



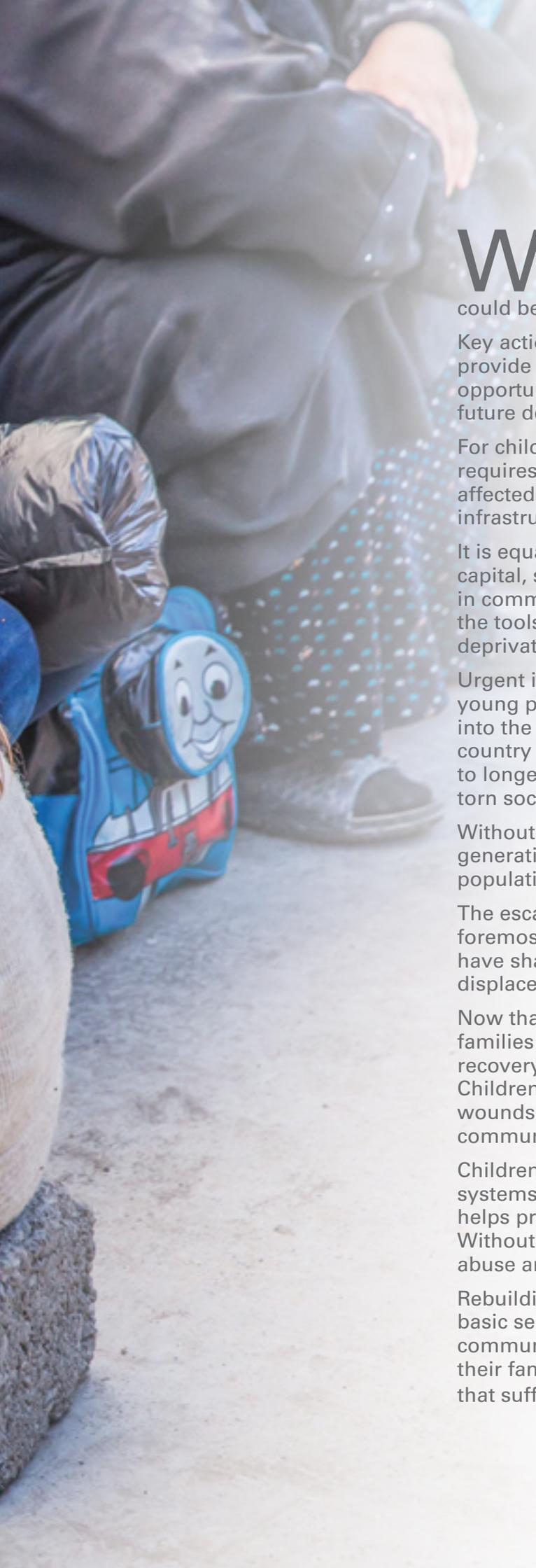
COMMITTING
TO **CHANGE**

SECURING
THE **FUTURE**

Kuwait Reconstruction Conference for Iraq
Kuwait City | 12-14 February 2018



Farah and her sister outside al Khansaa hospital in east Mosul.



Without sufficient investment in the children of Iraq, the hard-won gains of the last year to end the conflict and transition to a stable future could be undermined.

Key actions and investments are required now to provide education, protection and positive engagement opportunities for the children and young people. Iraq's future depends on them.

For children to thrive, a successful transition requires restoring essential basic services in conflict-affected cities and towns, and rebuilding shattered infrastructure.

It is equally critical to build up Iraq's human capital, strengthen social cohesion, rebuild trust in communities and give Iraqi children and youth the tools and the confidence to break the cycle of deprivation they are in.

Urgent investment in opportunities for children and young people to learn, develop skills and transition into the young adults who will build the future of the country will meet immediate needs now and contribute to longer term stability, prosperity and restitching the torn social fabric.

Without this focus, Iraq risks losing an entire generation of children. They make up half of its population and all of its hope for the future.

The escalation of conflict in Iraq has been first and foremost a children's crisis. The conditions of children have sharply declined amid spirals of violence, displacement and poverty.

