UNPACKING GENDERED REALITIES IN DISPLACEMENT:

The status of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon

UN WOMEN

About this study
This study was commissioned by the UN Women Regional Office for Arab States, with research undertaken in late 2017 and early 2018.

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RESEARCH PAPER

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The status of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ARAB STATES
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UN WOMEN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Now in its eighth year, the Syria crisis continues to forcibly displace hundreds of thousands of people. This has caused neighboring countries such as Lebanon to absorb displaced populations at an extraordinary rate, adding additional pressures to already overstretched national infrastructure and social services.

Estimates put the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon at well over 1 million, though this cannot be confirmed as the registration of Syrian refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ceased in 2015 at the request of national authorities. This suspension is just one of a number of social, economic, and legal barriers that Syrian refugees face when trying to meet their basic needs, all of which taken together leave the majority of Syrian refugees (75%) in Lebanon living under the poverty line (US$3.84 / LBP5815.10 per person per day).[1]

Female Syrian refugees make up more than half of the total caseload of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. Gender inequalities and discrimination leave women and girls at heightened risk in displacement, including being disproportionately vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, and to exploitation in both the public and private sphere. Changes to traditional gender roles, including the need for women to work outside of the household, contribute to amplifying these risks.

Within this context, UN Women sought to assess the impact of the Syria crisis on women and girls in Lebanon, with a focus on understanding the changing nature of gender dynamics, women's roles and responsibilities, their experiences of and access to humanitarian aid, and their experiences of violence. Using information gathered from 503 survey responses and five in-depth interviews, all conducted with female Syrian refugees, this report highlights the situation of women and girls living in displacement in Lebanon.

Seventy-nine percent (79%) of women interviewed stated that they were unable to meet their basic needs. Of those reporting that they could not meet their basic needs, many developed negative coping mechanisms including borrowing money. Some of the negative coping mechanisms adopted by those women were food-related including depending on less nutritious food or restricting the food intake of adult or female household members. In addition, 21% of women said that they either withdrew children from school, relied on children to contribute to household income, or both, (predominantly affecting boys).

Thirteen percent (13%) of women reported that they were currently working, the majority of whom live in female-headed households. However, 42% of women living in female-headed households stated that they would like to work more than they currently do, and 16% of women in male-headed households stated the same. The most universal sentiment expressed by the women interviewed for this study was that access to decent work and a livable income would create a much better environment both for themselves and their families, and that this is critical to ensuring their family's security in the long-term.

Women also noted difficulties in accessing humanitarian aid. These included challenges to traveling to services, particularly due to restrictions on women traveling alone and to an inability to afford vital transportation services. In many cases, women were actually unaware that humanitarian services even existed, especially economic and income-assistance programming, areas where need was expressed most clearly. Women also spoke of the desperate need for more and better mental health services. They reported limited access to mobile phones, with less than

1 UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, 2017, Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/vasyr-2017-vulnerability-assessment-syrian-refugees-lebanon

one-third (31%) reporting regular access to a mobile phone for their own personal use.

Women said that violence against women (VAW) is a common issue in Syrian women's lives in displacement in Lebanon, and that incidents are increasing. Nearly half of women interviewed (45%) reported that violence against women (VAW) is a problem in the Syrian refugee community in Lebanon, and 37% said it has increased since the start of the Syria crisis.[2] Sexual violence was a feature of the discussions, and in exploring where violence against women occurs, it was clear that the most common forms of violence take place predominantly in what is seen as the 'private' or domestic sphere within homes.

Women reported that the actual and perceived fear of violence at the hands of both the host community and the refugee community often keeps them isolated in their households, and consequently prevents them from accessing available services. They reported that this fear is compounded by husbands and other male family members, who women report, do not feel comfortable letting women and girls travel alone, even within neighboring communities.

When asked to compare their role in public and private life now to before displacement, the majority of women (83%) reported that they currently have a larger role within their households and society, and that there is some acceptance of women's leadership and engagement in public life. While there were differing views on whether women's increased roles and responsibilities in the private and public sphere are a positive or negative change, young women spoke positively to the changes they were experiencing, referencing opportunities which had not previously been available to them.

What emerges from the study is a clear picture of the challenges that families and individuals are facing in displacement and of the compounding impact that gender discrimination has. To counter this, as the crisis continues to impact women and girls throughout the region, the response must take seriously the need for gender-sensitive programming that can mitigate these risks and empower women to meet both their daily and long-term needs. To this end, the report has made the following recommendations:

1. Ensure that the **approach to gender mainstreaming in humanitarian and resilience programming is one that prioritizes both women's access to services and women's empowerment**; by ensuring that programs address issues of women's access (equal access of services), while also tackling gender discrimination and inequalities, combining service delivery with support to women's leadership, and including efforts to build meaningful dialogue around gender inequalities, violence prevention, and advocacy to promote gender equal legal reform;

2. Increase **access to employment services and financial resources for female Syrian refugees, actively targeting female refugees for livelihoods programming**. Ensuring that at least 30% of livelihoods opportunities go to women and girls is the minimal threshold to demonstrate commitment and support for women's empowerment and recovery;

3. Continue to **support interactive, safe spaces for female Syrian refugees to meet, network and socialize,** not only as a strategy for empowerment, but also to enhance reporting of gender based violence (GBV), and use of GBV services. Within these spaces, increase the availability and quality of psychosocial support services;

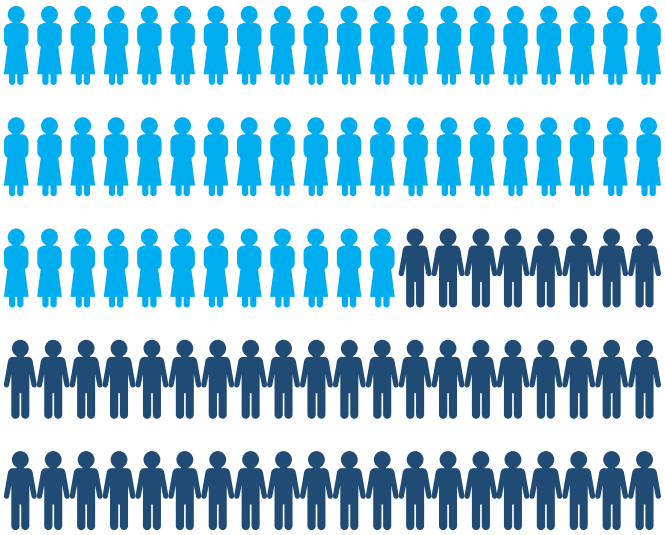
4. Continue to ensure **information sharing and awareness raising on available services**, pairing approaches that utilize technology with those that are based on word of mouth;

5. Promote **accountability for violence against women**, supporting the judicial system and the Interior Ministry to investigate and prosecute cases of violence against women within the refugee community; and,

6. Recognize the positive correlation between the strength of women's movements and organizations and gender-equal societies, and **invest in women-led organizations (Syrian and Lebanese)** as a key driver of short-term and long-term social equality.

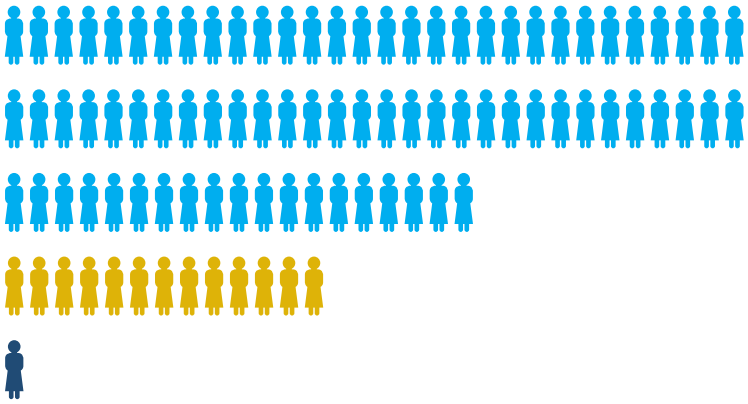
2 In line with a do no harm approach, respondents were not asked directly if they themselves had experienced domestic or sexual violence.

52%
of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are women.



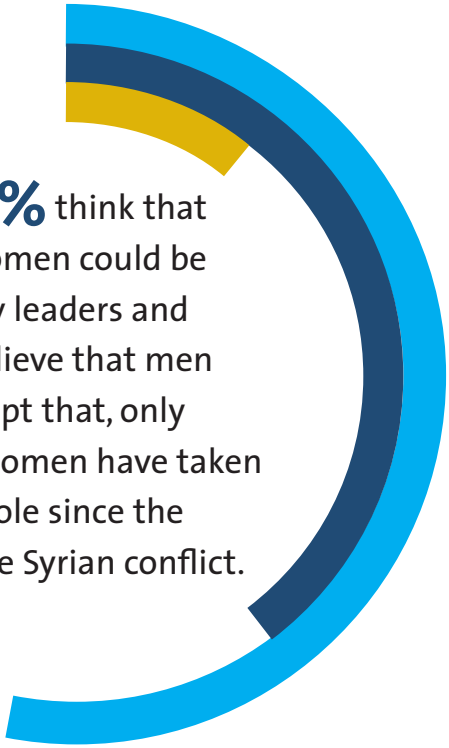
86% of refugee women have UNHCR registration, and **11%** have a residency permit.

79% of refugee women reported economic insecurity as a primary concern. Only **1%** have a work permit, though **13%** have jobs, the majority of whom live in female-headed households.



83% of women have now a larger decision-making role than before displacement.

While **42%** think that refugee women could be community leaders and **53%** believe that men would accept that, only **6%** of women have taken on such a role since the onset of the Syrian conflict.



37% of women think that VAW has increased since the beginning of the Syria crisis.

OVERVIEW OF THE SYRIA CRISIS IN LEBANON

Of the countries included in this study, Lebanon hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees. Exact population estimates are impossible, since Lebanon stopped the registration of refugees at approximately 1 million in 2015[3], but it is known that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are concentrated in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, the North and Akkar (including Tripoli), Bekaa Valley, and the South and Nabatiyeh, with the highest numbers in Bekaa.[4] Slightly more than half (52.5%) are female.[5] Within this population, the percentage of female-headed households is increasing. As per the 2017 UN Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, the percentage of female-headed households was 19% in 2017 (compared to 17% in 2016).[6]

Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. It does not have any formal refugee camps established for Syrian refugees, who are recognized by the Government as "displaced populations" and not refugees.[7] Informal camps, not sponsored by the Lebanese government or any other body and referred to in this study as "informal settlements," are forcibly disbanded on a regular basis, causing the residents of these areas to find alternative shelter.[8]

The influx of refugees into Lebanon has had a significant impact on the country. Lebanon lost $13.1 billion USD between 2012 and 2015 as a result of an economic downturn, and the World Bank estimates that the crisis has pushed 170,000 additional Lebanese people into poverty and worsened the situation for those already experiencing poverty.[9] *Syrian workers in Lebanon are largely unskilled, which threatens working Lebanese, particularly those in the construction and agricultural sectors.*[10] Lebanese unskilled workers find themselves unable to compete with Syrians willing to work for lower wages, and the increase in Syrian workers has caused a 60% reduction in wages.[11]

The populations being pushed out of work are also those that are the most likely to rely on public services.[12] This has put further pressure on the social services network serving vulnerable Lebanese, Palestinian refugees, and Syrian refugees,[13] *and has led to efforts by the government and humanitarian community to expand services and resources for all three populations, including providing Syrian refugees with access to more of the services they need.*[14]

3 United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal: Regional Overview, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php.

