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YOUTH WELLBEING IN DISPLACEMENT:
CASE STUDY RESEARCH & NRC GLOBAL FRAMEWORK

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This paper offers a global framework for youth wellbeing in displacement, capturing the multi-dimensional and complex nature of the concept. It presents three case studies that use the framework to explore youth wellbeing in context, which can provide a starting point for individuals and organisations to examine youth wellbeing in their specific context.

Literature points to a global prioritisation of better understanding how to more holistically consider wellbeing. When focusing specifically on youth, it is essential to think about how youthhood is experienced in regard to interpersonal relationships, institutional structures, crisis or conflict context, social practices and norms, political and legal realities, and in regard to a newly conceptualizing sense of self, purpose, and future. Considering these in the specific contexts of displacement today adds another layer of depth and complexity to such examination.

The framework emphasises how multi-dimensional youth wellbeing in displacement is, highlighting eight dimensions critical to understanding the wellbeing of an individual. This understanding must be at the centre of any examination of youthhood. It is also critical to acknowledge and emphasise the capacity of young people to offer complex, reflective, and nuanced insight into their lived experiences and potential futures.

This research is meant as the foundation of future work to contextualise and examine youth wellbeing in displacement. It also informs the development of measurements, tools, and toolkits that can support organisations in better implementing programmes for youth. The engagement of young people in such programmes is, certainly, the most important first step.

YOUTH AND DISPLACEMENT GLOBALLY

BACKGROUND

What does wellbeing mean to a young person in displacement today? This is the fundamental question that this piece of research sought to examine. NRC commissioned this work to create a foundational base of knowledge—informed by academic research, expert perspective, NRC programme documents, humanitarian guidance and tools, and field research in three locations. The goal was to employ a broad approach that could capture wide-ranging perspectives, with particular emphasis on the voice and experiences of displaced youth and their parents.

At the end of 2019, 70.8 million people were currently forcibly displaced globally; nearly half (25.9 million) were under the age of 18.[1] Approximately 403 million youth (aged 15-29) were located in contexts affected by violence or armed conflict.[2] Nearly 3 in 10 young people aged 15-24 that live in conflict- and crisis-affected countries are illiterate (triple the global rate).[3]

Youth, defined as ages 15-24 by the United Nations,[4] is a time of significant cognitive and behavioural development. Young refugees and IDPs are thus enduring the challenges of displacement during times of intense neurobiological, physical, and social transition. Displacement is linked with significant psychological stress, including exposure to violence, repeated loss and trauma, extreme economic stress, and profound insecurity regarding both ongoing shocks and the future.

Defining wellbeing broadly is a specific and separate challenge. The New Economics Foundation Centre for Wellbeing defines it as follows: *"Wellbeing can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole."*[5] Here, this general definition may be used to ground the following discussions but it is important to note what a nuanced and personal concept wellbeing truly is.

Youth wellbeing specifically is a dynamic and complex concept that must be considered in context. Some displaced youth today inhabit contexts of ongoing insecurity and conflict. Others experience stability but coupled with isolation of camps or distance from family or community. Still others live in new homes and social and cultural worlds found in resettlement. In many of these contexts, youth and their families struggle to meet their most basic needs, and youth are forced into adult roles as they take on new responsibilities to support their families. While these young people navigate significant and complicated barriers to their own wellbeing, they simultaneously demonstrate profound resilience, strength, and engagement in a diversity of contexts.

The NRC Global Youth Wellbeing Framework (Section II) reflects this effort to consider youth wellbeing in context. The research consisted of a substantial literature review; expert, NRC global, and NRC field staff interviews; and case studies in three locations. The case studies were comprised of 19 participatory sessions with 155 displaced youth and 60 parents in Jordan, Nigeria, and Syria. Importantly, the perspectives, experiences, and contributions of young people to these sessions informed both the process and products of this effort.

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[1] UNHCR (2019) Figures at a glance. Retrieved from: https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html

[2] UNFPA (2018) The Missing Peace Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. UNFPA Youth Peace and Security. Available: https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf

[3] UNICEF (2019) 3 in 10 young people in conflict or disaster-stricken countries illiterate. UNICEF Press Release, 31 January 2018. Available: https://www.unicef.org/eca/press-releases/3-10-young-people-conflict-or-disaster-stricken-countries-are-illiterate

[4] According to NRC, this definition is used as a general guide but country offices are tasked with contextualising the age bracket in order to be well attuned to the social, political, and economic realities of their particular location.

[5] New Economics Foundation (2010) Measuring Wellbeing: A guide for practitioners. Centre for Wellbeing, New Economics Foundation, p. 6. Available: https://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/7a378df45fafe612cc_a3m6i6g49.pdf

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The field perspectives were considered within two main frameworks from the literature review. First, a **capabilities approach** underlines the capacity of individuals to contribute in meaningful ways to their own development, while acknowledging social, political, and structural constraints.[6] This approach identifies objective aspects of wellbeing as foundational (e.g., unmet basic needs such as lack of adequate shelter, food, water, and hygiene facilities; lack of access to economic and livelihoods opportunity), while simultaneously emphasising the role of individual freedoms (via personal agency, perspective, and engagement) as contributing to overall wellbeing.

Second, a **life course perspective** emphasises that wellbeing is not a static, fixed state (or set of experiences and perspectives) across the life of the individual.[7] The life course perspective captures two critical components of youth wellbeing in displacement:

a) youth as a time of transition from one life phase to another (this includes brain and cognitive development, as well as social, economic, educational and civic changes); and

b) the importance of major life events or experiences, and their impact on displaced persons over time.

Both approaches offered important insights into youth engagement and participation in humanitarian response efforts, including understanding youth wellbeing as a large, multidimensional, and often-changing concept. This research prioritised the integration of these theories with on-the-ground perspectives and current humanitarian approaches to create a framework that can be useful and relevant for NRC actors considering youth wellbeing in displacement. While a comprehensive defining of wellbeing may be impossible, it is still of value to attempt such understanding in order to inform programming more generally.

