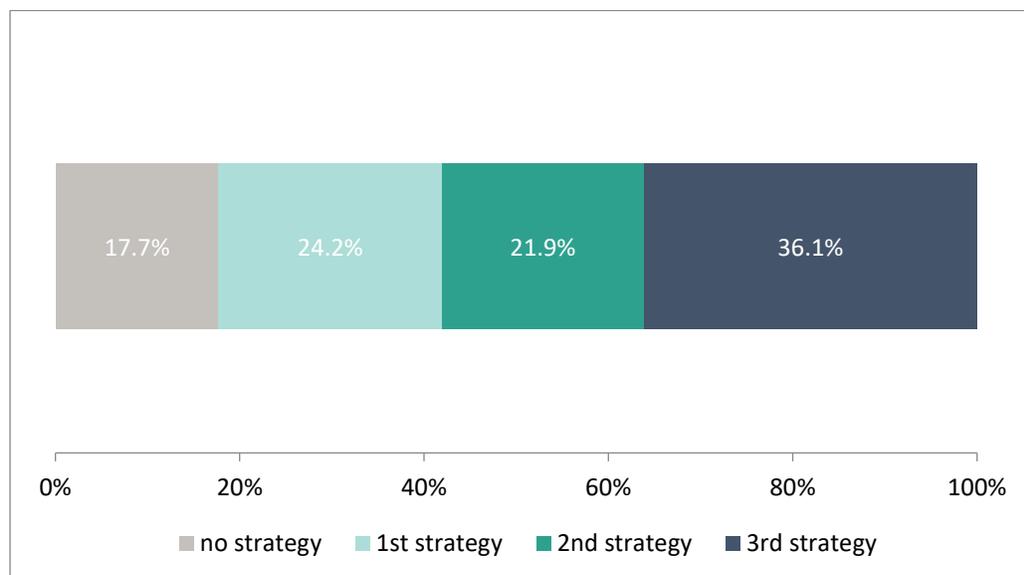
**Exhibit 11. Percentage of Children Who Show Signs of Seclusion**



## Stress Management

Stress management (also referred to as “coping”) is the conscious use of personal skills and resources to mitigate the impact of chronic stress or acute adversity. We asked children what they do to calm down when angry or upset. About 24 percent of children gave one strategy, 22 percent gave two strategies, and 36 percent gave three strategies (Exhibit 12). Almost one in five children could not identify any coping mechanism. Overall, children identified an average of 1.76 stress management strategies.

**Exhibit 12. Number of Stress Management Strategies Identified by Children**



There were no differences in the number of coping strategies identified based on equity variables.