4 UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal: Regional Overview.

5 UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal: Regional Overview.

6 World Food Programme, "Vulnerability Assessment," 68.

7 Lebanon has 12 refugee camps for Palestinian refugees, established after the 1948 war. Source: UN Relief and Works Agency, "Where We Work: Lebanon," 2014, https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon.

8 Barrett Limoges, "Thousands of Syrians face eviction from Lebanon camps," Al-Jazeera News, April 16, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/thousands-syrians-face-eviction-lebanon-camps-170415042553730.html.

9 Thomas James Jacobs and Eric Le Borgne, "Lebanon-Promoting Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity : Systematic Country Diagnostic" *The World Bank*, 2016, http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/951911467995104328/Lebanon-Promoting-poverty-reduction-and-shared-prosperity-systematic-country-diagnostic.

10 ILO, "Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Their Employment Profile," 2013.

11 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Agricultural Livelihoods and Food Security Impact Assessment and Response Plan for the Syria Crisis in the Neighbouring Countries of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey," 2013, http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/173889/.

12 Midgley and Eldebo.

13 Government of Lebanon and UN, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017-2020," 8.

14 Government of Lebanon and UN, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017-2020," 5.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY

Quantitative Study

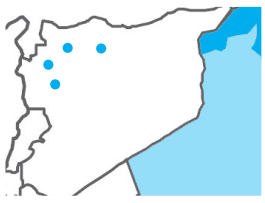
The study in Lebanon included 503 female Syrian refugees, selected to be broadly representative of the Syrian refugee population in terms of geographic distribution and age at the time of the study. Further details on sampling are included in the Methodological Appendix.

- The sample was stratified geographically to align with what is currently known about the population of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Thirty percent (30%) lived in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, 35% in Bekaa, 25% in the North and Akkar, and 10% in the South and Nabatiyeh.
- The majority was married and living with their partner (79%), though some had a partner living elsewhere (5%), were divorced (2%), or widowed (7%). Seven percent were single, a number that rises to 15% among 18-24-year-olds.
- Most women reported that their husband was the head of their household (60%), with 15% reporting that they were the head of the household, and 11% reporting that they and their husband jointly head the household. Where women reported that their parents head their household (7%), they were mostly young and unmarried.
- On average, women reported that their total household size was six members, including themselves. For the purposes of the study, "household" is defined as family members or close relatives who live under the same roof and share meals. This varied significantly from a range of one to 15-person households.

30% live in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, **35%** in Bekaa, **25%** in the North and Akar, and **10%** in the South and Nabatiyeh.

4% received a university degree, **12%** secondary or higher education, **58%** primary school, **30%** less than primary education and **21%** were illiterate.

24% came from Aleppo, **18%** from Homs, **12%** from Hama, **11%** rom Idlib and **9%** from Al-Raqqah.



- The average number of school-aged dependents per household was three, with a range from none to nine. The number of dependents was substantially lower in Beirut (1) than in Bekaa and the South and Nabatiyeh (3) or the North and Akkar (4).

- Most women had completed primary school (58%), with 30% completing less than primary school and 21% reporting that they were illiterate. Twelve percent (12%) had completed secondary school or higher, with 4% having received a university degree.

- Less than one-third (31%) of women had regular access to a mobile phone for their own personal use, 42% said that they had regular access to a shared phone, and 27% said that they had no access to a phone. This stands in stark contrast to data from 2016 which suggests that all Syrian refugee families 'own at least one mobile phone, and that most of these were smartphones'[15] – suggesting a large gender gap in access and use of mobile phones.

- Fifteen percent (15%) of women had arrived in Lebanon within the six months prior to the date of the study, 13% arrived between three years and six months ago, 34% arrived between three years and five years ago, and 38% arrived more than five years ago.

- Eighty-six percent (86%) of women said that they have UNHCR registration. Those in the South and Nabatiyeh (94%), as well as those in the North and Akkar (94%), had the highest proportion of refugee women registered with UNHCR, compared to 85% of those in Bekaa and 76% of those in Beirut and Mt. Lebanon. Women living in informal settlements and those in formal settlements[16] reported the same rate of registration. Further, 27% of women reported having a Syrian ID, 11% have a residency permit, and 11% have a passport in their possession. For the purposes of this study, formal settlements are permanent structure such as houses or apartment buildings in host communities, outside of the informal camps that have been developed.

- The largest group of women surveyed came from Aleppo (24%). Others came from Homs (18%), Hama (12%), Idlib (11%), and Al-Raqqah (9%).

Qualitative Study

The qualitative study included in-depth interviews with five women living in Mount Lebanon, selected to represent a range of circumstances based on age, education, marital status, and number and age of dependents. Participants included:[17]

- Hadeel: A 48-year-old divorced mother of three, living with her three children and three grandchildren in a one-bedroom apartment in northeast Beirut with elementary education and a household income of $700 USD per month. Hadeel arrived in Lebanon in 2012.

- Tala: A 27-year-old elementary educated woman who lives in a two-bedroom apartment in northeast Beirut with her husband and three young children. Her household has an income of $1,100 USD per month, and she arrived in Lebanon in 2014.

- Reema: a 35-year-old married mother of two who lives in a one-bedroom apartment in northeast Beirut with her husband and children. Reema has a secondary education and a household income of $800 USD per month. She arrived in Lebanon in 2014.

- Hanan: a 23-year-old married mother of two young children with an elementary education who lives in a one-bedroom apartment in northeast Beirut with her husband and children. Her household has a monthly income of $600 USD and they arrived in Lebanon in 2012.

- Zeina: a 26-year-old single woman who lives with 11 family members, including 6 children and 5 adults, in southern Beirut. Zeina graduated from college with a degree in English Literature in Syria and came to Lebanon in 2015. Her household income is $400 USD per month.

15 Reem Talhouk, Sandra Mesmar, Anja Thieme et al, "Syrian Refugees and Digital Health in Lebanon: Opportunities for Improving Antenatal Health," CHI'16 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, San Jose CA, 2016, https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/p331-talhouk.pdf.

16 For the purposes of this study, formal settlements are permanent structure such as houses or apartment buildings in host communities, outside of the informal camps that have been developed.

17 All names have been changed.

RIGHTS AND LEGAL STATUS IN LEBANON

Lebanon has traditionally kept an open-border policy toward Syrians seeking refuge, providing shelter and protection within its borders.

To remain legally within Lebanon, Syrian refugees are required to register with the Lebanon General Security Office, a process that can be expensive and time-consuming – as confirmed by secondary data and by this study. Registration requires refugees to present a valid identification document, an official entry slip for Lebanon, and a housing pledge that confirms their places of residence, in addition to a $200 USD fee (associated with registration and annual renewal).[18] As of May 6, 2015, as per Government of Lebanon instructions, UNHCR suspended new registration for refugees,[19] which, according to government estimates,[20] has led to nearly 500,000 people living in Lebanon without the necessary paperwork to access government or UN-provided services.

A welcomed move, in February 2017, the Government waived the annual $200 residency fee for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, provided that they had registered with UNHCR before January 1, 2015, or obtained residency through their UNHCR certificate at least once in 2015 or 2016.[21]

"Most Syrian refugees, although they have legal papers to be in Lebanon, their papers aren't renewed. This is mainly due to budgetary constraints and lack of guarantors." - TALA

This study found that 14% of female Syrian refugees interviewed did not have UNHCR ID cards. For women who arrived between January 2015 and June 2017, 25% did not have UNHCR IDs. Among those who arrived in the past six months, only 8% reported not having UNHCR IDs. One quarter (27%) knew someone who did not have the necessary documentation to live in Lebanon. However, there is significant regional variation, as shown in Figure 1 below. Additionally, women who arrived in the past six months are much more likely to know someone who does not have the necessary documentation to live in Lebanon (64%) compared with those that arrived prior to June 2017 (20%).

45% of women did not have enough money to live, **10%** to secure suitable shelter, **6%** to have enough food and **3%** to have enough water.

Only **35%** of women have household income from salaried work. Only **13%** have any type of work and **42%** of women who headed their households wanted to work more than they currently do.

18 Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: Residency Rules Put Syrians at Risk," January 12, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/12/lebanon-residency-rules-put-syrians-risk.

19 UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal: Regional Overview.

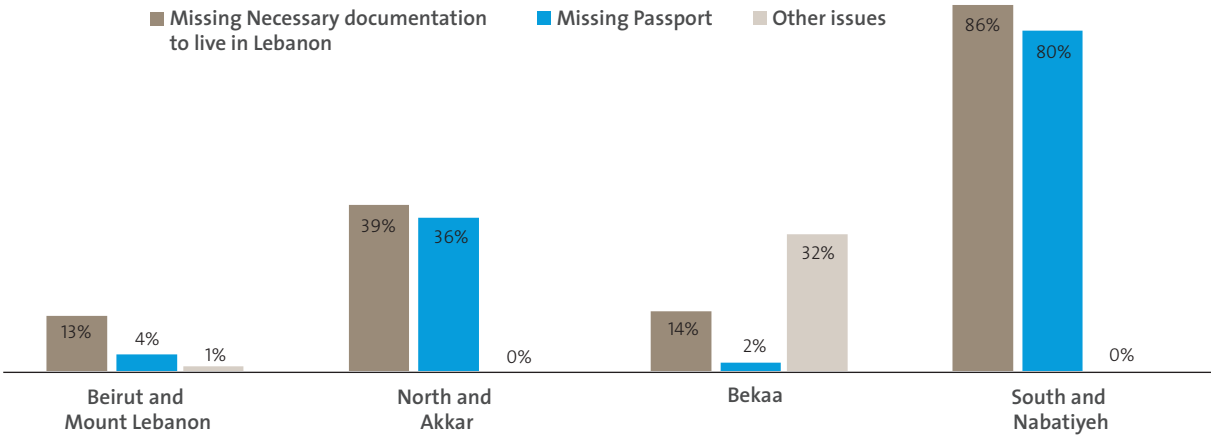
20 Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: New Refugee Policy a Step Forward," February 14, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/14/lebanon-new-refugee-policy-step-forward.

21 Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: New Refugee Policy a Step Forward," February 14, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/14/lebanon-new-refugee-policy-step-forward.

24% car
Homs, 1
and 9%

FIGURE 1:

Women Who Know Someone with Documentation Issues



In its efforts to support refugees, the Lebanese government has put in place domestic legislation that allows refugees to enroll in Lebanese universities and grants them access to subsidized primary health care upon registration with the UNHCR.[22,23]

In addition, at the time of writing, Syrian refugees were allowed to work in three sectors of the economy – agriculture, construction, and cleaning.[24] According to the 2015 Annual Report published by Lebanon's Ministry of Labor, in 2014, 1,102 new work permits and 1,048 renewed work permits were granted to Syrians.[25] However, even in permitted sectors, it remains difficult for Syrian refugees to obtain work authorization as it requires company sponsorship, which is granted only if the need for the worker can be justified to the General Security Office.[26,27] It is also time-intensive, bureaucratic, and expensive for employers: costing 240,00 LPB (approximately $159 USD).[28] Furthermore, only those who are not registered with UNHCR are eligible for work permits[29]— forcing a choice between legal employment and aid/subsidized access to education and health care.

