



ISSUE BRIEF

The Syrian Humanitarian Crisis: Raising the Profile of Women and Girls

The Syrian crisis has greatly diminished the ability of the Syrian people to meet their needs. Almost a third of Syrians are displaced; five million internally and more than two million across the borders of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. While no one denies that the needs are great and the challenges daunting, promises of assistance from the international community are failing to materialize. To date only 53 percent of the UN's appeal for the region has been met.

While concerned about the livelihood of all people, CARE recognizes that women and children suffer disproportionately in conflict. When men are called to war, it is women who are left behind to care for their families. And it is women who, when equipped with the proper resources, have the power to help entire communities build stronger futures. Syrian women exhibit incredible resilience in securing the livelihood needs of their families. They simply cannot do so alone and in environments where survival options are limited. Therefore, in all efforts to enhance a community's security and well-being, women must be prioritized.

Economic Needs

For refugees, making ends meet is exceedingly difficult. As the crisis prolongs, savings accounts and access to credit shrink while debt grows. Approximately 80 percent of Syrian refugees live outside of official refugee camps where access to assistance and services is more readily available- an imbalance exacerbated by a "camp-centric approach" to humanitarian aid in which most funding is slated for encamped refugees. Cities across the region were already limited in resources and, as the crisis continues, the coping mechanisms of local populations are becoming strained. In the absence of solutions, tensions are likely to manifest in deprivation and escalating violence.

Syrians are unable to obtain work permits in Jordan or Turkey and though sometimes legal elsewhere, opportunities are limited by local competition and ensuing hostility and discrimination. While incomes are often static, financial expenditures are escalating. Rental prices have risen with demand, compelling refugees to live in overcrowded, low-quality conditions. Securing adequate food, water, and other essential commodities is an additional problem as service providers struggle with current and anticipated funding shortfalls, even as winter approaches.

**"The cost of everything is going up.
Only the human beings are cheap."**

JORDANIAN MOTHER OF FIVE

Women in particular remain disadvantaged as they enjoy fewer income-generating opportunities as cultural mores prohibit most forms of female employment. This is compounded by worries over public harassment which, in conjunction with cultural restrictions on women's presence outside the home, limits them in seeking assistance. The situation is especially challenging for women who are single or widowed or whose male relatives are abroad. They face difficulties in accessing credit or rental agreements due to doubt regarding their ability to pay and they are vulnerable to risks of transactional sex, temporary marriage, and other possible coping mechanisms. Even when male relatives are living with their families, it is often women who are charged with the procurement of goods and services despite the difficulties they face in doing so.



Health

For refugees, access to health care ranks high among the numerous concerns faced daily. Many refugees suffer from recurrent conditions while new needs arise as individuals confront inferior sanitation and hygiene, greater stress, and less access to food, clean water, and other basic goods. While host governments have opened their doors with generous offers of medical assistance, they lack the capacity and funds to meet refugee needs, in particular those of women. Women have greater vulnerabilities as they often de-prioritize their health and consumption relative to that of their families while, at the same time, they might require sexual, reproductive and maternal health (SRMH) services and sometimes even assistance as survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). Where health services do exist, they are not sufficiently well-known or understood and are not perceived to be discrete and culturally-sensitive. Even getting to health facilities can be challenging as Syrian women are relatively secluded to the home. These trends also speak to the pressing need for psychosocial services, as well as the creation of safe and secure spaces for women to socialize with one another and play with their children.

“Our children are afraid. If our kids hear the planes nearby, they want to hide... We’re alive and not alive at the same time.”

SYRIAN REFUGEE IN JORDAN

Education

Prior to the crisis, in Syria approximately 93% of girls and 94% of boys attended primary school. Today, however, refugee school attendance remains low. Of school-age registered refugee children, only 29% in Jordan, 10% in Lebanon, and 10% in non-camp settings in Iraq are enrolled. Children are missing school for many reasons including schools’ limited capacity to absorb students, students’ lack of official documentation, high incidental expenses, overcrowding, protection concerns, high rates of child labor, and the difficulty of the local curriculum. In

particular, among refugee families the safety of school-age girls is a predominant source of anxiety as Syrian students face discrimination and bullying by host community students, as well as by adults they might encounter. Additionally, Syrian refugee families fear that the public presence of girls will invite unwanted harassment or marriage proposals. Unfortunately, as adults, uneducated girls are less likely to pursue employment, enjoy greater health outcomes, or participate in civic affairs.

Recommendations:

1. We call on donor governments to **address the specific needs of women and girls** by ensuring that humanitarian programmes are more effectively and consistently informed by gender analysis that identifies the different consequences of the crisis for women, men, boys and girls. This also requires that all initiatives **mainstream culturally-sensitive means to prevent and respond to GBV and gender-based discrimination that that women and girls are able to fully meet their economic, social and health needs.**
2. We call on donor governments to ensure that **flexible, predictable, longer-term funding is available** to enable aid agencies to plan for the growing and changing needs of those affected by the crisis. This will include humanitarian support to new refugee and asylum seeking populations as well as support for long-term initiatives which recognize the scale, depth and protracted nature of the crisis and its enduring affect on individuals across the region.
3. We call on donor governments to **increase funding for non-camp refugees. This requires enhancing efforts to strengthen the capacity of local governments and communities** to provide for all residents in terms of security, infrastructural development, logistical capacity and livelihood opportunities, and to create an enabling environment for civic engagement. Further, donors should emphasize approaching the distribution of goods and services with an understanding of the specific barriers to access women and girls face.



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