Now that violence is subsiding and children and their families are returning home. Iraq is moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development. Children must be given the pathways to heal the wounds of the past and engage positively in their communities.

Children and youth will need strong social protection systems to meet their needs and a foundation that helps propel them into fulfilling studies, jobs, and lives. Without this, they risk living in poverty, vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Rebuilding infrastructure and access to quality basic services and ongoing support for families and communities are essential. Only then will children and their families have hope for a better future in a country that suffered for way too long.

Reconstruction

- ▶ The recent conflict has left the homes of thousands of children in ruins, worsening an already critical housing shortage.
- ▶ In Mosul alone, there are some **8,500** damaged houses, affecting up to **25,000** children and adolescents.
- ▶ Conflict-related tensions are resulting in forced evictions, preventing children and their families from returning to their homes.

Rebuilding Iraq's critical infrastructure will restore the physical foundations of the country.

Utility networks and services are needed for water and electricity coverage and improved sanitation in all affected urban and rural areas. In many areas, there was damage to infrastructure that was already suffering from decades of underinvestment and poor maintenance. In other areas, planned or ongoing infrastructure investments were suspended due to conflict. Open spaces have been lost, affecting the quality of life of residents, particularly children and adolescents who lack safe spaces for recreation and playing. Many areas lack sufficient and appropriate education facilities.

In the housing sector, the damage inflicted during the conflict worsened an already critical housing deficit of an estimated 2 million housing units¹, with 50 per cent of this deficit in Baghdad and Ninewa.

As families return, many are finding their homes in need of major repairs, exacerbating pre-conflict housing shortages. In Ramadi for example, damage assessments conducted by UN-Habitat indicate that some 1,500 houses have been completely destroyed, and over 6,700 have suffered either severe or major damage.

This is forcing returning families to either rent while they rebuild their homes – putting the family under additional economic strain – or leave most of their family members including children in camps for the displaced or unfinished buildings. Many of the poorest families have to live in the ruins of their homes, in potentially hazardous conditions, putting children and the elderly at health risk. This is pushing families to take their children out of school and put them to work.

Children who survived the violence that swept over Iraq are experiencing deep psychological distress. They are now at risk of discrimination. In some cases, families are being denied the right to return home, leading to further instability for their children. According to assessments in conflict-affected areas, evictions account for 37 per cent of the housing, land and property rights incidents, while from July 2016-July 2017 forced relocation occurred in 11 per cent of cases.²

Recommendations

- Invest in restoring utility networks and services for water and electricity coverage and improved sanitation in all affected urban and rural areas.
- Rebuild homes and buildings so that children and families do not have to live in hazardous conditions.
- Invest in the construction and reconstruction of education facilities.
- Help families secure their Housing Land and Property rights so that families can have the right to return to their homes.

¹ UN Habitat

² UN Habitat



Destroyed buildings on the riverbank of Tigris river in west Mosul.

Poverty

- ▶ **One in four** children in Iraq lives in poverty³
- ▶ **30 per cent** of Iraqi children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition. More than one-third of Iraqi children lack sufficient income, access to education, health and sanitation services.
- ▶ Investment in basic services and overall job creation for Iraq's ever-expanding young population will be pivotal.

The needs of children must be front and centre to rebuild Iraq. Bricks are not enough for children to grow and thrive.

The World Bank estimates that poverty rates in Iraq increased significantly from 19 per cent in 2012 to 23 per cent in 2014. Poverty rates in conflict-affected governorates or those with large displacement are estimated to be 38 per cent and 41 per cent respectively.

Estimates show that in 2012, some 3.7⁴ million children in Iraq (representing 23 per cent of all children) already lived in poverty. Nearly 40 per cent of those children did not have enough income, and were also lacking access to education, health, water and sanitation services.

Poverty has irreversible effects on children. It makes it harder for families to contribute to the cost of education and health for children. Across Iraq, poor children show lower enrolment rates than the national average. Poverty risks driving children into work, including recruitment into the fighting.