"My husband has a work permit, it's not renewed though, we cannot renew it now, we don't have enough money and we don't have a guarantor." – HANAN

22 Goleen Samari, "Syrian Refugee Women's Health in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan and Recommendations for Improved Practice." World Medical & Health Policy. 2017;9(2):255-274.

23 George Sadek, "Legal Status of Refugees: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq," Library of Congress, 2013, https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugees/legal-status-refugees.php.

24 "Stand and Deliver: Urgent action needed on commitments made at the London Conference on year on," The Danish Refugee Council, January 20, 2017, https://i.stci.uk/sites/default/files/libraries/Stand%20and%20Deliver%20digital.pdf

25 Government of Lebanon and the United Nations (UN), "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017-2020," January 2017, http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Lebanon-Crisis-Response-Plan-2017-2020.pdf.

26 Rasha Faek, "Little Hope of Jobs for Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan," Al Fanar Media, February 25, 2017, https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2017/02/lebanon-jordan-syrians-face-bleak-employment-future/.

27 UNHCR, "Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Government Policy and Protection Concerns," http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/droi/dv/94_restrictedbriefingnote_/94_restrictedbriefingnote_en.pdf.

28 General Directorate of General Security, "Supplementary Fees," http://www.general-security.gov.lb/en/posts/168.

29 Syrians registered with UNHCR must sign pledges stating that they will not work in Lebanon.

ne from Aleppo, 18% from
2% from Hama, 11% from Idlib
from Al-Raqqah.

ECONOMIC SECURITY AND ENSURING LIVELIHOODS

More than three-quarters (79%) of female Syrian refugees in Lebanon reported that they are unable to meet the basic needs of themselves, their households, or both. All of the women who participated in qualitative interviews stated a desire to work to support their families, as they often had to make sacrifices or borrow money to survive.

When asked about the single greatest challenge they face, women responded that they do not have enough money to live (45%) or secure key livelihoods such as suitable shelter (10%), enough food (6%), or enough water (3%). This aligns with figures reported in previous vulnerability assessments for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.[30]

"I need nothing but work. Work allows you to preserve your dignity and self-respect." – HADEEL

Income and Employment

This study found that only 1% of female Syrian refugees said they have a work permit, though 13% said they were working either full or part time. Thirty five percent (35%) reported that their household had income from salaried labor from either themselves or another person in the household.In general, women living in female-headed households were 30% more likely to be working either full or part time than those in male-headed households (8%). Additionally, 42% of women living in female-headed households said they wanted to work more than they currently do, compared to 16% of women in male-headed households.

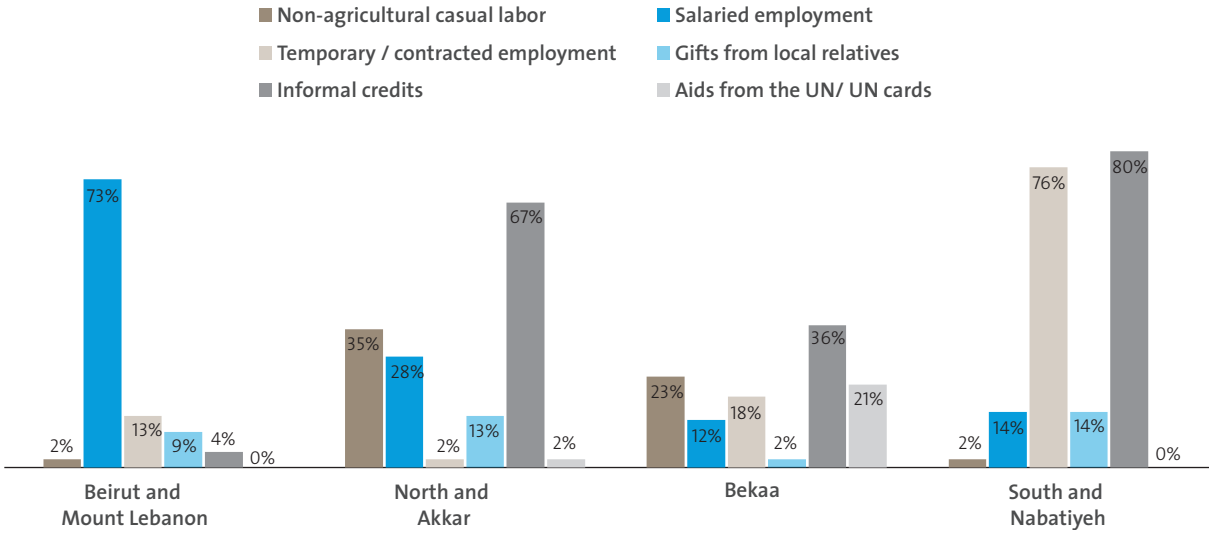
The legal minimum wage in Lebanon is $450 USD per month. More than two-thirds (68%) of women in this study reported that their monthly household income is less than $500 USD. This varied substantially by geographic area: in the South and Nabatiyeh and Bekaa Valley, more lived on under $500 USD per month (80% and 97% respectively) than in Beirut and Mount Lebanon (52%) and the North and Akkar (42%).

This is unsurprising given that income from salaried employment, defined here as full-time paid employment, was found to be much more common in Beirut and Mount Lebanon than in other regions of the country, as shown in Figure 2 below.

30 World Food Programme,"Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, 2016," December 16, 2016, http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp289533.pdf?_ga=2.85364313.1546748911.1506106105-1750603342.1502915762/

FIGURE 2:

Top Income Sources



Household income from temporary or contractual employment was much more common in rural areas (24% compared with 14% in urban areas) and in areas where salaried employment was lower (76% in the South and Nabatiyeh and 18% in Bekaa, compared with 13% in Beirut and Mount Lebanon and 2% in Bekaa). Income from informal credits was much more common amongst female-headed households, of which 17% reported relying on it as a main source of income compared with 9% of those in male-headed households.

Despite a stated desire amongst many women for greater work opportunities, very few women (15%) were aware of available employment assistance services, and only 3% had accessed these services – among the lowest awareness and access numbers in this study. Twelve percent of women reported that they would like to but are unable to access employment assistance services, likely among the women who said they would like to work more.

In the qualitative interviews, all women expressed an increase in financial difficulties since coming to Lebanon and a wish to work to be able to support their families. Women said that they were looking for jobs but were not able to find them, indicating the importance of employment assistance targeting women. Some women reported that they knew of programs offering artisan training for women, allowing them to earn income from producing handicrafts.

"It is very hard to ask for money from a complete stranger or from someone you do not know very well. Therefore, to find a job is key for our survival." – REEMA

Women reported changes in income-generating responsibilities within their households as a result of displacement, with many reporting that they or other women in their households were seeking work for the first time. Of those who reported being unable to meet basic needs, nearly one in six (16%) reported they had a female household member who had not previously worked, one-fifth (18%) had an adult family member seek employment in a different location, and 6% had a household member that accepted unusual, high risk, or socially degrading jobs. The majority, one-fifth (20%), relied on underage children to supplement their income, suggesting less social shame and greater employment options for children than women.

Cash and Food-Based Assistance

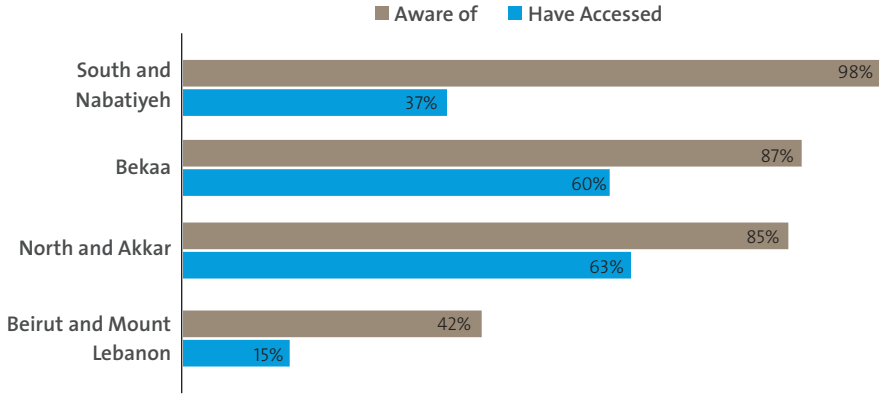
Syrian refugees in Lebanon are highly dependent on food aid. However, food insecurity has progressively worsened over the years, from 68% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon being food insecure in 2013, to 89% in 2015, and 93% in 2017.[31] Amongst this population, female-headed households face some of the highest levels of food insecurity, with 96% being food insecure according the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), and 61% living without a working member of the family.[32]

In this study, across all households, income from aid was not reported as a major component of household income. Only 15% of women reported that aid was a main source of income for their household in the past 60 days. Dependency on income from aid was higher in rural areas, where 25% reported humanitarian assistance as a major income source, and in Bekaa where the number rose to 34%.

Of the available services, more women are aware of food-based aid (74%), and more had accessed these services (45%) than any other assistance or service in question. However, there are significant discrepancies in awareness of and access to these services across key demographics. Geographic discrepancies persist, as shown in Figure 3 below. In urban areas, more than one-third of women (38%) accessed food-based aid, compared with more than half (55%) of women in rural areas.

FIGURE 3:

Awareness and Access to Food-Based Aid



Access to food-based aid is related to time since arriving in Lebanon: approximately half of those who arrived in Lebanon between three and five years ago had accessed food-based aid services (55%), but this dropped to 28% of those who had been in Lebanon for fewer than three years. In the qualitative interviews, some women reported that they had received food-based aid at some point during their stay, though none were receiving it any longer. There was confusion around how they could access food-based aid and why it had started or stopped.

"We spent a whole day at the UN office, they carried out an interview with us, and asked us basic questions. At first, after this, they provided food supply for a short period of time, but then they stopped. Although I tried to contact them, to tell them that we need help and support, all my attempts have gone in vain. They told me we were not in need anymore and there are other needier families they have to support." – HADEEL

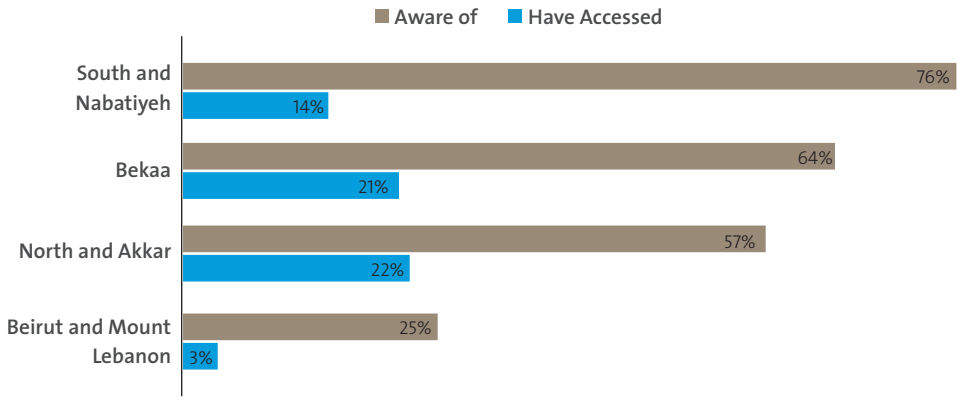
31 Government of Lebanon and UN, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017-2020," 72.