The products of this research are meant as a starting point, and both this paper and the Wellbeing Framework (Section II) within it should be regarded as such. The purpose is to prompt thinking around the particular meaning and experiences of wellbeing for young people experiencing displacement. Programmes that seek to support youth wellbeing within their approach and activities will need to use tools and guidance to apply the concepts of the framework on the ground. The development of such tools and guidance is a recognised next step for NRC, which will build on this framework and background research.

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6   See: Deneulin, S. and L. Shahani (eds.) (2009) An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach: Freedom and Agency. Earthscan: London; Sen, A. (1998) Development as Freedom. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

7   See: Brynner, J. (2005) Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-course: The Case for Emerging Adulthood? Journal of Youth Studies Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 367-384; OECD (2017), Evidence-based Policy Making for Youth Wellbeing: A Toolkit, OECD Development Policy Tools, OECD Publishing, Paris.

YOUTH WELLBEING IN DISPLACEMENT:
AN NRC GLOBAL FRAMEWORK

The Wellbeing Framework (Figure 1, below) offers a new representation of the most important elements for youth wellbeing in displacement. This representation draws directly on existing approaches and conceptual visuals; data from the literature review on wellbeing, youth, and displacement; and the case studies which emphasised youth voice and input.[8]

The representation differentiates between **context** and the **individual**; this is mainly important in how programmes seek to gather, analyse, and respond to information. A critical first step to understanding youth wellbeing is to examine the context, including environment, safety, and stability of a given location. It is only then that the more specific and individual aspects of youth wellbeing can begin to be understood.

Upon assessing specific, relevant aspects of context, it is then possible to examine aspects of wellbeing that are individually-centred, but still strongly tied to the context: (a) whether or not basic needs are adequately met, and (b) the baseline capacities and norms of young people in that location. Finally, with a strong foundational understanding of the individual in context, one can begin to explore the final category: (c) the eight dimensions of youth wellbeing. Each category in the framework is elaborated on below.

The case studies revealed these categories must be considered in *specific location.* In other words, to capture what youth wellbeing in context means, programmes must consult with youth about the context and environment; basic needs; and baseline capacities and norms (categories 1-3) and the ways these interact with the individual dimensions of wellbeing (category 4) *in that context.*[9] The four categories are not bounded boxes. Rather, they are a conceptual map of important pieces of a puzzle that interact in diverse and changing ways. These pieces are deeply interconnected, and interrogating these connections is a critical step to examining and describing wellbeing in a given context.

Figure 1: NRC youth wellbeing in displacement framework

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8   The focus group discussion activities were intentionally structured as very open-ended and broad, with discussion around definitions, personal meaning, contextual factors, and categories all emerging from the youth themselves. This was done in order to not impose ideas or previous frameworks or categories onto the discussions.

9   It is important to emphasise that "individual" does not mean things that happen in isolation or without social ties. Social engagement, interaction, and relationships are deeply entwined with individual wellbeing. The term is used to denote things that may be specific to the *individual* in order to better examine and validate peoples' unique lived experiences. Both literature and field work repeatedly emphasised the social worlds and engagement that wellbeing is a part of.

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YOUTH WELLBEING
FRAMEWORK NARRATIVE

Key to understanding the framework in context is to examine and understand the ways in which framework categories relate, intersect, and change. Below, each category (and interactions between them) is elaborated upon with examples from the case studies.

CONTEXT: ENVIRONMENT, SAFETY & STABILITY

To understand youth wellbeing in a given location, programmes must understand the context itself. Such contextual understanding or risk/context analysis is a critical first step for humanitarian programming generally and is foundational for considering experiences of youth wellbeing. Young people in displacement are navigating new environments with frequently changing risks and security issues. Often, movement itself is restricted or monitored. Youth spend much time outside of their homes in education, work, or seeking additional ways to support their families.

For displacement settings in acute and ongoing conflict, youth wellbeing is heavily influenced by security, safety, and youths' ability to meet the basic needs of themselves and their families. In protracted camp settings, young people may feel relatively safe from ongoing shocks but insecure regarding their economic futures. How youth describe their wellbeing—including mechanisms to increase or support it—is dependent in many ways on their environment.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN CONTEXT: SYRIA

In Aleppo, focus group discussions with youth and their parents highlighted how the ongoing conflict affects their wellbeing and daily lives. Safety, the parents noted, is the basis of everything else in Aleppo. Youth described social isolation due to the fear of new attacks, and that leaving the house to be with friends would be essential to their wellbeing, but currently both male and female youth rarely felt safe doing so. Participants noted that they had no idea when the conflict might end. This, they explained, makes it difficult or impossible to plan for the future; having goals, plans, or even hopes is challenging for young people at a time when they would otherwise be transitioning to independence and adulthood. Youth in Aleppo described independence, the ability to take responsibility, and personal freedoms as essential to their wellbeing but noted that all of these were impeded by the ongoing conflict.

INDIVIDUAL: BASIC NEEDS

Youth in displacement today are living with many unmet basic needs. This may include inconsistent (or total lack of) access to food, clean water, and adequate, safe housing. It also includes the need for youth and their families to feel financially stable and to have economic and livelihoods opportunities in their current location. When discussing their wellbeing, young people consistently named the unmet basic needs in their context and point to this as being a foundational component of their own wellbeing. In order to consider youth wellbeing in a location, it is first essential to acknowledge and take steps to address these unmet basic needs.

INDIVIDUAL: BASELINE CAPACITIES AND NORMS

Baseline capacities and norms refers to cognitive abilities, educational context and norms, educational attainment, and gender and cultural norms. These capacities and norms may lead to difference in experiences of wellbeing for young people in displacement in comparison with their peers within the same location and other locations of displacement, as well as their non-displaced peers. Importantly, these capacities will influence the ways that youth are able and willing to discuss their wellbeing.[10] Programmes must examine how these capacities contribute to youth wellbeing and how such wellbeing may be examined, understood, and supported.

