The child Protection Initiative (CPI) was established in response to a recommendation made at the “Children and City” conference held in Amman in December 2002. The “Amman Declaration” called for building up the capacities of municipal authorities and establishment of a regional fund to respond rapidly to the risks faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged children in the MENA region. The CPI, which was launched in September 2003, is supported by the World Bank and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), which is hosting its secretariat in Riyadh.

One of the objectives of CPI is to build an extensive knowledge on the main issues that face children in MENA region, and to derive lessons and best practices from the research and programs that address vulnerable and disadvantaged children’s issues, whether within the region or elsewhere. In order to fulfill this objective, the CPI commissioned scholars and researchers in the MENA region to conduct assessments of the status of children and relevant institutions in 12 cities, namely Amman, Riyadh, Khartoum, Alexandria, Sana’a, Beirut, Casablanca, Algiers, Kuwait, Gaza, Medina Al Munawara and Tehran.

The present study is the third one published by CPI in order to fill the knowledge gaps on children’s issues. The study attempts to: (a) review the status of children in Greater Amman, (b) review the status of disadvantaged children in order to identify vulnerabilities and risk factors affecting them, (c) assess the capacity of selected institutions that address children’s issues in Amman, and (d) propose a phased capacity building program for the institutions based on the findings of the assessment.

The analysis for Amman city reveals that the government of Jordan is taking considerable actions and measures to improve the living conditions of children and their families both in rural and urban areas. Basic services, such as education and health are provided to children and the government is safeguarding children’s rights to access these services. However, there are many challenges facing some children in Amman, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged ones, such as child laborers, street children, refugees, and disabled children. Although the existing statistical data on the different groups of disadvantaged children is either unavailable or insufficient to provide an estimate of the
magnitude of child vulnerability in Amman, yet recent surveys have shown some estimates on the national level.

The insufficient data on child vulnerability hinders developing effective policies to address them. The 2002 sample survey conducted by the Child Labour Unit on the situation of child labor in Jordan shows that about half of the working children belong to the age group 15-17 years, and children less than 14 years constitute 10% of working children. The vast majority of the working children are males. It was estimated that 510,000 disabled people of various ages are living in Jordan, two thirds of them are 24 years and under. Some governmental and non-governmental organizations estimated the percentage of disabled children to range between 1% and 4.9% of the total population.

Jordan is host to millions of refugees who were forced to flee their homelands as a result of war and occupation in Palestine. Of the 3.6 million registered Palestinian refugees both within and outside Jordan, 42% or nearly 1.7 million are in Jordan. Of these about two third (one million), are children and young people aged 24 and under. The study on street children conducted in Amman indicates that males constitute the highest percentage of street children, and 60% of them belong to the age group (15-18). The vast majority of street children (75%) have only completed their primary education, and come from large poor families (income level 100-150 JD), with a high proportion of unemployed parents. Moreover, it has been revealed that parents of street children have minimum or low levels of educational attainment. The vast majority of street children (85%) spend around 17 hours in the street. Amman study shows that there is a gap between the services to vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their actual needs.

The interviews conducted by the authors show that all the respondents felt that institutions and NGOs working with children in Amman city are doing an important job and that they have made significant progress in achieving their objectives. Some institutions and organizations, especially those targeting disadvantaged children, stated that the services they provide are badly needed, especially in poor areas. The results of the assessment clearly showed that the institutions and NGOs need assistance to enhance their capacity in various areas. These include: (a) strengthening the financial sustainability of the institutions, (b) developing their ability to assess the impacts of their work, (c) building up their capacities in needs assessment and participatory work, (d) professional development of their staff in specialized fields, and (e) stimulating the effective use of volunteers within NGOs.