32 Government of Lebanon and UN, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017-2020," 72, 103.

Awareness of cash-based assistance was less ubiquitous, with 52% of women reporting that they were aware of it, and only 15% reporting that they had received it since arriving in Lebanon. Those in rural areas were more likely to know about cash-based assistance, but were roughly as likely to have received it as women in urban areas. Additionally, women outside of Beirut and Mount Lebanon were much more likely to have received cash-based assistance, as shown in Figure 4 below.

FIGURE 4:

Awareness of and Access to Cash Assistance Programs



Similar to food-based aid, reports of cash-based assistance in the qualitative interviews were infrequent and inconsistent. One woman reported that she received cash assistance ($60 USD) every few months from the church that she belongs to, and another reported she received $400 USD once, several years after registering, and a third said she received cash a few times from an NGO, but it was inconsistent and unreliable.

In the qualitative interviews, women reported needing cash assistance to meet their basic needs, including supplying food to their families, buying clothes, and enrolling their children in education.

"Our financial situation is very critical. I often borrow from nearby stores, whenever I do not have the required financial resources to buy the food that my children need." – REEMA

Meeting Household Needs on a Low Income

To cope with inadequate income and limited availability of aid, 79% of women reported that their household had to borrow money to meet household needs. Women in female-headed households generally report using many more negative coping mechanisms than male-headed households.

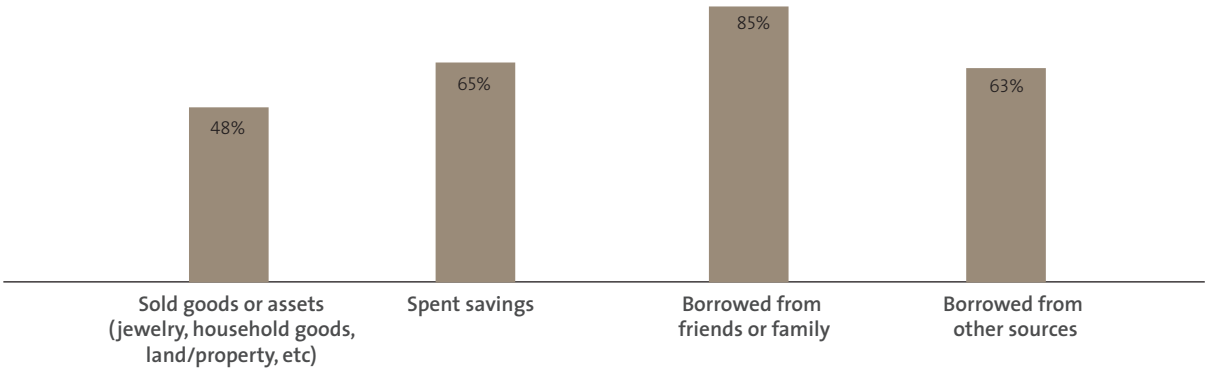
Households living in Beirut and Mt. Lebanon were less likely to report borrowing money, and were more likely to have salaried employment and higher incomes. However, the participants in-depth interviews from these areas all described borrowing on a monthly basis as necessary to make ends meet.

"When we are out of money and still have financial commitments that we need to respect at the end of every month, we often resort to borrowing money from neighbors." – HANAN

When they borrowed money, half borrowed from family members (49%) or friends (43%) in Lebanon. Borrowing from friends and family in Lebanon was less common among those who had recently arrived in Lebanon, likely because recent arrivals are less likely to have networks in their host country and may not have depleted their savings or sold off their assets.

FIGURE 5:

Financial Coping Mechanisms of Those Who Report Being Unable to Meet Basic Needs

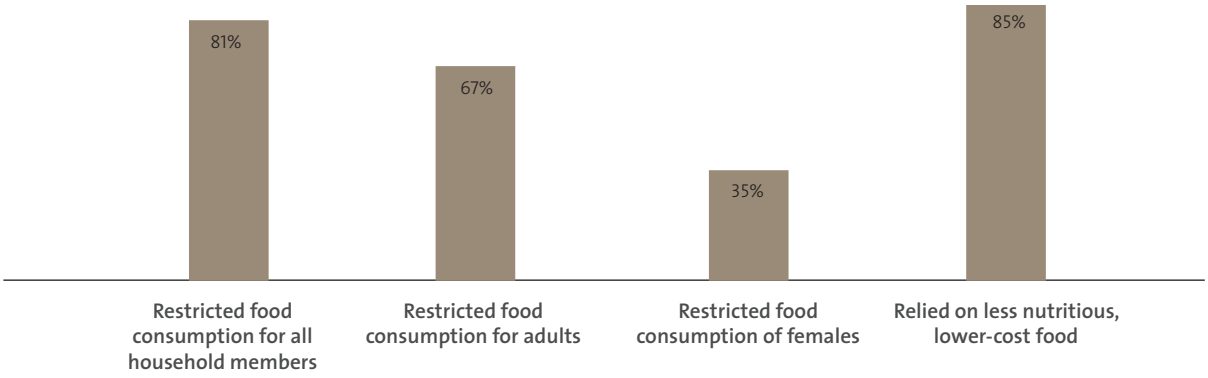


At the time of the survey, 39% of women reported that their household relied on informal credits from shops, friends, and hosts as a main source of income. This was more common in rural areas (50%) than in urban areas (31%), where employment rates and household income levels were lowest.

Among the 79% who reported that they had been unable to meet the basic needs of their household, most made sacrifices with regards to food and nutrition, as shown in Figure 6 below.

FIGURE 6:

Food-Based Coping Mechanisms of Those Who Report Being Unable to Meet Basic Needs



As noted previously, one-fifth (20%) of those unable to meet basic needs relied on income brought in by underage children to supplement their household income. However, this was not the only way in which children were impacted by the inability to earn an income that meets basic needs. Withdrawing children from school was also common (19%). Previous research shows that nationally, attendance rates of Syrian refugee children between 6 and 14 years is 52%,[33] however, for those ages 15 through 17, the numbers drop dramatically, with slightly more Syrian refugee boys (17%) than girls (15%) attending school.[34]

"None of the children in my family go to school. We simply cannot afford it." – ZEINA

33 World Food Programme, "Vulnerability Assessment," 27.
34 World Food Programme, "Vulnerability Assessment," 28.

Where children were withdrawn from school, it was more likely to be the male children (44%) or both male and female children (41%), rather than the female children alone (13%). This was perhaps because male children are more likely to contribute to household cash income: of the women who reported they relied on children to contribute to family income in the past six months, 75% reported that they relied on male children compared with 15% who reported that they relied on female children. Previous studies have reported that Syrian children now face an increased risk of labor exploitation because of the declining economic situation,[35] with 7% of Syrian refugee children working.[36]

In addition to relying on children to contribute to household income, 7% of women reported arranging marriages for their underage children as a mechanism for coping with their inability to meet the basic needs of the household. Three quarters (74%) reported that female children were the ones to be married, compared with just 11% who reported that male children were married.

In the in-depth interviews, women referred to struggling to enroll their children in education, or to pay the associated fees. Some reported that they could not find a school that would take their children, while others said that their children were presently enrolled. However, these women feared that they would have to withdraw their children from school in the near future because of lack of money.

"I have 2 children, a 7-year-old and a 10-year-old. Now both are enrolled in school, but if I need to, I will have to let them drop out." – REEMA

35 International Labour Organization (ILO), "Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Their Employment Profile," 2013, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_240134.pdf.

36 Compared to 2% of Lebanese children working pre-conflict. Source: Government of Lebanon and UN, "Government of Lebanon and the United Nations (UN), "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017-2020," 103.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN HOUSEHOLD AND THE COMMUNITY

Women report relatively low levels of engagement in financial decision making within the household, with increased engagement in decision making over 'family' related issues. However, overall, women did report increased engagement and a greater voice in household decision-making since leaving Syria, due to changing inter-family dynamics.

In general, men were perceived as better able to influence community decision-making, though close to half of the women interviewed stated that they are able to influence community decision-making. A small number reported taking on new leadership roles within their communities since leaving Syria.

Role in the Household

When asked about their role in household decision-making, over half (52%) stated that they are not involved in making financial decisions in the household. One-fifth (19%) reported that they are entirely responsible for financial decisions, though the majority of these women were also the heads of their households; 29% reported that they jointly made financial decisions with their husbands.

Women said that they have slightly more engagement in family-related, non-financial decision-making than in financial decision-making, with 39% reporting that decision-making responsibility is shared, 31% saying it is the responsibility of their husband only, and 20% saying that they themselves are entirely responsible.

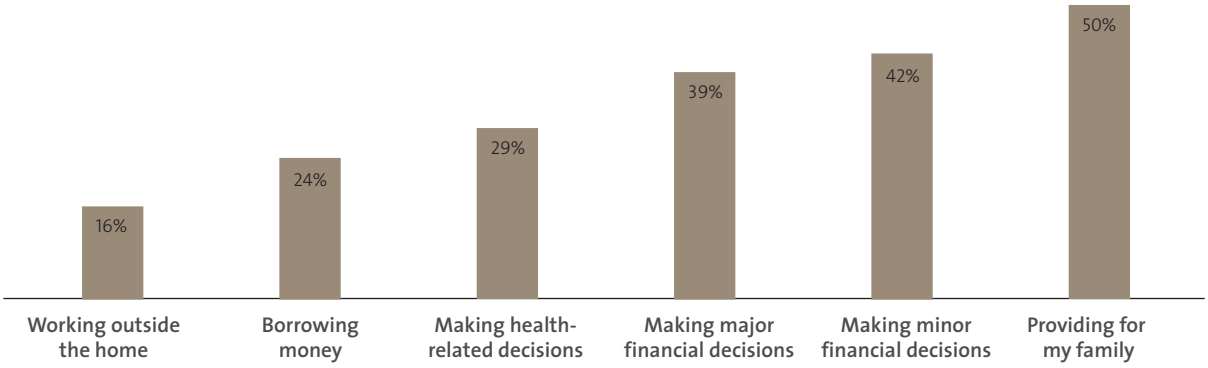
Women who are the heads of their households reported that they are more likely to lead decisions on financial and family matters, while women who have a male head of household are more likely to engage in only family matters. The majority of female household heads in this study said they are both the primary family decision-maker (82%) and the primary financial decision-maker (78%), women who were not the sole head of their household reported being more likely to have a role in family decisions (57%) than financial decisions (46%).

"Previously, in Syria, I was a housewife and nothing more. I never used to leave the house, maybe only once a week. I never worried about anything because my husband took care of everything. But here in Lebanon things have changed... I have to work. It is not easy." – TALA

When asked to compare their role in household now to before the Syria conflict, the majority of respondents (83%) reported that they now had a larger role, with just 15% reporting that nothing had changed and 2% reporting that their role had decreased. Ninety-two percent (92%) reported having taken on more responsibilities in their households or communities since the crisis, and women also reported working in greater numbers in displacement. Additional responsibility typically constituted in duties related to providing for their families, including interacting with aid and service providers, as can be seen in Figure 7 below.

FIGURE 7:

New Responsibilities Women Report Taking on Compared to Before the Syria Crisis



The qualitative findings support this, where women expressed that they had more responsibility now than they did before the Syria crisis. While some women found this empowering, generally women said this caused them much more stress and worry.

"Previously, in Syria before the crisis, I didn't worry about anything, all matters were resolved and fixed without my interference and involvement. However, when we came to Lebanon, things changed. Now, I have new responsibilities to deal with." – HADEEL

Despite not always claiming responsibility for decision-making, the majority of women (62%) felt that female Syrian refugees could influence decisions that are made in their households. In the qualitative interviews, women tended to agree with this sentiment, reflecting that when compared to before the Syria crisis, they felt they had much more of a voice within their households, even if the ultimate decision was taken by their male counterparts.