There are complex interactions between cognitive abilities, cultural and social norms (including around gender), and specific crisis and displacement experiences such as trauma exposure. For youth, these interactions are occurring during the critical developmental phase of late adolescence and young adulthood. Additionally, there is documented correlation between PTSD and cognitive impairment, memory loss, decreased problem solving, poor attentiveness, and negative emotional regulation.[11] Youths' abilities to develop and use problem-solving, critical, and higher-order thinking skills may be affected by trauma. These skills may also be differently developed due to explicit teaching and learning of these skills (prior to displacement) and cultural norms around these skills (both prior to and during displacement). Thus, educational experiences in their place of origin is also relevant to baseline capacities and norms.

BASIC NEEDS IN CONTEXT: NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

In Maiduguri, focus group discussions with youth were consistently framed around their unmet basic needs. Across four FGDs with youth from camp and host community settings, 69% percentage of all brainstormed factors that affect youth wellbeing were related to unmet, physical basic needs or unmet economic/financial needs. Youth explained that it was challenging for them to think deeply about their social or psychological wellbeing because in the present moment they were focused mostly on their survival and that of their families. For males, there was a slightly greater concentration on increasing their economic stability and livelihoods opportunities; for females, there was more discussion of unmet needs in the home, such as food and water but also bedding, hygiene products, and cooking utensils. Discussion of basic needs thus lead to greater talk of the ways in which wellbeing is gendered in this context, and both groups noted that restrictions on time spent outside of the house for females could have both positive and negative effects on wellbeing. Women felt less independent and more restricted in their decision making, but this led to greater feelings of safety and security as well. Males described feeling free to pursue economic opportunity with greater choice, but when little opportunities exist they felt helpless and psychologically unwell when they could not provide for their families.

BASELINE CAPACITIES AND NORMS IN CONTEXT: JORDAN

In Jordan, youth in the FGDs were engaged, self-reflective, self-aware, and demonstrated significant high order thinking and perspective. This is likely reflective of the strong educational system in Syria prior to the conflict, as well as the educational attainment of the participants themselves. Many had completed their secondary education and planned to go to university one day. While young people in both Za'atari and Mafraq noted that meeting basic needs was the foundation of their wellbeing, they also discussed in depth the many subjective aspects that they considered to be essential. This included self-confidence, identity and sense of self, self-sufficiency and independence, and resilience. Additionally, both male and female groups spoke in depth about how they are affected by traditional gender norms. Females noted that it was important for women's wellbeing to have choice in regard to their future, but that often there are restrictions on such choice. Males, too, were self-reflective on their own pre-conceived notions of female youth in their context, first describing what they thought a female youth's priorities may be but later reconsidering and noting how their own perspectives are shaped by the gender and cultural norms of their society.

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10 For example: Are youth accustomed to complex problem solving? Do they have the skills for it, and, culturally, is it encouraged and built? To what extent do they have higher order and critical thinking skills? Are they able to engage in these skills today?

11 Hayes, J., ValElzakker, M.B., and Shin, L.M. (2012) Emotion and cognition interactions in PTSD: A review of neurocognitive and neuroimaging studies. Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience, Vol 6, Article 89.

Education, gender, and cultural norms will influence how young people are able to discuss their experiences and their perspectives. The manner in which youth have engaged with complex and abstract ideas in the past will impact how they describe their current circumstances today. Additionally, cultural norms around individualism and self-expression may impact how a young person talks about their wellbeing, their identity, and their hopes for the future. Components of "past" life experience situate a young person's experiences of, and ways in which they are able to talk about, personal wellbeing in displacement.

INDIVIDUAL: EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF YOUTH WELLBEING

The eight dimensions of youth wellbeing represent the key areas of a youth's life, and the perspectives and experiences that are most relevant to their individual wellbeing in their current circumstance. These dimensions overlap, interact, and affect one another; thus, the dimensions are not intended as bounded categories.[12]

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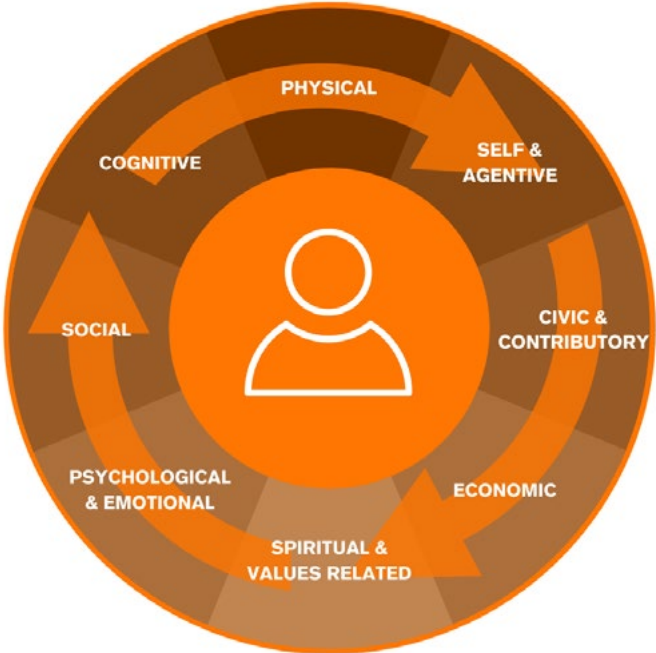
[12] In the academic and programmatic literature reviewed here, some of these dimensions were combined (for example, in the use of the term "psychosocial") while in other resources they are teased apart. For the purposes of this research, it was valuable to highlight each individually in order to assure that the depth and nuance of the youth descriptions were captured in the framework.