Percentages of children by deprivation⁵

	0-4 years	5-14 years	15-17 years
Nutrition 	29.9	12.4	10.7
Health 	12.3	11.4	10.5
Water 	15.3	16.2	14.1
Sanitation 	5.8	5.2	4.7
Housing 	13.8	14.1	11.8
Information 	-	9.4	15.0
Education 	-	6.6	31.6
Protection 	-	15.6	-

Child poverty is directly linked to investment. With the drop in oil prices in 2014, overall Government expenditure has also fallen. Iraq's GDP and per capita income dropped by 27 per cent (between 2014 to 2016)

The oil industry represents approximately 75 per cent of GDP and provides 95 per cent of total government revenues in Iraq (2012). The continued slide in oil prices in 2015/16 and decline of the economy contributed to further tensions and under-investments in key services.

³ In 2012

⁴ Child poverty is measured by the deprivation of rights to health, education, water and sanitation, basic living standards and protection from neglect and abuse.

⁵ UNICEF estimates on 2012 IHSES data.

The conflict and the displacement of over 3.3 million people as of July 2017 – half of whom are children – and over 2 million returnees, exacerbated the situation further. In addition, Iraq is hosting over 250,000 refugees from Syria.

The double shock of falling revenue and conflict has diverted resources away from productive investment, and increased poverty and vulnerability among the displaced. With losses of livelihood and unemployment, affected displaced families are increasingly unable to meet their children's basic needs, depleting household assets and leading to adverse health, education, and well-being for children.

Recommendations

- Rebuild Iraq's social protection systems to respond to the needs of vulnerable and poor children to fulfil their basic rights to education and health. This includes efforts to make social safety-net programmes child-sensitive.
- Addressing child multidimensional poverty must be central to any development planning for Iraq, to relieve children's deprivations including lack of education, access to basic health services and water and sanitation.

Children selling biscuits in the streets of western Mosul.

Education

- ▶ Once a model of learning, Iraq is struggling to rebuild its education system.
- ▶ There is a shortage of schools, teachers, and learning materials.
- ▶ It is urgent to invest in teachers and schools, and increase access to quality education for all children.
- ▶ More than 3 million children in Iraq do not attend school on a regular basis.

Once seen as a model in the region, today Iraq is struggling today to rebuild its education system. Years of conflict have had a ruinous effect on the sector which now suffers from structural challenges, with almost half the nation's schools in need of repairs.

As per its constitution, free and compulsory primary education are at the heart of Iraq's development as a fundamental factor for the progress of the society. But repeated cycles of conflict have created deep challenges and gaps in access and quality of education. Internal displacement continues to disrupt schooling for millions of children, causing many to drop out.

More than 3 million Iraqi children do not attend school or attend irregularly. More than 700,000 displaced children have missed an entire year of schooling. In conflict affected governorates such as Salah al-Din and Diyala, more than 90 per cent of school-age children are left out of the education system⁶.

The number of out of school children has increased because of internal displacement and the influx of refugees from Syria. There are not enough schools or teachers. Children affected by conflict have also missed out on years of schooling. The impact of violence means that these children and their teachers need more than just education – they need life skills and psychosocial support.

Despite efforts by the Government and partners to provide continuity of learning, major gaps remain. Shortages of teachers, teaching skills and learning materials, and a curriculum lacking life skills education, mean that children are not learning or are leaving school without the necessary skills.

Recommendations

- Up front, multi-year investment in national education, quality standards and the capacity of education staff and the social workforce.
- Providing immediate, quality education opportunities, including through accredited and certified non-formal education with pathways to formal education.
- Innovative approaches to structured, accredited and certified learning that can engage all children, particularly those in non-formal education or out of school, when traditional education service delivery cannot reach parts of the population.
- Support from the private sector and international donors to provide tailored technical and vocational training opportunities to prepare adolescents and youth for their working lives.

⁶ UNICEF 2017. The cost and benefits of education in Iraq: An analysis of the education sector and strategies to maximize the benefits of education. Iraq Country Office.



School children inside a UNICEF school tent in Alhabanya Camp

Children, Adolescents and Youth

- ▶ Almost **70 per cent** of Iraq's population is under the age of 30.
- ▶ Adolescents and youth need opportunities.