Role in the Community

Overall, men were perceived by women as better able to influence decisions made in the community (78%) than women (45%). In the South and Nabatiyeh, respondents had greater confidence in a woman's ability to influence community decisions (77%), and all women in this area (100%) believed that men can influence community decisions, perhaps suggesting a deeper engagement in community decision-making in general in this geographic area.

"My role and power are limited to matters related to my household and family. I have no influence or impact beyond the walls of my house. Our society favors men over women, which is unfair and unjust." – REEMA

Forty-two percent of women felt that female Syrian refugees can serve as leaders in their community, and half (53%) believed that men would accept female community leaders. Six percent (6%) reported that they had taken on a role as a community leader that they did not have prior to the Syria crisis; almost all of these were located in Bekaa. In the qualitative interviews, some had a positive outlook on the role of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon because the greater freedom afforded to women in Lebanon may help change Syrian communities.

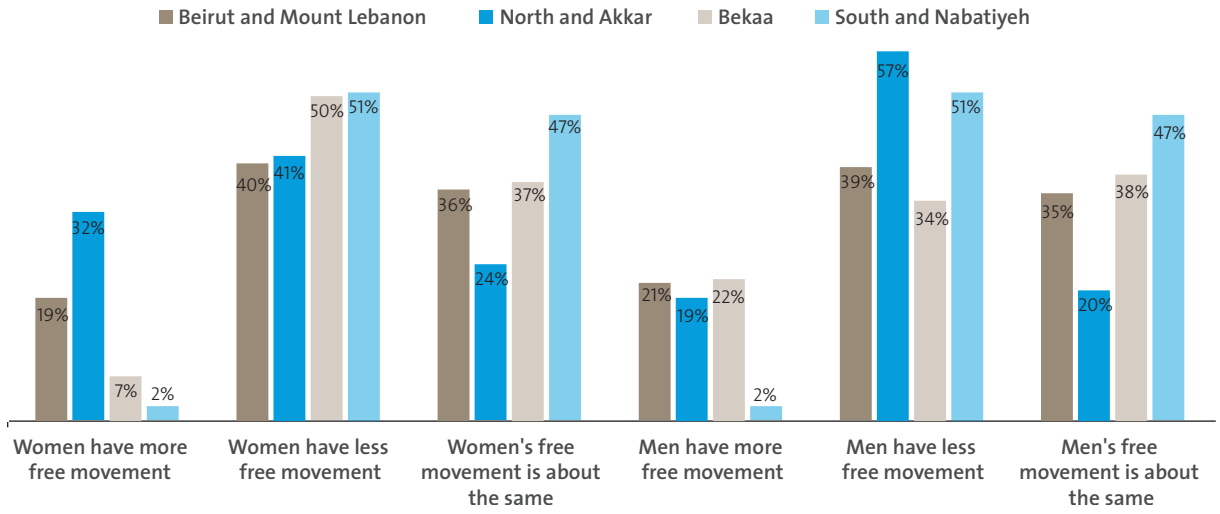
"Once we came to Lebanon, Syrian women realized that women could be more active in society. We started to look and see clearly, how things are versus how they should be. Now, Syrian women have realized that they can make important decisions, they can work, be financially independent. After the Syria crisis, women felt the need to quit their comfort zones, take a step forward, and become active members of society, not relying on anyone for help. Look at women in Lebanon: they are very active and autonomous" – HADEEL

Freedom of Movement

Though over half of women (56%) said that men and women were equally able to move freely in their community, one-third (30%) felt that men could move more freely than women. This varied substantially by geographic location, with more women in Beirut and Mount Lebanon and the North and Akkar believing that men had more freedom of movement than women. There was also regional variation when women were asked to compare current freedom of movement to before the Syria conflict, as shown in Figure 8 below.

FIGURE 8:

Women's Perceived Comparative Freedom of Movement of Men and Women



In the qualitative interviews, women reported that their status as secondary citizens in Lebanon, along with un-renewed papers, seriously restricted their movement. Some women said their husband's fear for their safety was also a factor, as was lack of access to public space. The only women to report that she had more freedom of movement compared to when she was in Syria cited her divorce as the driving factor, demonstrating the power men hold over women in the private and public sphere.

"Because we cannot renew our residency permit, we are always afraid of being caught. As a woman, being caught by authorities is not a pleasant thing. When I was in Syria, I was more comfortable, I was able to move freely, go whenever I want. Here in Lebanon, I am handcuffed: my husband doesn't let me move freely, I can't find a job or go out at night, and I don't feel safe or secure." – REEMA

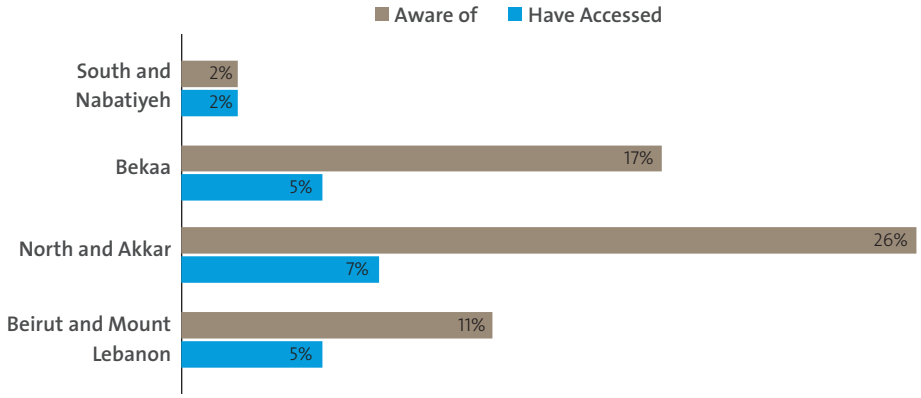
The high cost of transportation was also cited in qualitative interviews as placing additional restrictions on women's freedom of movement, where women reported that the cost of transportation affected their ability to go anywhere, and that in family household decision making, men's transport needs were often prioritized over women's.

"It is difficult to move in Lebanon. The public transportation is expensive and I am a woman I can't go out from home alone. I could be physically harassed or abused." – ZEINA

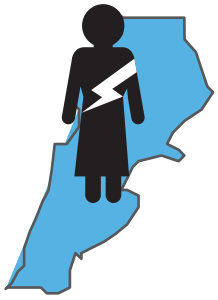
In the quantitative study, access to transportation services was lower than that of any other service discussed, potentially due to low awareness levels. Sixteen percent (16%) of respondents were aware of transportation services for Syrian refugees in Lebanon, though this number is highly dependent on location, as shown in Figure 9 below. Only 5% percent of women reported having accessed transportation services.

FIGURE 9:

Awareness of and Access to Transportation Services



In addition, inability to access transportation presents a barrier to accessing other services: 10% of women reported that being unable to afford transportation kept them from accessing services that they needed, with 25% reporting that their access to services would be enabled by more convenient locations or mobile service delivery.



63% of women said that VAW was a problem in the Syrian refugee community in Lebanon, and 37% said it has increased since the start of the Syria crisis. 15% said they or someone in their household had experienced an issue with their safety in Lebanon.

24% came from Aleppo, 18% from Homs, 12% from Hama, 11% from Idlib and 9% from Al-Raqqah.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

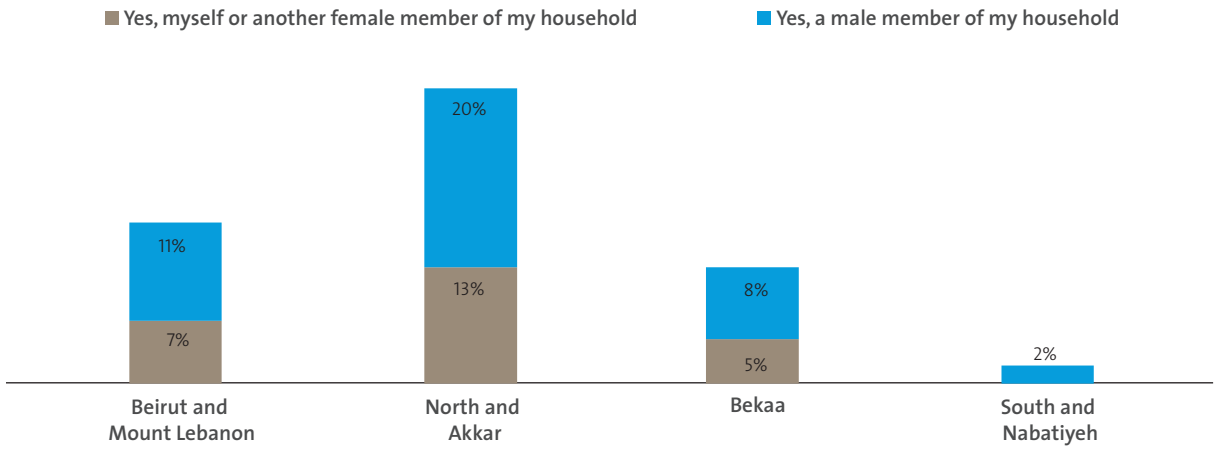
This study suggests that violence against women is a common security issue in Syrian women's lives in displacement in Lebanon, and that incidents are increasing. Sexual violence was a feature of the discussions, and in exploring where violence occurs it was clear that the most common forms of violence take place predominantly in what is seen as the 'private' or domestic sphere – within homes, between neighbors, and with landlords. Women did report public security issues, and noted that men were more likely to be the victim of these than women, but these were reported at lower rates than violence against women, such as domestic violence.

Nearly two-thirds of women interviewed (63%) reported that violence against women (VAW) was a problem in the Syrian refugee community in Lebanon, and 37% said it has increased since the start of the Syria crisis.[37] Fifteen percent (15%) of women reported that they or someone in their household had experienced an issue with their safety while in Lebanon, most often verbal harassment, community disputes, or displacement/eviction.

When discussing public safety issues, 7% of women stated that violence had occurred to them or another woman in their household; 12% stated that it had occurred to a male member within their household. As with other topics, there is significant geographical variation in experience of safety issues, with those in the South and Nabitiyeh reporting almost no safety issues, as seen in Figure 10 below.

FIGURE 10:

Women Reporting a Household Member Experienced a Safety Issue

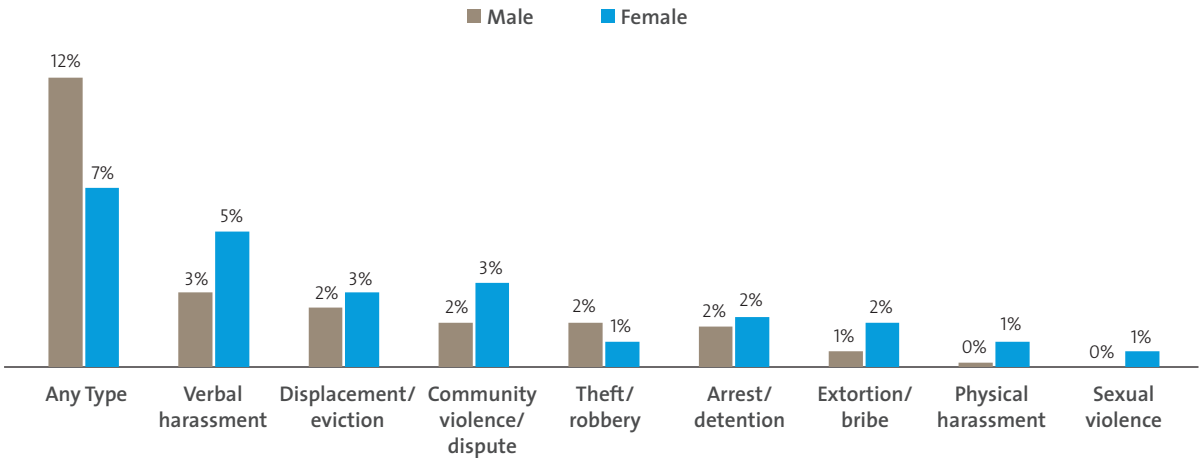


37 In line with a do no harm approach, respondents were not asked directly if they themselves had experienced domestic or sexual violence.