❶ **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.** This refers to an individual's psychological and emotional experiences and state. It is particularly relevant for youth in displacement who have experienced traumatic events, as well as who are undergoing significant biological and social changes as a result of their age and developmental stage. Psychological and emotional wellbeing includes, for example, emotional regulation; self-control; task performance; open mindedness; and empathy and trust.[13]

Across the three locations, youth categorised happiness, hope, feeling content, feeling comfortable, feeling emotionally safe, trust, and lack of fear as aspects of their psychological wellbeing. They described strategies to improve this, including reading to calm the mind; finding quiet time to be alone; putting aside time for self-reflection; working through problems or conflict with friends; feeling the support of family when problems arise; engaging in games and sports; and other strategies. Youth noted how closely tied their psychological wellbeing is to their circumstance and environment. Additionally, many noted that it was difficult to think about this aspect of their wellbeing, as they are still experiencing real hardship in their current lives.

❷ **SOCIAL WELLBEING.** This refers to social connectedness,[14] including relationships, engagement, interactions, and support that young people currently experience. It includes prosocial relationships; sociability and social efficacy; positive and stable family relationships; close friends for mutual support and development; positive interactions with neighbours and community; collaboration skills; communication skills; and strong sense of community and belonging.

According to the literature, in contexts of displacement, social ties and social skills are essential to wellbeing. Social capital—strong social ties, shared communities and values, trust, and cooperation— is strongly linked to resilience of both communities and individuals within those communities. In displacement, youth may find themselves living alongside those who are different from them (for example, in Za'atari neighbours living in adjacent caravans may originate from different parts of Syria with dissimilar customs and norms). The skills to forge new relationships and develop trust across difference to create new communities is essential.

Additionally, youth and parents in all locations described the centrality of families—both nuclear and extended—in contributing to the wellbeing of all of its members. Youth, in particular, may take on new roles as traditional family structures change. With injured parents in Syria, youth describe working to support both those parents and their younger siblings. In Nigeria, parents noted that their youth-aged children would live with them long into adulthood in order to assure that the family can survive.

❸ **PHYSICAL WELLBEING.** Physical health and security are essential to wellbeing in contexts of displacement. This includes the physical health of self and of family members; lack of sickness and disease; lack of injury; access to health care and services; and accessibility for those with injury or disability or specific physical needs.

Youth in Syria and Nigeria explained that fear of deteriorating health of family members significantly affected their wellbeing. In fact, in all locations individual young people noted that the health of their family members was the most important aspect of their own individual wellbeing. In Nigeria, a young male participant described the fear he had of getting sick and being unable to care for the family who was dependent on his earnings. In Jordan, participants noted that health services were often inadequate or inaccessible, and their own wellbeing was affected by worry for injured or ill family members.

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[13] INEE (2018) Guidance Note: Psychosocial Support: Facilitating psychosocial wellbeing and social and emotional learning. Available: https://inee.org/resources/inee-guidance-note-psychosocial-support

[14] Social connectedness is an important element in NRC's Safe and Inclusive Learning Framework, which notes the role of education in providing protective and life-saving functions in both first phase emergency response and beyond.

❹ **SPIRITUAL AND VALUES-RELATED WELLBEING.** Religion and faith play a significant and meaningful role in youth wellbeing in displacement. This includes the right to practice religion, as well as access to religious services, texts, spaces, and customs. Specifically, spirituality plays an important role in managing psychological health in the face of hardship.

In Jordan, female participants described the role of faith to their wellbeing as an individual practice. Praying allowed them the opportunity for quiet, peace, and calm. In Nigeria, males described the significance of the teachings of religion to contribute to a peaceful, tolerant society. They emphasised that this was an essential point of comfort in the midst of conflict.

Youth in all locations elaborated how important it was for them to live in a context where values and morals can be expressed freely and openly. This included values such as justice, equity, equality, tolerance, peace, and support for others. Participants noted that religion was often a pathway to experience and practice such values. However, it is critical, they said, for such values to be included in governance, institutions, and programming to support those in displacement.

❺ **CIVIC AND CONTRIBUTORY WELLBEING.** Youth, who are capable young adults seeking to become independent and contributing members of society, require the opportunity for civic participation and contribution as an integral part of their wellbeing. This includes the desire for a sense of belonging in community; the opportunity to contribute in meaningful ways to community and society; as well as acknowledging their relationship with national identity and with former country or region of origin.

Syrian youth in Jordan noted the struggle to reorient themselves in relation to their country and national identity. For youth who have been displaced across borders, their sense of belonging and role in society has shifted. It is particularly important for these young adults to find new and engaging ways to become active citizens.

❻ **SELF AND AGENTIVE WELLBEING.** Self and agentive wellbeing relate closely to the categories above. However, for youths' particular stage of development these concepts of self, identity, and individual agency featured prominently and often in separate conversation from psychological and emotional wellbeing. This dimension includes a youth's changing sense of self; self-development and self-growth; identity and self-concept; choice on a daily basis; choice about future; future aspirations and relationship to personal identity; space and opportunity for self-reflection and building self-awareness; and self-esteem.

Youth approaches broadly—including Positive Youth Development frameworks—centre the concept of agency as central to youth programming and youth wellbeing. This field work underlined the prominence of this point, with youth in all locations describing strong sense of self, choice, and desire for self-reliance. This dimension is emphasised as notably relevant to the stage of life of youth, and youth should be encouraged to explore, discuss, and share perspective on their changing lives and wellbeing experiences in their contexts.

❼ **ECONOMIC WELLBEING.** Economic wellbeing refers to the relationship between economic activities or opportunity and youths' goals, values, and plans. It may include financial stability for self and family; financial independence (i.e., not relying on aid); opportunities to engage in livelihoods activities; opportunities to learn vocational skills; access to capital; access to support for businesses and learning (e.g., mentorships); and desired economic activities for the future. However, it differs from the foundational category above in that it reflects not only what a youth needs, but also acknowledges their reasons and values associated with their economic activities.

