



Integrated child protection, WASH and cash-for-work to address child labour among adolescents in Syria

Photo: Global Communities Turkey/Syria

***This case study describes how an integrated protection, WASH and case assistance project aimed to prevent and respond to child labour among adolescents in Syria.***

## Background

In Atmeh Camp, northern Syria, an innovative programme approach was developed to support extremely vulnerable adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 years who were in or at risk of the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) including hazardous child labour and recruitment into armed groups and armed forces. The prevention of child labour as well as removal of adolescents from the WFCL was challenging due to a lack of alternative sources of income for many young people. After recognising this programming gap for older adolescents, a creative solution was developed by Global Communities Child Protection and WASH programmes to link older adolescents with economic opportunities within the ongoing humanitarian WASH programme.

## Integrated protection, WASH and cash assistance for older adolescents

When the child protection team identified older adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 years old in or at risk of WFCL, they linked them with the WASH programme that offered cash-for-work opportunities for adolescents of working age. During a first pilot, a total of 40 older adolescents were trained to work as hygiene promoters to support hygiene campaigns through awareness-raising activities and household visits. Each adolescent was paired with a WASH staff member who served as their mentor and trainer.

Key components of the programme included the following:

- Child protection case workers identified older adolescents based on specific vulnerability criteria. The project prioritised high-risk adolescents, such as girls at risk of early marriage or boys at risk of or formerly recruited into armed groups, and adolescents involved in hazardous work. However, the project also included adolescents at risk of child labour, for example, adolescents who were out of school and adolescents with physical impairments
- Whenever adolescents or their family members were still believed to be associated with armed groups or armed forces, they were not selected for the programme; instead, case workers referred them to more specialised agencies that could support the demobilisation process.
- For each adolescent, an initial needs assessment was conducted to assess whether the cash for work programme would positively affect the identified protection concerns before referring them to the WASH employment programme.
- The child protection team provided additional support to adolescents to enrol and stay in school and referrals to other services as needed.
- The adolescents were hired to work for half days so that they could also attend school or other training possibilities. They were provided with a stipend equal to US\$100 a month.
- Adolescents were trained on safe work and child rights.
- The participating adolescents were also enrolled in community-level psychosocial support activities, literacy classes and vocational skill training courses.
- Child protection case workers identified and tracked at-risk siblings of the participating adolescents and offered support to the whole family, including provision of parenting support sessions for parents and caregivers.

Key considerations regarding staff training and actions included the following:

- Technical support was jointly provided by WASH and child protection staff who were experienced in working with children formerly in child labour.
- All staff and mentors were trained in the safeguarding policy, child protection principles and child labour. It was important that all staff were well informed about the issues facing adolescents who had been formerly recruited into armed groups and what support they would need in the current job.
- Parents and caregivers were informed about the programme and encouraged to urge their children to attend the programme activities. They were encouraged to notify project staff of any problems in the family during the course of the programme.
- Child protection staff made regular “on the job” visits to the WASH programme to monitor progress and address any challenges.

To ensure safeguarding of adolescents formerly associated with armed groups and armed forces, the following measures were taken:

- The project and staff did not share personal information about the participants, including risks of (re-) recruitment into armed groups;
- The WASH teams were carefully provided with information about the participating adolescents and their needs and vulnerabilities, without disclosing any personal or sensitive information.

## Successes

- The project evaluation, which included a baseline and end evaluation using interviews and focus group discussions, showed there was high satisfaction from all project participants as well as significant positive impact on their psychosocial wellbeing, and an immediate mitigation of the identified protection risks. For example:

- Adolescents reported that they felt a sense of hope and enjoyed earning an income at the end of the project. Many reported that they would go back to school or look for other types of work in the near future.
- The adolescents reported increased peer support and confidence as well as professional skills in data collection, awareness-raising and communication, knowledge related to WASH and financial literacy.
- Many adolescent girls reported that the job opportunity helped them to postpone their marriage plans.
- The stipend of US\$100 a month was sufficient to withdraw the adolescents from hazardous work and prevent them from joining armed forces.
- The youth centre has seen a significant uptake and increase in youth participation where young people continue to attend different sessions. Many of the most vulnerable youth are still coming to the youth spaces, which may indicate a linked effect or knock-on benefit, but this has not been proven.
- Children reported that they wanted additional skills learning in the programme, such as photography and financial literacy.
- Since the initial pilot, a total of three rounds of 40 adolescents have completed the WASH cash-for-work and mentorship programme.

## Challenges

- While the project successfully prevented adolescents from falling back into child labour and recruitment into armed forces, the programme was less effective at reintegrating all adolescents back into school. This was largely due to significant educational gaps among the 15- and 16-year-old adolescents and the lack of tailored learning programmes.
- Despite the fact that the cash-for-work only took half the day, some of the work shifts initially interfered with school. Adjustments in timing were needed to accommodate for school shifts in the afternoon; as a result, work activities had to take place early in the morning.
- While monitoring the programme it was challenging to track who was using and spending the income. In some families, adolescents gave their parents their earned money, which was spent in a way that did not benefit the adolescent. In these instances, the child protection team tried to encourage parents and adolescents to use the earned money for education.
- A general challenge was to scale up the programme due to a lack of donor opportunities and funding.

## Lessons learned

- A cash-for-work programme coupled with a strong child protection component can be effective in meeting adolescents' and families' immediate economic needs and mitigating child protection and child labour risks. However, it must be stressed that cash-for-work programmes are a short-term intervention, and unless long-term educational and livelihoods support is provided, the needs of youth remain unaddressed.
- It is key to put in place safeguarding measures when working with high-risk children and adolescents to avoid stigma and to ensure the safety of all.

## Resources

- **[Annex 1. Observation checklist](#)**
- **[Annex 2. Baseline and Endline questionnaire](#)**
- **[Annex 3. Focus Group Discussion](#)**

More information and resources are available at: <https://alliancecpha.org> and <https://alliancecpha.org/en/child-protection-hub/child-labour-task-force>