In terms of the type of safety issues reported, when women reported that they or another household member had experienced a safety issue in the last six months, it was most often verbal harassment, eviction, or community disputes. In general, women reported men and women were the victims of similar types of safety issues, as shown in Figure 11 below.

FIGURE 11:

Type of Safety Issue Experienced by Gender of Victim



Similarly, in the qualitative interviews, women reported that verbal harassment was common, even expected, although they did not always consider this to be a "safety issue". Only one women reported that she had experienced something she would categorize as VAW, perpetrated by a member of the host community. The woman said she had not reported it as she was afraid to tell anyone in case it resulted in violence or her out-of-date papers being discovered.

"When we first got to Lebanon, my ex-husband and one of my relatives used to harass me verbally. I never reported any of these cases. We are family. And the violence was only verbal." – HADEEL

Four percent (4%) of women who reported that they or another female member of their household had experienced a safety issue characterized the experience as sexual in nature, and no incidents of this nature were reported with male household members. However, one-quarter of women (27%) said that violence against Syrian women can be sexual in nature, with far fewer married women (23%) than unmarried women (43%, including those that are single, divorced, and widowed) saying violence can be sexual, indicating the particular vulnerability of women among this group to sexual violence.

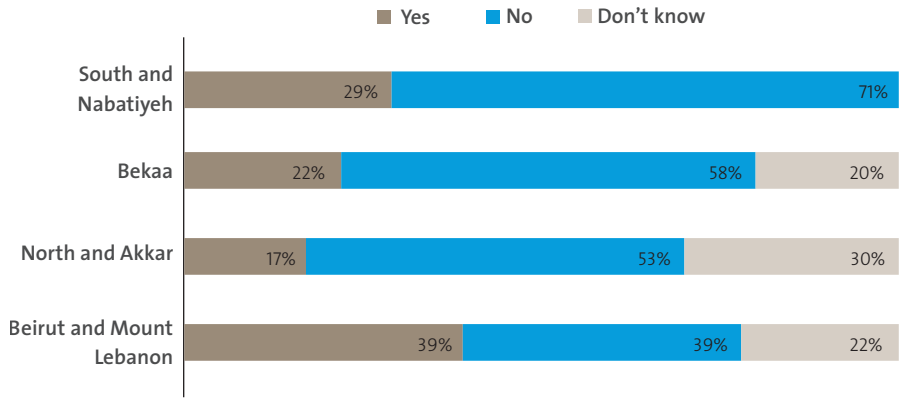
Additionally, those that reported a female household member had experienced a security issue were more likely to say that VAW can be sexual in nature (50%, compared with 25%) suggesting that actual incidence rates may be higher than what was reported in this study.

"I have never been sexually aggressed, only verbally. If I were old, no one would talk to me in an inappropriate manner. Also, because I wear a veil, I feel that it is an additional reason that people harass me verbally, because I am different." – TALA

Perceptions of the sexual nature of VAW also varied by location, with women in Beirut and Mount Lebanon more likely to say that violence can be sexual in nature than women in any of the other three areas of Lebanon, as shown in Figure 12 below.

FIGURE 12:

Believe Violence Against Women Can Be Sexual in Nature

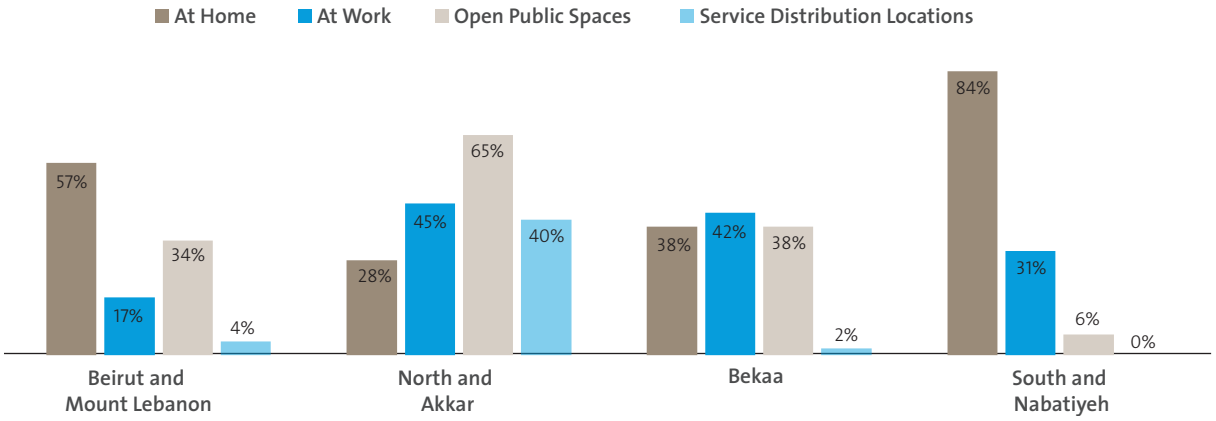


Nearly half (47%) of safety issues were attributed to relations with the host community, and an additional quarter (25%) were attributed to landlords, with only 11% saying safety issues were caused by the refugee community. However, women who live outside of informal settlements were more likely to cite the refugee community as the source of security issues (16%) than women who live in informal settlements (3%).

Half of women (48%) reported that the risk of VAW is greatest at home, however perceived risks vary by location, with those in Beirut and the South and Nabatiyeh more likely to say VAW happens at home and 40% of those in the North and Akkar saying it happens at service distribution locations, as shown in Figure 13 below.

FIGURE 13:

Location of Greatest Perceived Risk of Violence



A large number of women (38%) say that, when violence against women happens, it is not reported on or spoken about. Sixteen percent (16%) stated that VAW is reported to the police, with 14% stating it is reported to a victim support organization, and 14% saying it is reported to a male family member or relative. This highlights continued challenges in ensuring accountability for the perpetrators of violence against women, and issues of shame and silence – heightened by being a refugee – that survivors live with.

"I am living in a dilemma. I do not want any confrontation between my husband and the stalker. I do not want any problems. Plus, my husband's residency in Lebanon has expired and we cannot renew it for lack of money and absence of potential guarantor. I can neither tell the police, nor my husband." – HANAN

In the in-depth interviews, women said that cases of violence or harassment, whether verbal or physical, were rarely reported to authorities, mainly because Syrian refugees were afraid that negative actions would be taken against them, even when they weren't the perpetrators. If violence was reported, women were not confident that any action would be taken to punish perpetrators, mostly because they believed that Syrians were seen as second-class citizens by Lebanese people as well as by the authorities.

"It is different here. In Syria, the state is responsible for the well-being of its citizens. However here in Lebanon, Lebanese authorities do not feel concerned about the well-being of Syrians, because we are refugees." –TALA

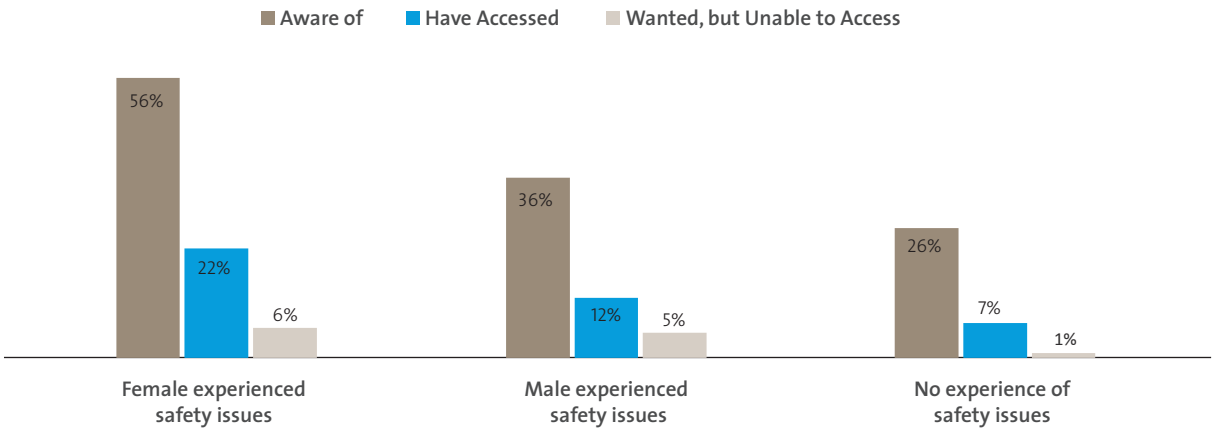
Only 28% of women were aware of VAW prevention and response services and even fewer - 8% of women - had accessed such services themselves. This is consistent with the literature, which contends that utilization is low despite coverage perhaps because victims are unwilling to report the violence.[38,39]

Awareness of VAW support services was high among women who had a household member that had experienced a safety issue, as show in Figure 14 below, suggesting that at least some women who experienced safety issues are aware of services to support them. Additionally, 22% of women who reported that a woman in their household had experienced safety issues had accessed VAW prevention services compared to 7% of those whose household had not experienced such safety issues, signifying that when safety incidents occur, some women do seek help.

FIGURE 14:

Awareness of, Access To, and Inability to Access VAW Support Services

By Household Experience of Safety Issues

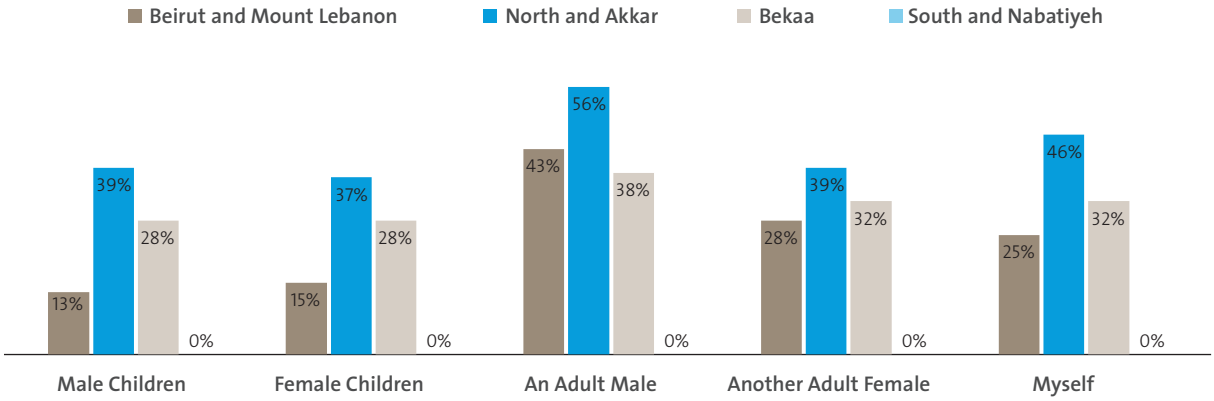


38 Samari, 262.
39 Masterson, 6.

On the whole, perceived lack of safety reduces the free movement of refugees. Nearly one in three (30%) reported that lack of safety had inhibited their own movement, with more reporting that it restricted adult male household members than female household members or children. As with other topics, there are stark regional differences in the experience of restricted movement due to safety concerns, as shown in Figure 15 below, most notably, there were no reported reductions in freedom of movement for women or their household members in the South and Nabatiyeh.