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This dimension specifically reflects the capabilities approach that emphasises understanding youths' goals and values. For example, some youth in Za'atari camp described having relative economic stability. However, their ultimate goal was to attend university, and they faced significant economic barriers to achieving this goal. It is essential to capture economic stability and livelihoods opportunities objectively (such as a measure of household financial stability). However, it is equally important to allow youth to express their individual goals, preferences, and hopes in regard to economic and vocational activity.

❸ **COGNITIVE WELLBEING.** Cognitive wellbeing refers to having certain cognitive abilities—such as high order thinking, problem solving, abstract thinking, goal setting—that are appropriate to biological age. As such, it closely aligns with aspects of some of the above dimensions, as well as the baseline capacities and norms category. Like economic wellbeing, it was determined that this was an important independent category in order to assure that it is addressed at the level of individual. For example, in a context wherein many youth have high levels of educational attainment (e.g. Syrian refugees in Jordan), there may still be different experiences of cognitive wellbeing for individuals based on trauma exposure and recovery.

The cognitive wellbeing of the individual will be influenced by opportunities to learn and practice cognitive skills and opportunities to receive support and process trauma, in particular as it relates to cognitive and life skills. By parsing this dimension out, it is intended to again centre the impact of experiences on individuals rather than groups.

READING THE FRAMEWORK: INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

When seeking to understand youth wellbeing in a specific context, one must develop not only an in-depth understanding of each component, but also how each of these pieces interact, interrelate, and compound with one another.

In a given context, one may first consider context, basic needs, and baselines capacities in order to gain understanding of the general circumstance, risks, vulnerabilities, needs, strengths, and assets of youth. Across different locations, some categories may be more heavily weighted and discussed by young people than others; it is important to acknowledge that youth have their own priorities and individual needs.

It is essential to hold space for youth to explain and elaborate on the details of these circumstances for themselves. From these foundational conversations, the more subjective aspects of wellbeing emerge as young people explain what they know, value, and experience. It is through these descriptions of experience that the relationship between various elements of the framework will be clarified and contextualised to a given location. For example:

- "Greater" social wellbeing may be closely connected to "greater" physical wellbeing by virtue of an able-bodied youth's opportunities to connect with others outside of the house.

- A young person whose household is financially unstable ("lesser" economic wellbeing) may experience more stress ("lesser" psychological wellbeing) but close, cooperative family ties ("greater" social wellbeing).

- In a conflict context, a household may experience the trauma of losing its male breadwinners ("negative" impact on psychological and social wellbeing), resulting in lost economic stability and unmet basic needs. In response, traditional gender norms that kept females in the house are relaxed in order to increase income, which may positively affect a female youth's sense of self, independence, and contribution ("greater" agentive, civic/contributory, economic, and psychological wellbeing).

In Aleppo, the ongoing conflict led to people losing access to basic items for survival (food, water, NFI) and also livelihoods activities. Both should certainly be acknowledged in conversations about general wellbeing of the population. But in focus groups, youth and parents also note the enduring commitment of communities to support one another, the strong ties and emotional support within families, and the strength of women to take on new roles when male head of households are lost. All of these aspects factor into the ways in which a young person experiences, understands, and describes their personal wellbeing.

In north-east Nigeria, youth and parents described the severe hardship in meeting their basic needs after displacement. Due to insecurity, movement is limited, and economic opportunity is bleak. Still, parents note that both the educational and vocational opportunities for their children are greater than in their villages prior to displacement. They note that traditional gender and cultural norms may shift slightly with this context, and that their youth-aged children are being exposed to new forms of independence and opportunity. For parents, consideration of youth wellbeing in displacement captured both the negative and constraining aspects of context alongside the potential opportunity.

It is impossible to fully understand or represent the large and multi-dimensional concept of youth wellbeing without examining the interrelated and interdependent pieces of the puzzle. Likely the most important and notable finding of the case study research was the capacity of young people to offer in-depth, insightful, and nuanced perspective on each. While young people note that meeting basic needs was the foundation of their wellbeing, they, too, note many subjective aspects of their wellbeing that they deem essential. Just because a young person's basic needs are not currently met does not mean that they are not simultaneously reflecting on the many dimensions and aspects of their subjective and experienced wellbeing.

FRAMEWORK IN
PROGRAMMATIC CONTEXT

This last section presents a brief overview of key findings from each case study location which illustrate specific aspects of the Wellbeing Framework. Each case study offers a brief summary of the enabling environment, basic needs, and baseline capacities and norms. It then elaborates on some of the most poignant data points for each location with regards to the eight individual dimensions of wellbeing. All eight dimensions of youth wellbeing were discussed in each location. However, each case study highlights a few dimensions that were emphasised by participants in the study as particularly important.

CASE STUDY 1:

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN JORDAN

Environment:	**Basic needs:**	**Baseline capacities and norms:**	**Key dimensions highlighted:**
Stable (Za'atari and Mafraq), restrictions on mobility (Za'atari), lack of documentation/legal status (Mafraq), generally feel safe (both)	Inadequate living conditions (Za'atari), lack of livelihoods and economic opportunity (both), have access to food, water, other NFI (both)	High education attainment in Syria the norm, high level of critical thinking and engagement, descriptions of limitations on girls/women, traditional gender norms (both)	Cognitive, agentive, civic, psychological/emotional

In Jordan, we talked to a total of 61 youth (38 female), ages 16-29, living in two locations: Za'atari refugee camp and urban Mafraq. The average length of time participants lived in current location was 7.1 years (range of 5-9 years). An additional 22 parents of youth participated in focus group discussions. As of March 2020, 85,623 Syrian refugees were living in Mafraq and 76,349 were residents of Za'atari camp.[15]

Jordan is a stable context for its refugee population, but with specific challenges that differ by location. For refugees in Za'atari, restrictions on mobility and precarious living conditions impact wellbeing. All focus group discussion (FGD) participants in Za'atari live in caravans with extended families and described the conditions as crowded, lacking privacy, and inadequate. The women described the impact of mud in the camps during the winter months. This made it impossible to keep oneself and living spaces clean, which had a negative impact on their hygiene, self-esteem, and dignity. Males noted that the congested camp posed challenges to their emotional wellbeing, as they could not have space to calm down, self-reflect, or unwind when tensions or stress ran high. Both genders noted that restrictions on their movement out of the camp made them feel powerless and frustrated.