According to The World Bank, the population of Iraq is 37 million people. Nearly 70 per cent is under the age of 30. Sixty per cent of the population is under the age of 25, compared to 54 percent in neighbouring countries and 48 percent in developing countries generally.

Conflict and violence have diminished trust among communities. When communities lack trust and social cohesion, there is often increased tension, crimes, targeting of minorities, sexual violence, trafficking, child marriage, human rights violations, and ultimately conflict.

Without proper investment and increased opportunities, weaknesses in the social and economic fabric may worsen, making young people an easy target for exploitation, abuse, trafficking, radicalization, and recruitment into the fighting. These increase the likelihood that violence will continue to be used.

Adolescents and youth are however untapped resources waiting to be activated. They can play a critical role in fostering trust, building tolerance, bridging differences and strengthening social cohesion.

- ▶ Children who lived in conflict areas have been through immense stress and violence.
- ▶ **90 per cent** of children in Mosul are still under the trauma of death of those close to them.
- ▶ Current psychosocial and mental health services cannot keep up with the needs
- ▶ Without investment in children, Iraq risks slipping back into a cycle of grievance and violence.

Exposure to violence is detrimental to children's psychosocial well-being. Children who lived in Mosul have been through immense stress and violence. 80 per cent of adolescents from Mosul who were interviewed said they feel shocked and afraid of attacks. Some children have nightmares that are so vivid that they haunt them during the day.⁷ Death of family members, friends or other relatives leave a long-term scar on children's minds. 90% of them are still living with the effects of emotional trauma.

Essential aspects of childhood like school and play have been denied to children living in Mosul for so long. Many have become desensitized to violence and have difficulties behaving as children again. The exposure to extreme violence and deprivation can cause children to suffer from "toxic stress" – the most dangerous form of stress response – which can have severe consequences for their long-term physical and mental health if they do not receive adequate support.

Available psychosocial and mental health services are not able to meet the increased needs. In 2014, the mental health workforce had one psychiatrist available per 250,000 people, one psychologist per 1 million people and 1 social worker per 500,000 people⁸.

Many of the women, boys and girls from religious minorities who escaped abduction, recruitment and violence are displaced. They lack adequate access to medical, mental health and psychosocial services. There is a significant need to provide rehabilitation and reintegration support to these children.

A country-wide assessment, has shown that one of the strongest drivers for children to join the fighting are financial motivations⁹, defending or liberating the country or religion.

7 Save the Children (2017) An Unbearable Reality: The impact of war and displacement on children's mental health in Iraq. Available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12182/pdf/iraq_an_unbearable_reality_june_2017_1.pdf

8 WHO (2014) Mental Health Atlas Country Profile

9 UNICEF/Transition International, February 2017

Those drivers, combined with a lack of opportunities for young people, can push young people to more extreme ideologies. In Iraq today, there continues to be a high risk of child recruitment. One third of boys consulted who were not associated with the fighting before are now considering joining.

There is a need for rehabilitation, reintegration and socio-economic support for children who have played an active role in the fighting, including those in detention or released from detention.

Without significant investments in helping these children to engage with their communities and families and bridge social and cultural gaps, adolescents and youth in Iraq risk slipping back into a cycle of marginalization, deprivation, grievance and violence which could threaten the stability of the region.

- ▶ Children need services and life skills to create the trust and understanding needed for lasting peace.

The conflict in Iraq has had a drastic impact on the lives of the children. Many children have experienced direct or indirect violence. Today's children face multifaceted threats and a hostile environment for growth, learning and access to economic resources. There are high numbers of separated and unaccompanied children.