FIGURE 15:

Reduction in Household Member Freedom of Movement due to Safety Concerns



Free movement is particularly limited for those 15% of women whose household had experienced a safety issue. Of women who reported that they or a female household member had experienced a safety issue, 72% reported that their mobility had been personally reduced, 58% reported that the mobility of another adult female household member had been reduced, and 39% reported that the mobility of female children had been reduced.

HOST COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Lebanon currently accommodates a refugee population that is one-third of the size of the host country population, and as such assumes the burden of these refugees on a scale incomparably larger to that of neighboring countries. Lebanese host communities feel this affects competition for limited jobs and social services, which were strained even before the crisis. However, more worrisome than the economic and social strain is the destabilizing effect that refugees have in an already fragile and volatile situation. According to the International Labour Organization, competition over job opportunities is one of the most urgent challenges facing host communities,[40] and though fears may be misplaced, many Lebanese have reported that insecurity had increased dramatically as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees.[41]

"There is this prevalent idea among Lebanese that Syrians are bad, we have no value, and are here to ruin their country. There is sort of social tension between refugees and host communities." – ZEINA

Despite reporting that nearly half of all safety issues are caused by the host community, only one fifth (17%) considered the relationship between host community and refugees to be poor or hostile. Among those women who reported that a woman in their household recently experienced a security issue, 42% characterized relations with the host community as hostile.

For example, in one of the qualitative interviews, the woman described a family in her area that was known for committing violent acts against Syrian refugees. Men in her household have been robbed and beaten-up by people associated with this family, but the police have done nothing about it.

"The Lebanese people see us as here to compete with them, take their jobs, and threaten their security. They feel superior because we are guests in their country." – TALA

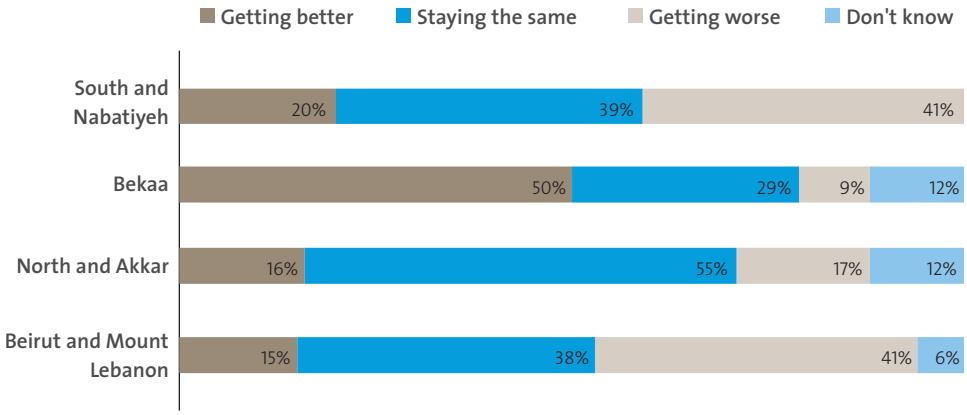
Respondents were split over how the relationship between refugees and the host community has changed over time. However, as shown in Figure 16 below, those in Bekaa and the South and Nabatiyeh were more likely to say that relations were getting better, while those in Beirut and Mount Lebanon thought things were getting worse.

40 ILO, "Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Their Employment Profile," 2013.

41 Tim Midgley and Johan Eldebo, "Under Pressure: The Impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis on Host Communities in Lebanon," Advocacy report, World Vision Lebanon, 2013.

FIGURE 16:

Perception of Change in Host Community Relations



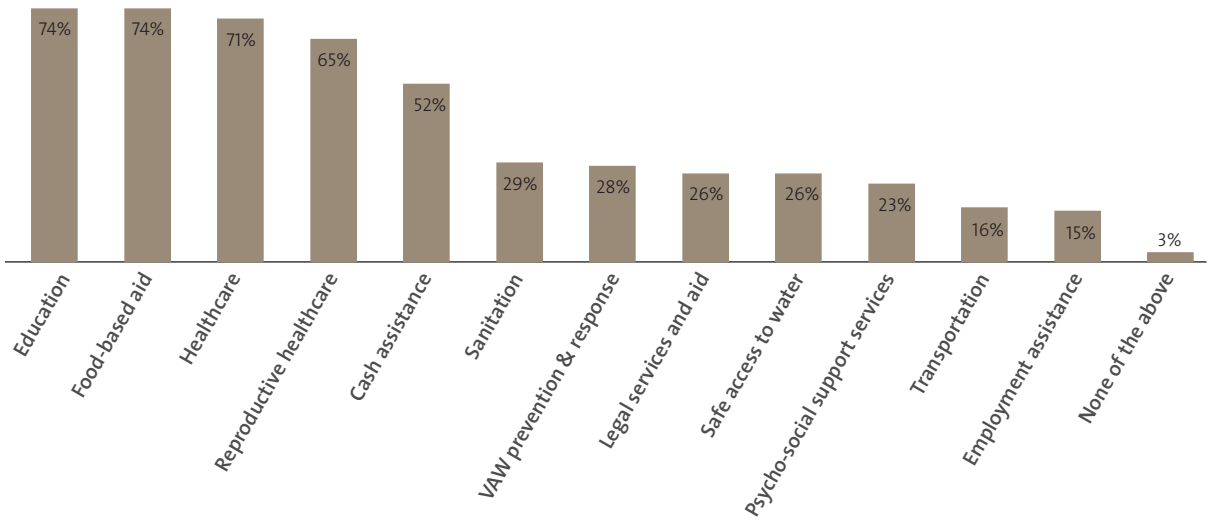
In the in-depth interviews , women generally said that relations with the host community were strained, citing competition for jobs, apartments, and other resources. Similarly, in the quantitative study, the greatest reported source of tension between the host and refugee communities was competition for jobs, with 37% of women citing this as the key issue that drives tensions. Another 8% cited cultural differences, and 7% cited competition for resources.

OVERALL AWARENESS OF AND ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

In our study, awareness of services provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanon varied widely by the type of service, as well as the geographic location of the respondent. The vast majority of women (97%) said they were aware of at least one service the study asked about. As shown in Figure 17 below, the most ubiquitous services were healthcare, education, food-based aid, and cash assistance. In general, awareness of services was higher in rural areas and informal settlements.

FIGURE 17:

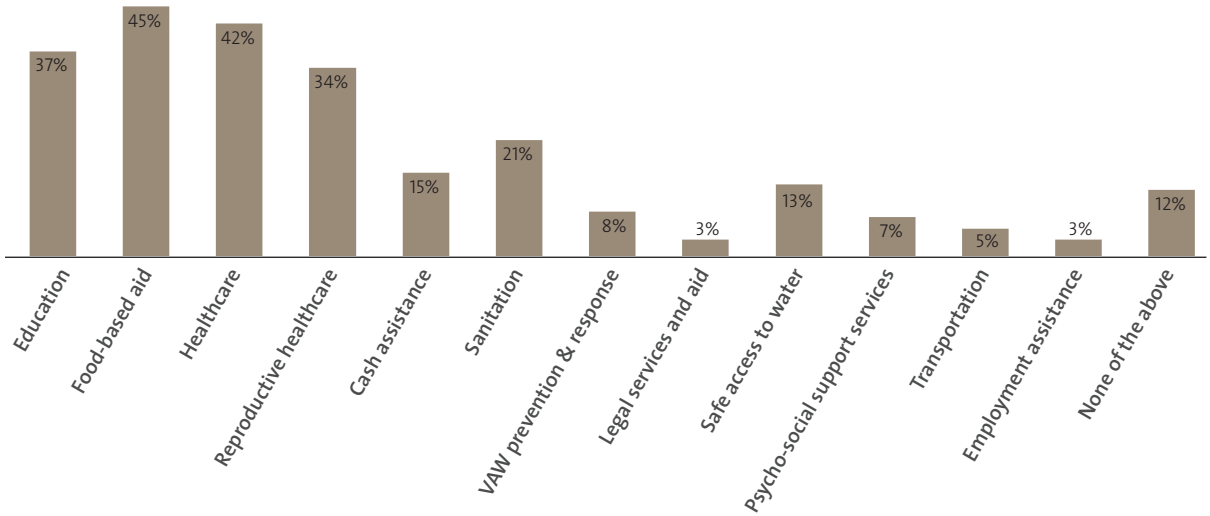
Total Awareness Levels by Service Type



Levels of usage were much lower than levels of awareness of aid assistance: healthcare, education, and food-based aid. Only 12% of women said that they had not accessed any of the services discussed. This number rose to 20% in the South and Nabatiyeh. Additionally, women in female-headed households were more likely than male-headed households to have used at least one service, only 7% of women in female-headed households said they had not accessed any services, compared with 15% of women in male-headed households.

FIGURE 18:

Reported Access by Service Type



Low levels of usage were reflected in the qualitative study, where women said that they had often tried to receive assistance from humanitarian organizations but were either unable to make contact, told they were ineligible, or never heard from the organization.

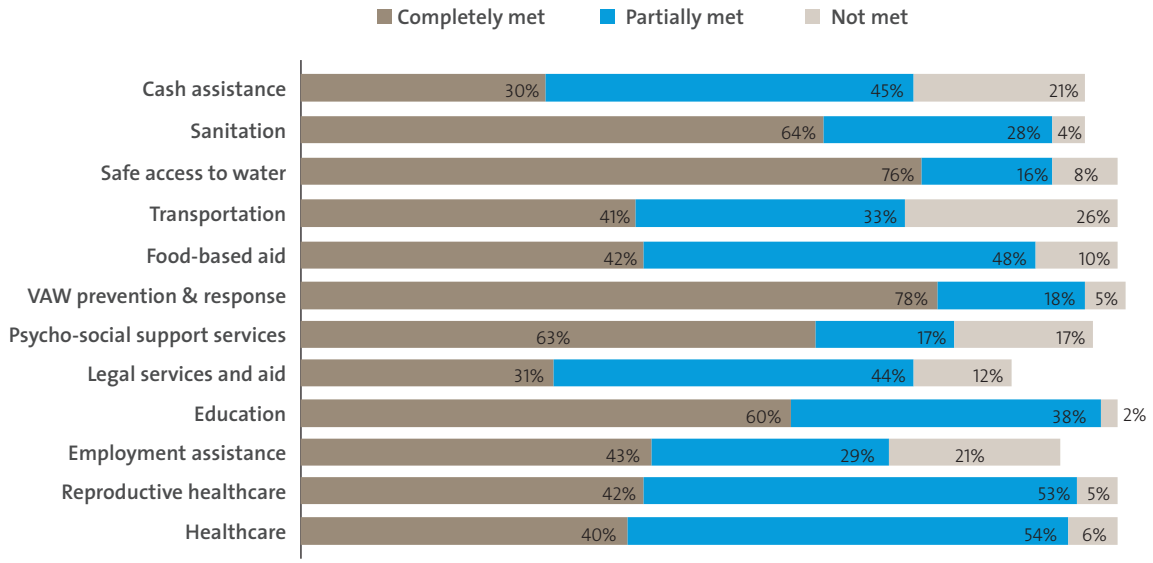
"When it comes to UN agencies providing help and assistance, I went several times to try and get something from these services but they told me that we are not eligible. I reached out to several NGOs, they all refused to help us." – ZEINA

Where women had used services, they generally said that their needs had been met by these services to some extent. This was particularly true of those that accessed psychosocial support and violence against women prevention and support services, as well as access to water and sanitation, as shown in Figure 19 below.