Youth in Mafraq described their unmet basic needs. This most often included inadequate medical services and lack of access to livelihoods opportunities where they would not be exploited. Programme staff noted that undocumented young people were even more vulnerable to such exploitation, and while pathways

> " *For me, I can still think about future plans for myself. I know that changes when you are a parent. Then your children come first. I think that is very difficult for our parents. They are so concerned for us, that it has in some ways broken them. I worry as much about the things that could make my mother happy as myself. It is very difficult."*
>
> Female youth participant, Mafraq.

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[15] UNHCR (2020) Jordan Fact Sheet, February 2020. Retrieved from: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/loxation/51

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exist to obtain legal refugee status, many remain unreached by such efforts.

Youth in all workshops were engaged, self-reflective, self-aware, and demonstrated significant higher-order thinking and perspective. With a strong educational system in Syria prior to the conflict, young people described the value placed on education, self-improvement, and goal setting that they had grown up with and still held today. While youth noted that meeting basic needs was the foundation of their wellbeing, they described many subjective aspects that they also considered essential. This included self-confidence, identity and sense of self, self-sufficiency and independence, and resilience.

Both genders desired conditions that would facilitate opportunity for reflection and growth, alongside strong desire for continued education opportunities and trainings. Youth discussed values in relation to their own self-development and pointed to the challenges of considering these things while living in displacement.

Participants in all FGDs named the following components as essential to their wellbeing: jobs, economic opportunity, and financial stability; social

> *Every year, the rain brings so much mud and this affects our wellbeing. No matter what we do, we are covered in mud. Look at this, today – I wanted to dress nicely for this workshop, to present myself well. I wore a nice dress and hold myself with pride. But my dress is covered in mud. How can I feel good about myself? If we want to leave the camp, go to get a job or go to university… we are just going to be looked at and called dirty. This impacts my self-esteem, I don't want to be outside and be thought of as a dirty refugee."*

Female youth participants, Za'atari

> *My identity is tied to my status as 'refugee.' To be labeled as such is enough to break anyone's wellbeing. Until we are no longer refugees, we cannot really be well. We did not choose this identity, we were forced."*

Male youth participant, Za'atari

relationships and healthy community; health and wellbeing of family members; physical health and access to healthcare; emotional health and psychological support; religion and the freedom to practice their religion; and the ability to contribute actively to communities, society, or their country's future. This, coupled with the in-depth reflections on self, point to the fact that young people conceptualize their wellbeing as multi-dimensional, and understand how interrelated these many pieces of their lives are.

Overall, youth were future-oriented and spoke in generally 'positive' or hopeful terms about their potential futures. It is important to note that this is not to minimize the challenges and unmet basic needs in their current lives. Instead, it emphasizes that youth still describe plans, desires, hopes, and dreams. While young people describe significant current challenges, they are simultaneously able and interested in talking about their potential futures.

Finally, in both Za'atari and Mafraq, parents of youth spoke about their children's wellbeing in very different ways than the youth did. There was much greater focus on basic needs, and a reluctance to discuss in depth beyond those basic needs. The main takeaway from the FGDs with parents was a notable disconnect between parents' and youth perspectives. Many parents assumed and described their youth as disengaged. They believed youth would be disinterested in talking or thinking about wellbeing beyond meeting their basic needs.

> " *If we want to leave the camp, go to get a job or go to university… we are just going to be looked at and called dirty. This impacts my self-esteem, I don't want to be outside and be thought of as a dirty refugee."*
>
> Female youth participants, Za'atari

> " *A sense of justice and equity are essential to my wellbeing, especially in the environment you live. All that we experience here is unjust and discriminatory….It is important to be non-discriminatory in practice, to accept others, to treat others well. But how do you practice these things, how do you learn them and believe them, when you are in a place where such things do not win out? This hurts your overall wellbeing – and also how to increase your wellbeing—when you are constantly experiencing injustice in the world around you."*
>
> Male youth participant, Za'atari

Interestingly, the youth FGD participants in both locations in Jordan showed the opposite to be true. Additionally, youth described significant concern for the wellbeing of their parents. It is clear that in order to better the wellbeing of young people, it is simultaneously essential to attend to the wellbeing of parents.

NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

Environment:	Basic needs:	Baseline capacities and norms:	Key dimensions highlighted:
Ongoing conflict means the region is generally unstable; urban areas and camps in Maiduguri are relatively secure from conflict, but with ongoing regular displacements continuing; few restrictions on mobility (and due mainly to security or economics), IDPs generally feel safe where they are but insecure in regard to the future	Extensive unmet basic needs, including inadequate living conditions, lack of food, water, hygiene materials, cooking supplies, clothing, other NFI; very few livelihoods and economic opportunities; some access to education, but cannot be prioritized if basic needs are not met	Low education attainment in villages prior to displacement; unfamiliar with activities that required critical and abstract thinking; limited engagement with abstract topics; descriptions of significant limitations on girls/women, traditional gender norms	Physical, agentive, spiritual, economic

In Maiduguri, Nigeria, we spoke to a total of 40 youth (20 female) ages 15-29. The FGDs were divided by youth living in NYSF camp (two FGDs) and youth living in Gongolong host communities (two FGDs). On average, participants lived in their current location for 6 years. An additional 20 parents of youth participated in FGDs. As of the beginning of 2020, approximately 1.8 million Nigerians were displaced from their homes throughout the northeast (including Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states). The majority of those fled to Maiduguri and its outskirts to live in host communities and camps.[16] The city of Maiduguri is relatively stable, but ongoing conflict continues just outside its perimeter. IDPs in Maiduguri are free to move about, though this mobility is restricted by economics and the lack of security outside of the city itself. While there is an extensive humanitarian response effort via NGOs based in Maiduguri, NGOs are limited in both their movement out of the city (and thus access to the most in need), as well as by funding.

