



# PROTECTION ANALYSIS ON CONFLICT-RELATED RISKS

Syria | Aleppo

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent armed clashes in Aleppo have led to a rapid deterioration of the protection environment, characterized by fighting within densely populated neighborhoods, large-scale forced displacement, and the breakdown of civilian protection mechanisms. The escalation has coincided with the expansion of security checkpoints, the closure of key transport routes, and the increased reliance on collective shelters that fail to meet minimum protection standards.

While all civilians in Aleppo—particularly Kurdish communities—have been affected, the impact on LGBTQIA+ individuals has been consistently and disproportionately severe. This is driven by the intersection of armed violence, forced displacement, social stigma, and the absence of legal, institutional, and effective governmental and non-governmental protection. The erosion of coping capacities, coupled with sectarian and racist practices by the transitional authorities, and heightened exposure during displacement, sheltering, and movement restrictions, has significantly increased life-threatening protection risks.

Analysis conducted during this period indicates that multiple protection risks have reached critical and high-severity levels, with a strong likelihood of further deterioration should hostilities recur intermittently, displacement become protracted, or transitional authorities remain unaccountable. In particular, risks related to physical violence, sexual and gender-based violence, forced disclosure of identity, restrictions on freedom of movement, racial discrimination, extremist incitement, and the demographic and ethnic marginalization of Syrian communities require urgent attention.

Without immediate, targeted, and SOGIESC-sensitive interventions—and without addressing discrimination and hate incitement against Kurds, Alawites, and Druze—affected individuals, especially LGBTQIA+ persons, gender non-conforming individuals, women, and persons with disabilities, face a high likelihood of severe harm, including potentially fatal outcomes.



## PROTECTION RISKS

Requiring urgent attention during the current analysis period include:

- Attacks against civilians and unlawful killings resulting from armed clashes in residential areas.
- Ill-treatment and abuse at security checkpoints, particularly targeting gender non-conforming individuals.
- Sexual and gender-based violence against lesbian women and transgender persons, exacerbated by the lack of safe shelter options.
- Forced disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity in overcrowded collective shelters.
- Exclusion from humanitarian assistance and essential services due to discrimination.
- Severe psychological distress resulting from cumulative trauma and repeated displacement.
- Serious restrictions on freedom of movement caused by road closures, security checkpoints, and disruption of transportation.
- Destruction and vandalism of civilians' private property.
- Deliberate marginalization and demographic siege of Kurdish communities in Syria.

- Structural and systemic ethnic discrimination.
- Racism and the proliferation of hate speech.
- Justification of killings and the normalization of criminal practices carried out with impunity.
- The entrenchment of structural social problems that will inevitably affect all Syrian communities in the near future.
- Torture and ill-treatment of detainees in field-based or state-affiliated detention facilities.
- Rising rates of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances.



## URGENT ACTIONS REQUIRED

The current situation requires immediate action to prevent further deterioration of protection outcomes and the adoption of harmful coping mechanisms. Key priorities include:

- Ensuring safe movement and access to emergency transportation options for individuals facing imminent threats.
- Expanding safe shelter alternatives outside collective accommodation for LGBTQIA+ individuals at heightened risk.
- Scaling up protection-outcome-linked cash assistance, including support for transportation and temporary housing.
- Strengthening confidential referral pathways for protection case management, responses to sexual and gender-based violence, and mental health and psychosocial support services.
- Improving coordination among protection actors to ensure SOGIESC-sensitive, survivor-centered responses that do not expose individuals to further harm.
- Condemning the practices of the transitional authorities against Kurdish, Alawite, and Druze communities, and pursuing transparent international accountability mechanisms.



# CONTEXT

Since the fall of the Assad regime and the assumption of power by the transitional government, a series of structural violations have been documented affecting multiple Syrian communities. These practices have been marked by a clear absence of accountability and a highly sectarian and extremist character, reflected in the conduct of authorities and affiliated actors in Suwayda, the coastal regions, and Aleppo, as well as in violations committed against unarmed civilians in the governorates of Homs and Hama.

The most recent escalation of armed confrontations in Aleppo has resulted in a rapid deterioration of the protection environment. Fighting has erupted within densely populated neighborhoods, alongside the expansion of security checkpoints, intermittent closures of main roads, disruption of essential services, and the issuance of evacuation orders by the Syrian transitional government for residents living in areas surrounding active hostilities. These developments have significantly increased civilian exposure to violence, imposed severe restrictions on freedom of movement, further eroded already fragile coping capacities, and intensified extremist practices by the governing authorities.

The dynamics of the conflict are not limited to direct hostilities alone; they are also characterized by the increasing militarization of civilian space. Security measures have increasingly relied on profiling based on gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as broad discretionary enforcement practices. For members of the LGBTQIA+ community, this context translates into a highly complex risk environment in which armed violence intersects with structural discrimination, social stigma, and a criminalizing legal framework—producing acute and systematic protection threats that ultimately affect Syrian communities as a whole.



