

FACTSHEET

Syrian women and the struggle to survive five years of conflict
Study results in brief | March 2016



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.



Women in Syria learn first responder skills. (Credit: CARE)

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

22%

Women's economic participation in 2010 before the crisis

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 **enrolment 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

¹ *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates*. Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, iMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 26.

“Women [in Syria] now know they can do anything – but they learned this lesson the hardest way possible.”

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.



A tech repair class for refugees. (MK MacIsaac/CARE)