Youth participants in Northeastern Nigeria were more hesitant to engage in discussion of their wellbeing than youth in Jordan and Syria. We countered this by dividing into smaller groups, assigning a team leader, assigning an (NRC staff) "writer" to ensure everyone could participate without the stress of having to read and write, and by adjusting activities to offer more multiple choice and ranking options.

Ultimately, lesser engagement with the activities and subject matter became a key finding of this case study. Most youth were not able to write and only 3 (all male) out of 40 participants were currently enrolled in school. Abstract thinking, problem solving, and critical thinking were challenging, and so activities were adapted in order to simplify the content of conversations. According to program staff, the educational context in both Maiduguri and participants' prior homes likely contributed to these challenges.

Youth explained that they were not accustomed to talking about such subjects, and that it therefore posed a lot of challenges. They described the activities and questions as difficult, and noted that they would like much more time to think about their answers. At the end of the sessions, multiple youth noted that

> " Now, after we did this activity, I can think of many things that are related to my wellbeing. I think inner peace and calmness, to feel content with myself, this is what it means to me. I did not understand or really think about this for myself before very much. I think when I go home now, I will think of all the things that I wish I told you about. This was a hard thing to think about and then talk about. But now I understand."
>
> Female youth participant, Gongolong host community

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16 UNHCR (2020) Nigeria: Population of Concern Snapshot: January 2020. Available: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/74365

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they were beginning to both feel more comfortable and have greater understanding of the subject matter after our focus group discussions.

All youth FGD participants spoke about the lack of economic opportunities available to them and their families, as well as the many unmet basic needs that they were living with on a daily basis. In the activity where youth were asked to brainstorm as many factors that were related to their wellbeing as possible, the vast majority of factors could be characterized as economic-related (e.g. livelihoods and skills training) or basic needs / physical-wellbeing related (e.g. adequate housing, hygienic materials). Youth noted that this reflected the foundations of their wellbeing: in order to think about their emotional, psychological, or social needs, they first need to meet these basics. In both the Gongolong community and the camp settings, young people and their families lacked many basics including consistent access to food, clean water, hygiene materials, mattresses, adequate shelter, adequate cooking materials, etc. "I can't think about my happiness, or my future too much, unless my family has food and shelter," a male youth from the Gongolong community explained. "And I need a job to help provide those things. Right now, I have nothing."

" *We didn't write many things that relate to psychological and emotional wellbeing. This is because it is difficult to think about. We don't have control over so much of our lives. We don't have control over what happened in the past. So we don't caught up thinking about these things. It is important to think about the future, and the things that you need and your family needs in order to survive. I can control my decisions and thoughts every day like that. So that is what I am focusing on."*

Male youth participant, NYSC camp

As noted above, delving in-depth into discussion of subjective wellbeing was challenging for all youth FGDs. However, youth noted the importance of religion in their lives, and described its effects on their daily experiences of wellbeing. Religion became a proxy for accessing this type of conversation. A female youth from NYSC camp noted that: "When I pray, I feel peaceful. I feel content. I feel psychologically well and able to handle my life here. My religion teaches peace, so being able to practice this in hard times is how I feel at peace too. This is when I feel happiness and hopefulness."

Discussions about the meaning of religion in their particular circumstance allowed for reflection on individual and subjective experiences of wellbeing. One male FGD explained at length the connection between their faith and peace, tolerance, and community. "Religion adds to my social, psychological, physical, and economic wellbeing. It is all of those things. It helps me to be a good citizen, and to contribute to the society. We need this now, with the conflict."

Youth, too, explicitly noted that it was important for them to focus on aspects of their life over which they had control. With so much of their life external to that which they could affect, it was important for them to specify where they could find agency.

Relatedly, youth were very direct in talking about their needs and plans. Older male youth described the exact steps necessary to build a successful small business. Females explained a specific trade (e.g., sewing) that they would like to learn, as well as a plan to earn income for the family via this trade. Generally, males had specific livelihoods plans while females described their planned trade in terms of "extra" income for their household, alongside their roles inside the home. There were significant differences described in terms of male and female daily routines in both the camps and host communities. Both male and female youth noted that males are outside of the home more, which brings both more opportunity but also more risk. Females may feel safer and protected at home, but this leaves them dependent on their families and sometimes less in charge of their futures.

> " *I see them with more aspirations now. They are in the city, so they witness the education levels of their peers. They see young people with small businesses. They realize they need to learn to read and write. In our village, there was nothing for them; during the rainy season when there was no farm work they would just be sitting. Now in the city, they have motivations. This is a positive side of the conflict. I can now have greater aspirations for my children's futures."*
>
> Mother, Gongolong host community

Parents of youth offered more in-depth reflection on the wellbeing of the young people in their communities. Parents noted that youth is a time of forward-thinking, and that the biggest challenge to their youth-aged children is the uncertainty about opportunities for the future in their context. Still, opportunities are often greater now in Maiduguri than they were in the villages prior to displacement. Parents described the importance of their own role in supporting their children to develop, even into adulthood. They noted how important it was to reflect on the identity and strengths of each child, and support them in learning about themselves. In their current situation this is particularly important in order to assure that the youth stay out of trouble and make good decisions—with little to do, there is real risk of making bad choices. Parents note that this is particularly true for males who are more frequently out in the community making decisions, often under duress.

Overall, parents were vocal about wanting their children to engage in activities that encouraged self-reflection, learning, and plan-making for the future. But like the youth themselves, they noted that unmet basic needs and limited economic opportunities severely limited the capacity for young people to focus on personal growth and wellness.