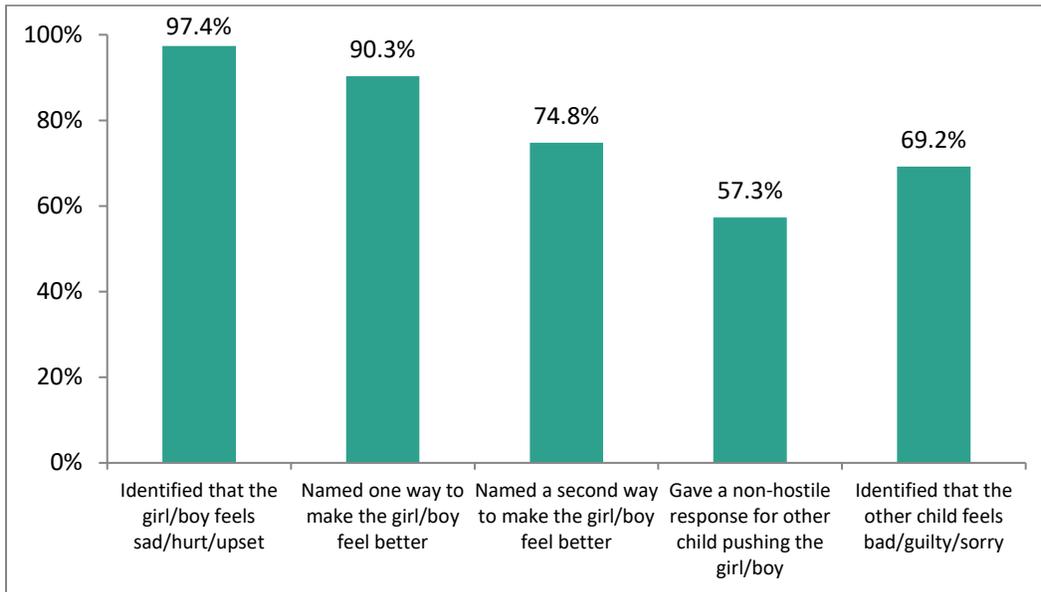
## Empathy

Empathy is awareness and understanding of others’ emotions and expectations. More specifically, it refers to the ability to take the perspective of other individuals, understand their emotional reactions, and coordinate that into socially desirable interactions. This ISELA subtask allows us to understand children’s ability to understand the emotions of others in their community and react appropriately.

To assess empathy, enumerators showed children a picture of a young child crying and asked a series of questions about what the girl or boy was feeling and what they could do to make the child feel better. To help them relate to the child in the picture and ensure gender inclusivity, we showed boys a picture of a boy and girls a picture of a girl. We also gave children a situation in which a child’s intent could be interpreted as either hostile or benign and asked them to interpret the intent. We scored children based on the number of socially and culturally appropriate responses they provided to the five situational questions asked.

On average, children answered 77.8 percent of the empathy questions correctly (Exhibit 13, next page). Scores on each item ranged from 57.3 percent correct to 97.4 percent correct. Most children were able to diagnose the child’s emotions in both pictures and identify ways to make the child feel better. Slightly more than half of the children answered the question, “Why do you think the other child pushed the girl/boy while making a line?” with a non-hostile interpretation.

**Exhibit 13. Correct Answers to Empathy Subtasks**



Two factors showed statistically significant differences: girls showed slightly more empathy than boys, and older children (11 to 12 years old) showed more empathy than younger ones.

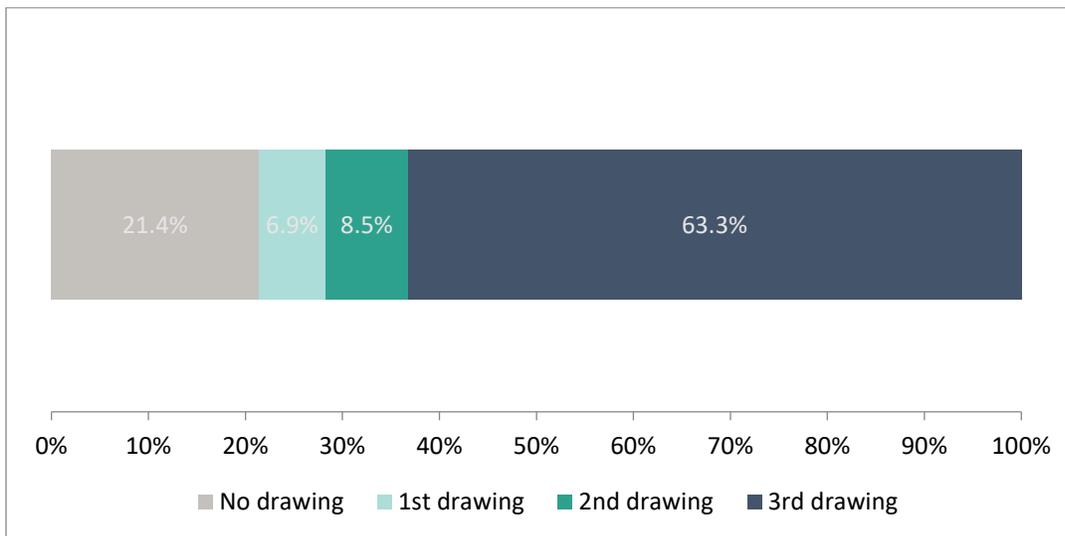
### Perseverance

Perseverance refers to a child’s ability to stay on task despite the task’s difficulty. This ISELA subtask allows us to capture perseverance in children using a difficult drawing activity.

