RESEARCH IN FOUR COUNTRIES

10 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS with Syrian women and men

15 informant interviews

Five years of war and displacement have triggered fundamental shifts in Syrian gender roles and responsibilities, both in Syria and in neighboring countries.

CARE has brought together informational interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon with Syrian women and men. In line with CARE’s central gender focus, the study explores what appears to be an opening for women, even amidst horrendous devastation.

HOUSEHOLDS IN FLUX

- Women are filling the gap left by deteriorating Syrian public services.
- Female-headed households have increased in number as men go to fight, are killed, or return to Syria.
- Even when at home, men often cannot leave to work or otherwise for fear of the authorities.
- Adolescent boys and girls are impacted, sidelining education to adopt new household duties.
- Tension and conflict are rife, increasing the risk of domestic violence.

TRANSITION IN NUMBERS

from CARE, UNHCR, UNICEF & World Health Organization

- 12-17% Female headed households in Syria
- 65% of economically active in agriculture in Syria are women
- Up to 35% of households in neighboring/refugee-hosting countries are female-headed
- Up to 25% of Syrians are living with a disability, some due to injury
- 5 Average household size

In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, Syrian women have started to engage in small-scale income-generating activities, usually home-based, for which they receive “payment” dependent on the client’s largesse rather than a set price.
PROTECTION RISKS

WOMEN

• Women are under immense pressure as they seek to juggle these demands. Some cope alone, while others walk a tightrope between generating income, and managing the disapproval of the sidelined man of the household.

• Both inside Syria and among refugees, there is a serious risk that domestic violence may increase as a result of household conflict over the roles of women, the changing economic balance of power between the sexes, and the related feeling of emasculation that men may experience.

MEN

• Men seeking income in Syria are relegated to small/petty trade or joining armed groups, CARE found that 17% of households in southern Syria had enrollment in armed groups as their primary source of income (23% among internally-displaced households).1

• Men’s economic participation once they are refugees has been constrained by the lack of legal access to the labor market. Complicated and expensive registration processes hinder men in keeping their registration current, and block men from moving outside the home.

GIRLS

• Adolescent girls have had their education interrupted both inside Syria, and as refugees, and been forced as a result of dire economic conditions to assume livelihoods-related responsibilities early, including care for older persons or medical cases, or to get married early to reduce economic burdens on the family.

BOYS

• Adolescent boys have adopted the father’s traditional responsibilities: in Syria, they support their mothers by cutting wood, filling the water tank, or contributing to the family’s scant income as street vendors. In refugee contexts, they often assume the role of breadwinner, in particular in female-headed households.

WHAT WOMEN NEED

Syrian women seeking to improve their livelihoods said:

• they need peace and security - to be able to return home (for the displaced) and re-establish their lives and develop sustainable, non-harmful livelihood options.

• they need male family members and the (Syrian and host) community to support them as they seek ways to contribute to family income. They need their husbands to agree to their quest for work outside the home, to encourage them in their new roles, and to support them by helping with household chores.

• legal frameworks should be more accommodating for them to establish sustainable livelihoods – which includes allowing their husbands to go back to work.

• vocational training courses and other livelihood support should be better adapted to their specific needs, compatible with their roles as caretakers, and not expose them to additional protection risks.