SYRIA, ALEPPO AND DAMASCUS

Environment:	Basic needs:	Baseline capacities and norms:	Key dimensions highlighted:
Ongoing conflict / acute emergency (Aleppo), recovery/ relative stability (Damascus); limited mobility due to security (both)	Lacking access to health infrastructure, markets, livelihoods (Aleppo); lack of livelihoods and economic opportunity (both); have access to food, water, other NFI (both)	High education attainment in Syria the norm, high level of critical thinking and engagement, descriptions of limitations on girls/women, traditional gender norms (both)	Cognitive, agentive, social, psychological/emotional

In order to include an acute emergency perspective in the development of the framework, an abbreviated version of the case study methodology was conducted in two locations in Syria: rural Damascus and Aleppo.[17] A total of 54 youth (38 female) took part in FGDs, with an age range of 15-24. The average length of displacement was 4.7 years.[18] An additional 18 parents took part (10 Aleppo, 8 Damascus).

At the time of research, some areas in Aleppo were continuing to experience conflict with ongoing stressors experienced by its population. In early 2020, northern Aleppo governorate was home to approximately 410,000 IDPs.[19] Movement in Aleppo is heavily restricted due to significant safety concerns amid ongoing conflict. Needs in this location are acute, and approximately 54 percent of communities reported restrictions to access for humanitarian actors and assistance.[20] Damascus was experiencing relative stability in terms of ongoing shocks, but its inhabitants still described the daily experiences of living in a country ravaged by nine years of war.

Facilitators noted that participants were engaged with the material and activities and had deep and insightful answers about their subjective wellbeing even in acute emergency. Notes from the youth groups demonstrated high order and critical thinking, as well as the ability and willingness to reflect on subjective points despite the clear immediate need of their context.

The brainstorming activities in the two locations (Aleppo and rural Damascus) prompted different responses. All groups in Aleppo noted the instability of their environment and how that impacted their ability to meet basic needs. "Safety is the basis of all wellbeing in Syria," a parent in the Aleppo FGD noted. Youth participants emphasized the need for security and safety for themselves and their families as foundational, but also access to health services, good health and hygiene, the need for economic recovery and financial stability, livelihoods opportunities, and return to education. In contrast, all groups in Damascus described a recovery context, in which they emphasised the need for increased livelihoods opportunities, return to education, and general economic recovery in their communities.

Despite these contextual differences, groups in both locations held similar conversations about their subjective wellbeing. Both male and female groups noted how individual and personal freedoms, personal decision making, self-reliance, taking care of oneself, and independence relate to their wellbeing. In the Aleppo female FGDs, participants discussed the role of marriage at this point in their lives; namely, how

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17 Field teams (who conducted the activities and focus group discussions) requested a limit of four questions for the group discussion, compared to a guide of 8-10 questions in Jordan and Nigeria. They also conducted an abbreviated version of the brainstorming activity. Because of the abbreviation of the methods, the Syria data was slightly less in depth than in the other two locations. Still, the teams did an excellent job and the quality of data indicates that such content and methodology could be used very successfully in Syria in the future.

18 Not all participants had experienced displacement. Some had been displaced elsewhere and then returned home to the current location. Others were displaced from their home to the current location. While questions were phrased to try to elicit information about experiences in displacement, all of the above are reflected in this data.

19 REACH (2020) Northwest Syria: Situation Overview. Available: https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/northwest-syria-situation-overview-16-march-2020

20 REACH (2020).

it was a common and traditional choice (and often an expectation), but that women may also choose for themselves a different path. Males in both Aleppo and Damascus noted a desire to be both financially and physically independent of their parents. All groups commented on the different experiences and meaning of wellbeing for male versus female youth, much of which related to traditional gender norms that persist even in times of conflict. Females noted that they are much more restricted in their movement than male youth, and that expectations for their future are still based on traditional social norms.

For all groups, social relations and family featured prominently in discussion. For the male FGDs, participants discussed the roles that they now play in their families. For some, this was noted as central to their lives now: "Right now, there are more important things than our goals, like working to support our families. We cannot complete our education right now, which would make it possible to achieve our previous goals for the future. Right now we just need to think about work and family, at least for the near future" (Male, Damascus).

Others explained that being less reliant on their parents (especially at this age) will contribute to improved wellbeing: "I want to be able to take responsibility, to work and be able to make my own money. I don't want to take money from my father" (Male, Aleppo).

In the parents' FGDs, there were numerous examples of parents supporting their youth-aged children to become more engaged, get out of the house, and begin to rebuild lives post-conflict. This suggests an interesting interaction between the role of social support and independence/agency to the wellbeing of youth.

Additionally, parents in Aleppo described the psychological and emotional wellbeing of their youth-aged children in the direct aftermath of conflict. There was description of trauma and its effects, as well as parents' reflections on how they provided support for their children to become well enough to leave the house and engage with society again. Many parents acknowledged that specific NGO programming offered an important opportunity to support youth in this reengagement, including building new social relationships. Parents described the importance of social relationships with peers their own age, as youth could talk through life changes and hopes and plans for the future with others who could relate.

> **"** *My daughter survived a missile falling on her house that killed four of her brothers… afterwards she wouldn't talk to anyone, wouldn't respond to anything. Psychologically, she was in a very bad place. She wanted to be in complete isolation. But I finally found a program to enroll her in, and I convinced her to attend just once. Now, she goes every day. She has regained many lost parts of herself, her enthusiasm and socialness. She engages with the family, turning off the TV to talk with me everyday and helping with her young sisters. She goes alone to her program now, without fear."*
>
> Parent, Aleppo

For both locations, the facilitators noted that participants described the experience of the FGDs in positive terms. "It was so nice," one female (Aleppo) noted, "to express what is inside of me comfortably in this environment. To be asked about the things that I want." The majority of participants described the activities as easy but noted that they were not often asked to talk about these ideas.