Enumerators asked students to draw a picture with their non-dominant hand, and allotted 60 seconds to complete the drawing. If the child finished the drawing within the 60 seconds or was still drawing at the end of 60 seconds, it was marked “correct.” Students were also given the option to stop at any time.

Children were asked to copy three pictures. Most students (63 percent) attempted all three drawings (Exhibit 14). The average number of drawings attempted was 2.1. One in five students made no attempts.

**Exhibit 14. Number of Attempts on Perseverance Task**



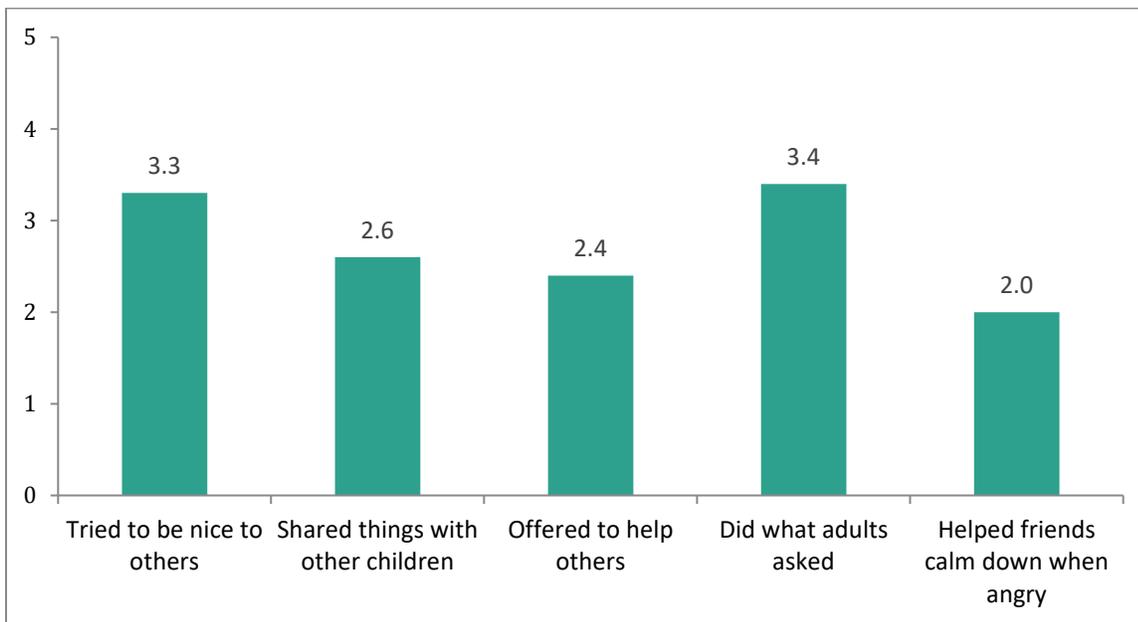
Among the equity factors analyzed, children’s age made a significant difference in their ability to perform this task; older children were likelier to complete all three drawings than younger children. Children 9 to 12 years old completed an average of 2.2 drawings, while children 6 to 8 years old completed an average of 1.6 drawings.

### Pro-Social and Anti-Social Behavior

This subtask examined how often children exhibited pro-social (socially appropriate) or anti-social (conflict) behavior within the past week.