# HARM TO CIVILIANS

## Gender-Based Violence, and Disproportionate Impact

Civilian casualties and injuries have been reported as a direct result of hostilities within residential areas, with women, children, and marginalized groups exposed to disproportionately high levels of risk. In addition to conflict-related violence, a marked increase in gender-based violence and other forms of abuse has been observed, linked to forced displacement, overcrowding, and the erosion of social protection mechanisms.

Women, lesbian women, transgender persons, and individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) face heightened risks of sexual violence, harassment, and exploitation, particularly in environments characterized by limited privacy and pronounced power imbalances. For members of the LGBTQIA+ community, violence is not merely opportunistic; it is also driven by hostility rooted in moral and social constructions of “deviance,” thereby intensifying the severity of abuse and reinforcing patterns of impunity.

The cumulative effects of repeated exposure to violence, fear of identity disclosure, and the absence of safe and confidential reporting mechanisms have resulted in significantly reduced reporting rates. This not only obscures the true scale of harm but also exacerbates psychological distress among affected individuals.

01

## **Displacement, Shelter, and Access to Services**

The recent escalation has triggered waves of forced displacement, often occurring abruptly and without prior planning. Large numbers of displaced households have sought refuge in overcrowded collective shelters that fail to meet minimum protection standards. These shelters lack gender-sensitive arrangements, private spaces, and effective measures to prevent harassment and surveillance.

For LGBTQIA+ individuals, collective shelters frequently constitute environments of heightened risk rather than safety. The risk of forced disclosure of sexual orientation or gender identity, combined with social hostility from other displaced persons, increases the likelihood of avoiding shelters altogether or leaving them prematurely. This, in turn, heightens exposure to homelessness, exploitation, and violence.

Access to humanitarian services remains uneven. Discrimination, lack of civil documentation, and fear of exposure prevent LGBTQIA+ individuals—particularly persons with disabilities—from accessing registration, assistance, and referral pathways. These barriers deepen reliance on informal and unsafe coping mechanisms.

02

## **Freedom of Movement and Livelihood Disruption**

Movement restrictions imposed through security checkpoints, road closures, and disruptions to transportation have severely limited civilians' ability to seek safety, access livelihoods, or obtain essential services. For individuals with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), movement carries additional risks due to appearance-based profiling and identity checks, rendering travel itself a potential trigger for detention or abuse.

Furthermore, movement to other areas—including Afrin and surrounding towns—remains heavily restricted due to constraints imposed by de facto authorities controlling those areas.

Livelihood opportunities have also been significantly affected by instability, repeated displacement, and rising living costs. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community, who are often already economically marginalized, face disproportionate exclusion from income-generating activities. As Aleppo continues to experience a protracted humanitarian crisis after fourteen years of armed conflict—marked by extensive infrastructure destruction and compounded by the impacts of the earthquake—economic vulnerability continues to deepen, increasing exposure to exploitation, extortion, and reliance on harmful coping strategies that place individuals at greater risk.

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# PROTECTION RISKS

## **RISK 1: ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS AND UNLAWFUL KILLINGS**

Armed clashes within the city of Aleppo have exposed civilians to both direct and indirect attacks, including unlawful killings and serious injuries resulting from shelling, gunfire, and fighting in residential areas—particularly in Sheikh Maqsoud, Ashrafieh, Bani Zaid, and Lairamoun, with spillover effects in nearby areas such as Al-Sryan and Al-Midan.

The collapse of essential services and the issuance of forced evacuation orders have further elevated risk levels, especially during harsh winter conditions or when residents refuse to comply with evacuation directives, increasing exposure to harm while remaining in or moving through affected areas. Marginalized groups—particularly LGBTQIA+ individuals—face compounded risks due to limited access to safe shelter, restricted mobility, and the absence of effective protection and accountability mechanisms.

## **RISK 2: SIEGE-LIKE CONDITIONS AND UNLAWFUL RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT**

Restrictions imposed through security checkpoints, road closures, and disruptions to transportation have severely constrained freedom of movement, limiting access to safety, healthcare, humanitarian assistance, and livelihoods. Gender non-conforming and transgender individuals face heightened risks due to appearance-based profiling, identity checks, and discretionary security practices, forcing many to drastically restrict their movement. This results in increased isolation, inability to access essential services, and growing reliance on unsafe coping mechanisms.

### **RISK 3: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The escalation of the conflict has contributed to increased levels of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, harassment, and intimate partner violence, driven by forced displacement, overcrowding, economic stress, and the erosion of social and legal safeguards. Survivors face significant barriers to reporting and accessing services due to social stigma, fear of retaliation, and the lack of safe and confidential referral pathways.