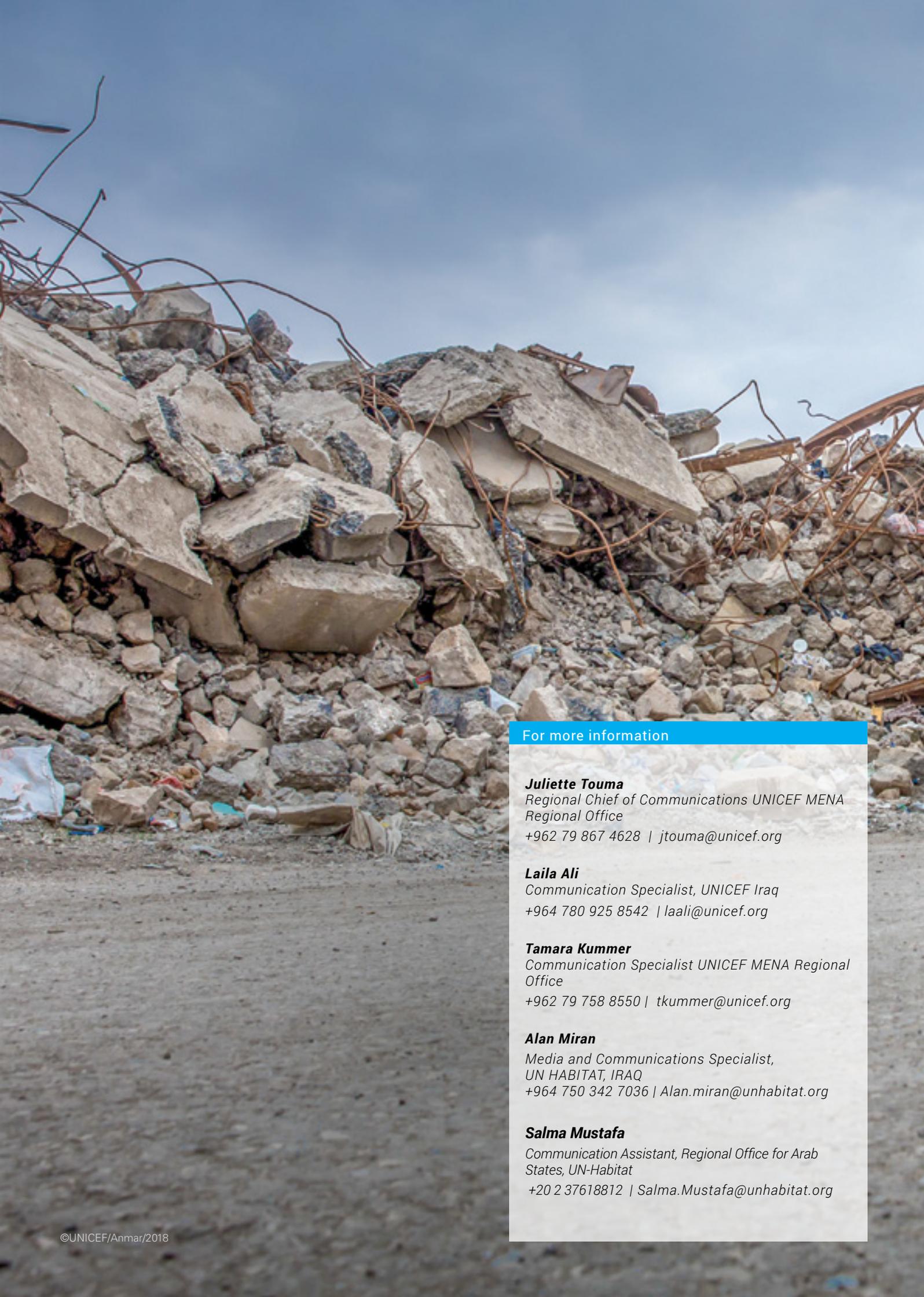
Going forward, greatest challenges include psychological, physical and gender-based violence and the risk of child marriage, child labour, and children recruitment.

Recommendations

- Up front, multi-year investments in the national child protection systems, including building the capacity of the social workforce at national and community levels.
- Significant investment is needed in psychosocial and specialized mental health services
- Birth registration and other civil documentation is essential as it serves a foundation for a child's rights to family unity and reunification.
- Adolescents and youth must be able to access opportunities to engage in social, civic and economic activities to realise their potential and offset the risks, frustration and lack of hope that they otherwise face.
- Provide the most vulnerable youth and families with access to decent, legal livelihoods opportunities and adequate social protection.
- Mechanisms to enable adolescents and youth to contribute to decision-making about the future of their country.



School children in Mosul in their winter uniforms provided by UNICEF. Many of the children in Mosul have missed on nearly three years of education.



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