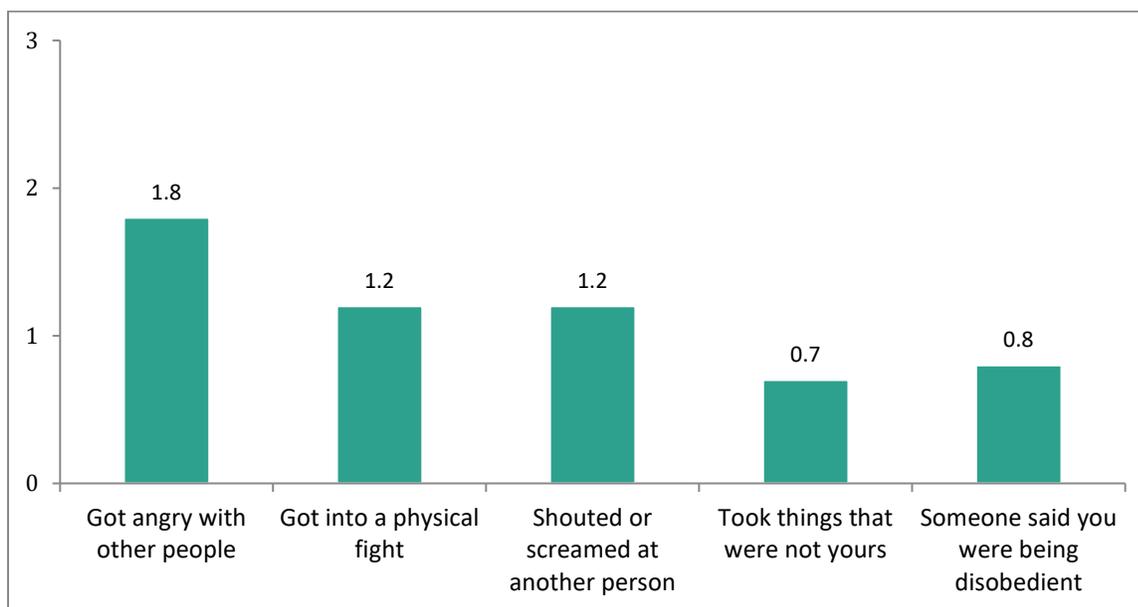
In the pro-social component, children were asked questions about five behaviors to assess whether they interact with peers and community members in a socially appropriate manner. Children demonstrated pro-social behaviors an average of 13.8 times in the last week. The most common behaviors were doing what adults told them to do and trying to be nice to others, which had occurred an average of three times in the last week (Exhibit 15).

**Exhibit 15. Average Number of Pro-Social Behaviors Reported in the Last Week**



The anti-social component considers how well children can control their impulses in conflict situations. For instance, children were asked how often they had gotten angry or gotten into a physical fight in the last week. Children reported an average of 5.8 anti-social behaviors in the last week (Exhibit 16, next page). Considering there were a total of five behaviors, this means each behavior occurred at least once in the past week. The most common behavior, which children reported engaging in an average of 1.8 times in the last week, was getting angry with people. The least common behavior was taking things that did not belong to the child.

**Exhibit 16. Average Number of Anti-Social Behaviors Reported in the Last Week**



Having a higher risk index and having had more residences were linked to showing slightly more pro-social behaviors. Boys showed an average of 1.4 more anti-social behaviors. Younger children and children with a higher risk index were found to report more anti-social behaviors. However, these differences, though statistically significant, were marginal.

### Self-Concept

Self-concept refers to the understanding of and ability to express preferences, feelings, thoughts, and abilities. It also refers to a child's growing capacity for independence and confidence in a range of routine activities. It is especially hard to measure self-concept through self-reported measures with young children, so ISELA uses a drawing activity to understand whether children can imagine a hopeful future for themselves, and whether they can identify realistic supports and barriers to reaching this future self.

About 70 percent of children attempted to draw their future self and were able to describe scenes and details. Some children who did not draw responded verbally to the remaining questions. The average age of the child envisioned in the future was 18 years old. While 88 percent of the children described one thing they would be doing in the future, 47.6 percent identified a possible barrier and over half identified supportive means to attain their future self. Fewer children could identify a second thing they would be doing in the future (55 percent), a barrier (38 percent), and supportive means (52 percent).

The average percentage of self-concept activities that children could perform correctly was 55 percent. Scores correlated to a statistically significant extent with age and the number of homes in which children had lived. Six- and 8-year-olds scored 46.6 percent correct, while 9- and 10-year-olds scored 52.8 percent correct and 11- and 12-year-olds scored 60.6 percent correct. Therefore, self-concept and children's idea of what they want to be in the future increase as children get older. The average increase in scores based on the number of homes in which a child had lived was relatively small, at 2.3 percent.