### **RISK 4: FORCED DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY**

Overcrowded collective shelters, security checkpoints, and informal living arrangements create environments characterized by severe violations of privacy. Surveillance, interrogation, and peer monitoring contribute to forced disclosure of identity, exposing LGBTQIA+ individuals to harassment, violence, eviction, and social exclusion.

### **RISK 5: ACUTE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND DETERIORATION OF MENTAL HEALTH**

Prolonged exposure to violence, repeated displacement, fear of identity disclosure, and social isolation have led to widespread psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In severe cases, this includes thoughts of self-harm or suicide. These risks are further intensified for LGBTQIA+ individuals due to cumulative trauma and the continuous need to navigate hostile and unsafe environments.



# RESPONSE

## PROGRESS IN PROTECTION

In response to the escalation of armed clashes in Aleppo, the Protection Department at SEEN initiated limited protection responses despite severe operational constraints and resource shortages. Current interventions have focused on remote case management, the provision of mental health and psychosocial support, hotline-based counseling, and the activation of available referral mechanisms.

However, protection and humanitarian needs far exceed the scope of existing responses. LGBTQIA+ communities continue to face critical gaps in access to protection services due to social stigma, fear of identity disclosure, and the absence of SOGIESC-sensitive programming.

SEEN's Protection Department conducted a rapid risk assessment, with preliminary findings indicating the following:

- The organization currently lacks emergency financial resources to provide direct cash assistance, mobility support, or safe shelter alternatives, beyond limited interventions such as remote social accompaniment, hotline services, case management, and documentation of human rights violations.
- Given the severity of the current risks, any further delay in response is likely to result in irreversible harm, including loss of life or forced exposure to multiple forms of violence.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

During the period covered by this analysis and the preceding phases, the situation requires urgent and coordinated action to prevent the escalation of protection risks and to mitigate the life-threatening impacts of conflict and displacement in Aleppo. Protection risks disproportionately affect LGBTQIA+ individuals and other marginalized groups, necessitating targeted, comprehensive, and immediately actionable measures.

## **Risk 1: Attacks on Civilians and Unlawful Killings**

### **Government and Parties to the Conflict:**

- Take immediate steps to reduce civilian harm through strict compliance with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction and proportionality, and ensure accountability for violations.

### **Humanitarian and Civilian Protection Actors:**

- Prioritize emergency protection monitoring, documentation of violations, and early warning mechanisms, with particular attention to the risks faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals who may be unable to access safe shelter or flee hostilities safely.

## **Risk 2: Siege-Like Conditions and Unlawful Restrictions on Freedom of Movement**

### **Donors:**

- Provide flexible and rapid funding to support safe mobility interventions, including emergency transportation and protection-outcome-linked cash assistance, particularly for individuals at immediate risk at checkpoints, alongside the provision of essential items and winterization support.

### **Humanitarian Community:**

- Advocate for facilitated humanitarian access and adapt service delivery models to reduce exposure risks, including the use of remote modalities and confidential referral pathways for gender non-conforming individuals, while condemning the practices of the transitional government.

## **Risk 3: Gender-Based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence**

### **Protection Sector and Partners:**

- Scale up survivor-centered, confidential, and SOGIESC-sensitive gender-based violence response services, including strengthening referral pathways, ensuring access to mental health and psychosocial support, and expanding safe alternatives to collective shelters for lesbian women and transgender persons.

### **Donors:**

- Allocate dedicated funding for GBV services that explicitly include LGBTQIA+ survivors, recognizing their heightened exposure to violence and the barriers they face in accessing mainstream services.

## **Risk 4: Forced Disclosure of Identity**

### **Protection Actors:**

- Integrate privacy, confidentiality, and data protection safeguards across all services. Collective shelters should not be considered safe options for LGBTQIA+ individuals unless minimum protection and privacy standards are met.

### **Coordination Bodies:**

- Issue clear guidance prohibiting practices that lead to profiling, surveillance, or disclosure of personal characteristics during assistance delivery.

## **Risk 5: Acute Psychological Distress and Deterioration of Mental Health**

### **Health and Protection Actors:**

- Expand mental health and psychosocial support services through both remote and in-person modalities, ensuring inclusive, confidential access for LGBTQIA+ individuals experiencing severe psychological distress.

### **Donors:**

- Provide long-term, flexible funding to sustain mental health and psychosocial support services beyond the immediate emergency response, recognizing the cumulative and protracted nature of trauma in this context.



# METHODOLOGY

This analysis was conducted using the Protection Analysis Framework (PAF), applying a qualitative and context-sensitive approach to identify, analyze, and prioritize protection risks arising from the recent escalation in Aleppo. The analysis drew on multiple data sources to ensure accuracy and reliability.



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