### SEL Environment

An important factor in a child's social and emotional development is the conduciveness of the environment around the child. An environment that is not safe and supportive will affect the development of SEL competencies. In this subtask, we asked children how often they felt unsafe and how often they experienced physical or verbal violence in their child center or school within the last week.

Thirty-six percent of children reported feeling afraid in their center/school, and 39 percent reported feeling afraid while traveling to their center/school, in the last week. An astonishing 30 percent of children reported feeling unsafe because an adult had hit, kicked, or threatened to hurt a child in their center/school in the last week, and 45 percent reported that an adult had screamed or yelled at a child in the last week (Exhibit 17).

Physical and verbal violence occurs not only between adults and children, but also between children. More than half of the children (67.5 percent) reported that children in their center/school had gotten into a physical fight with other students, and 51 percent of children reported bullying in the center/school.

On average, children reported 42.7 percent of the seven negative SEL environment factors in their center/school in the last week. Older children reported a slightly lower frequency of negative experiences (9 to 12 years old) compared to younger children (6 to 8 years old) — a statistically significant difference.

### Exhibit 17. Children Who Felt Unsafe or Witnessed Violence in the SEL Environment

SEL Item	Percentage
Felt afraid in center/school	35.9%
Felt afraid on way to center/school	38.9%
An adult in your center/school hit or kicked a child	29.6%
An adult in your center/school screamed or yelled at a child	45.8%
An adult in your center/school threatened to hurt a child	30.4%
Children in center/school were bullied by other children	51.0%
Children in your center/school got into a physical fight	67.5%

## Additional Questions

We supplemented ISELA with two additional questions to better understand the local context and children’s current emotional state. The first question was, “What do you consider the most challenging/pressing issue in your community?” The second question was, “Which of the following feelings could apply to how you feel right now: a) feeling loved and appreciated, b) feeling physically safe, c) feeling emotionally safe, d) feeling a sense of hope, or e) feeling insecure?” Enumerators read each question and possible responses to the child.

### Challenging/Pressing Issues

Children reported that the most pressing issues facing their communities involve safety (Exhibit 18). The second most common response was limited access to basic resources, followed by psychosocial issues.

### Exhibit 18. Most Pressing Issue in Children’s Communities

What is the most challenging/pressing issue?	n	Percentage
Safety-related issues (robbery, no safe space, sexual abuse, diseases)	447	90.1%
Limited access to basic resources (including food, water clothes, electricity, money, medicine)	396	79.8%

What is the most challenging/pressing issue?	n	Percentage
Psychosocial issues (leaving family and friends, missing schools and/or exams, fear of further displacement, or separation from family members)	374	75.4%
Other issues (overcrowding in living areas, heat, lack of independence, boredom, no access to internet)	306	61.7%

A higher percentage of girls reported limited access to basic resources (82.3 percent versus 77.5 percent). A higher proportion of younger children reported safety-related issues as the main concern. Older children (9 to 12 years old) tended to report psychosocial issues as the most pressing challenge.

### Current Emotional State

A majority of children reported feeling loved and appreciated, physically safe, and emotionally safe (Exhibit 19). Most — 70 percent — reported feeling a sense of hope. Fewer than 10 percent reported feeling depressed or apathetic.

#### Exhibit 19. Children’s Current Emotional State

How do you feel right now?	n	Percentage
Loved and appreciated	396	79.8%
Physically safe	394	79.4%
Emotionally safe	377	76.0%
A sense of hope	346	69.8%
Unsecure	55	11.1%
Depressed	38	7.7%
Not feeling anything	21	4.2%
Don’t know	11	2.2%
No answer	9	1.8%

There were few differences according to sex and age. Fewer young children (ages 6 to 8) reported feeling a sense of hope, but this may be because the concept is too complex for younger children.

## Conclusions

The ISELA results showed that children had high degrees of empathy (78 percent correct) and perseverance (63 percent of students attempted all three drawings). Children reported higher levels of pro-social behaviors (13.8) than anti-social behaviors (5.8). Children had lower overall levels of self-concept (55 percent) compared to other subtasks, though self-concept was higher in older children.<sup>13</sup> Injaz programming should continue to build on these skills to improve their SEL competencies.

Children identified an average of 1.76 coping strategies for dealing with stress. Students have 11.7 members in their social support network and access more than half of them when they need help managing emotions or solving a problem. Very few children are socially secluded from their network. Most children are in a positive and supportive emotional state. They reported that the most pressing concern in their community involved dealing with safety-related issues, likely due to conflict or threat of conflict.

Equity analysis did not reveal any major differences in performance based on socio-economic status or risk factor, but we found several differences related to sex, age, and living conditions. Girls and older children (9 to 12 years old) reported slightly higher levels of empathy and pro-social behavior and lower levels of anti-social behavior. Self-concept scores increased progressively with age and, to a lesser extent, based on the number of residences in which the child had lived.

It appears that not all child centers and schools are a safe and supportive learning environment. Our most astonishing finding is that 30 percent of children reported verbal and physical abuse in their center/school in the past week (e.g., an adult kicking, hitting, yelling, or screaming at a child) and felt afraid in their center/school; this can impede the natural development of SEL competencies. This is an issue of child protection and child rights that requires an urgent response.

## Recommendations

Considering the hostile SEL environment and feeling of insecurity, Injaz must increase PSS and introduce child protection programming in all child centers, including child protection training, development of a child protection plan, and establishing a reporting mechanism in centers that is anonymous, well-publicized, and easily accessible to children of all ages. Injaz may either identify staff resources to manage and respond to reporting through this new mechanism or engage an established international NGO to launch the child protection plan and reporting mechanism, using existing child protection officers in each center. The program should build upon existing relationships in children's networks and engage the most trusted individuals in the child protection plan and response system, including students' mothers, close friends, and teachers. Once the child protection program is in place, Injaz staff may facilitate sharing of best practices among centers and conduct unannounced visits and assessments to ensure consistent use of safe, gender-sensitive, and child-friendly practices. To address the issue in schools, Injaz staff should share the findings with the local school authorities (local councils) and promote a dialogue around addressing child protection issues.

Second, conflict behavior (e.g., bullying and fighting) among children should be addressed through appropriate SEL programming. Injaz should support CBOs in developing child-friendly SEL centers that provide a safe, nurturing environment free of conflict. They should train center staff in conflict mitigation, positive discipline, and anger/stress management strategies that they can model and teach.

Third, based on the challenges in administering the tool, we recommend continued testing of ISELA with a larger sample of students and with participation from all stakeholders. An instrument adaptation workshop, piloting (including cognitive testing), and enumerator training with guidance from Save the

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<sup>13</sup> Most children were at the upper end of the age range (10 to 12 years old) for which this tool was designed, so we would expect a right-skewed distribution for most of the subtasks. However, self-concept is an abstract domain that may be difficult for younger children to grasp, and this may have contributed to lower scores among younger children.

Children and stakeholder participation can ensure an age-appropriate and context-relevant instrument. Training assessors in standardized use of the tool and conducting inter-rater reliability testing during training and data collection is also very important for reliable administration.

Additionally, since the sample disproportionately represented older students (10 to 12) who performed better on some of the more challenging subtasks, we recommend piloting the tool with more children in the younger age group (6 to 8) — which may include children outside of the Injaz-supported centers — to further adjust the tool to the target age groups. Many children in the younger age group had difficulty executing the drawing exercises, envisioning their future selves, and describing their current emotional state; we therefore recommend further adjustments to these subtasks.

## Next Steps

Injaz project staff plan to review findings with partners and facilitate consultations to determine how best to respond to the issues and recommendations raised in this report. Injaz will also present findings to donors and implementing partners (many based in Amman, Jordan) operating in northeast Syria. Addressing the child protection, conflict mitigation, and SEL issues will require a coordinated response.