Ninety-three percent (93%) of respondents identified the UN as the provider of services for refugees.

FIGURE 19:

Needs Met by Service Type Accessed



BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND POTENTIAL ENABLING FACTORS

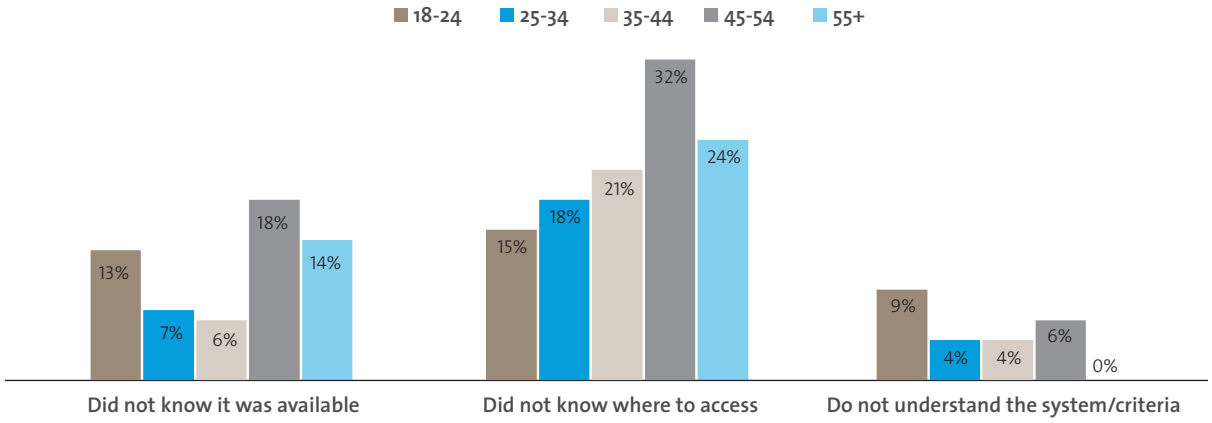
Despite the efforts of providers to reach affected populations, refugees often face external barriers to accessing services. Women and girls encounter more barriers in their ability to access services at each stage of the access pathway: from their ability to identify their individual and/or familial need for services, to learning about the services offered, making the decision to seek services, the physical journey to those services, and finally the experience receiving services. Though some specific barriers are unique to which step the individual has reached, a few are common to each of these steps – namely, a lack of awareness and prohibitive cost.[42] [43]

"When we registered our names, the process was not easy, it was long and it took time. We did an interview – they asked us a few questions and that was it. I only received assistance and support now, two years after registration." – TALA

In this study, lack of knowledge about what services were available (10%) and where (20%) were reported as the biggest barriers for those who wanted to access services but could not do so. This was increasingly true among older respondents, as shown in Figure 20 below. In other studies, women and girls have expressed frustration with the lack of disseminated information on where to receive services.[44] The qualitative interviews also reflected these findings.

FIGURE 20:

Knowledge-Related Barriers to Service Access



42 IASC, "Syria Crisis Common Context Analysis Update, August 2015," August 2015, http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-crisis-common-context-analysis-update-august-2015.

43 For further discussion, see Literature Review sections "Overview of Issues Affecting Women and Girls as a Result of the Syria Crisis" and "Enabling Factors and Barriers to Access of Humanitarian Services Across All Countries"

44 Zeina Zaatari, "Unpacking Gender: The Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan." New York: Women's Refugee Commission, March 2014. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UnpackingGender-WRC.pdf, 13.

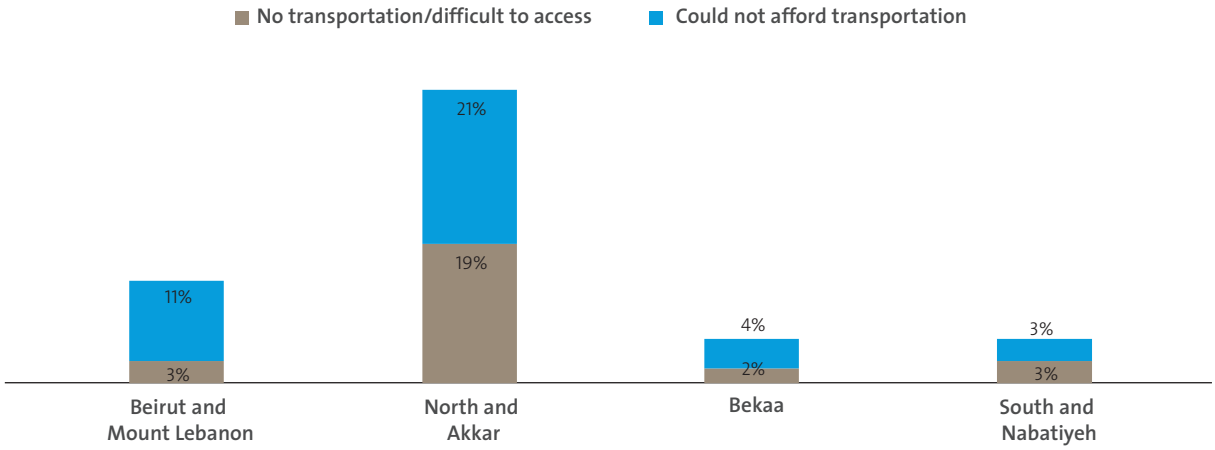
Affordability was reported as a second major barrier: 14% of female refugees reported that they could not afford provider costs. This was particularly the case for single women (32%, compared to 13% of married women), and among those who arrived in Lebanon recently (26% of those who have arrived in the past six months, compared to 13% of those who have been in Lebanon for more than six months). Of those who wanted to access services but were unable to, 21% reported that lowering the cost would help them access services. For 33% of women, the services needed to be provided for free for them to be able to access.

"I found out about an organization offering donations through the UN. They gave me a website where I can fill out an application. However, to do so, I need a laptop and a printer. This was not possible. Therefore, we did not get any grants." – ZEINA

In some areas, services were more difficult to physically access than in others, as shown in Figure 21 below. One in 10 women (10%) reported that they could not afford transportation costs to reach service locations. Throughout Lebanon, women believed that conveniently-located services (13%) and mobile services (12%) would further improve access.

FIGURE 21:

Transportation-Related Barriers to Service Access



These findings echo previous research on geographic accessibility: due to the challenges women face in accessing public space – both due to safety and affordability – comprehensive care services that come directly to refugees without requiring that they travel to receive the services, have proven to be very effective for women to access an array of services securely.[45,46]

"I need supplies and help from INGO through specific channels without the need for us to move as we are afraid of being arrested. Even if on a bimonthly basis, if supplies are provided on a regular basis, this would be very helpful." – REEMA

Previous reports called for gender-segregated services to enhance access.[47] However this study's findings counter this. Only 4% of women reported that either female service providers or a female-only environment would help them access services. When asked what would enable them to access services, a large percentage of respondents (35%) said they did not know what could help.

Additionally, access to education in particular may be affected by institutional barriers for Syrian students: most Syrian students speak only Arabic, whereas the Lebanese education system instructs in not only Arabic, but also French and English, which causes many Syrian students to fall behind or drop out.[48] In 2014, male and female Syrian adolescents in Lebanon reported moderate to major perceived barriers to education,[49] whereas their host community counterparts perceived none.[50]

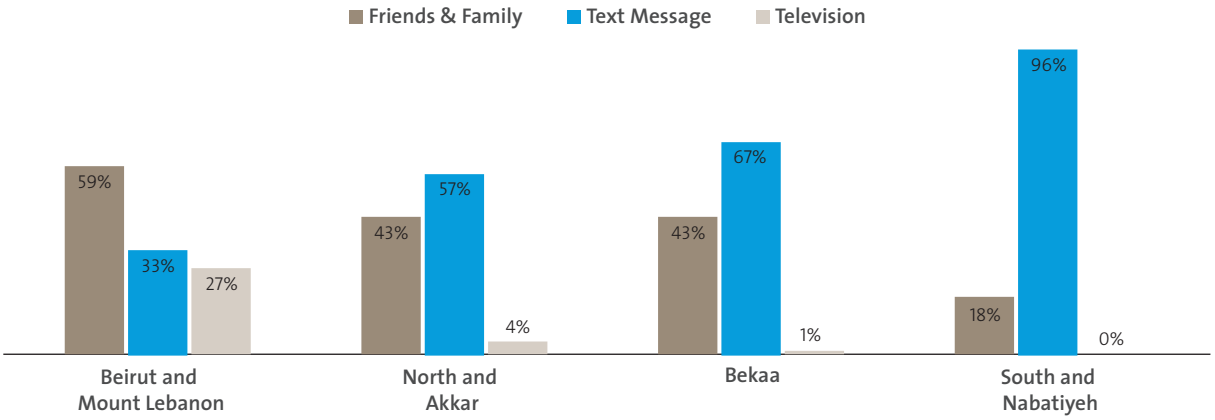
45 Zaatari.
46 Pamela Lilleston et al, "In Brief: Reaching Refugee Survivors of Gender-Based Violence," *International Center for Research on Women*, 2016. https://www.icrw.org/publications/in-brief-reaching-refugee-survivors-of-gender-based-violence/.
47 K Boswall, RA Akash RA, "Personal Perspectives Of Protracted Displacement: An Ethnographic Insight Into The Isolation And Coping Mechanisms Of Syrian Women And Girls Living As Urban Refugees In Northern Jordan." *Intervention*. 2015;13(3).
48 Lorraine Charles and Kate Denman, "Syrian and Palestinian Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: The Plight of Women and Children," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2013;14(5): 98.
49 Types of perceived barriers not specified.
50 Mercy Corps, "Syrian Adolescents: Their Tomorrow Begins Today," Portland, Oregon: 2014, 15.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT HUMANITARIAN RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Women primarily accessed information about available services through their friends and family (45%), text messages (58%), and television (9%). Nearly half (45%) of women reported that they obtain information through friends and family. These behaviors varied by region, as shown in Figure 22 below.

FIGURE 22:

Top Sources of Information about Humanitarian Services



In the in-depth interviews, women reported that they heard about most resources and services through word of mouth. Some women also reported that they received text messages from organizations about receiving resources and services, though nothing came to fruition.

More women found text messages trustworthy (90%), than friends and family (79%); however, both were perceived to be more trustworthy than television (59%). In general, women were less likely to trust text messages as they got older, with 92% of women under 35, 89% of women 35-44, and 82% of women 45 and older finding them trustworthy.

HEALTHCARE

Access to healthcare is a critical need faced by all refugees. Our study found that, while women were generally aware of healthcare services available to them, major barriers in terms of affordability and meeting needs must be overcome for more women to access them.

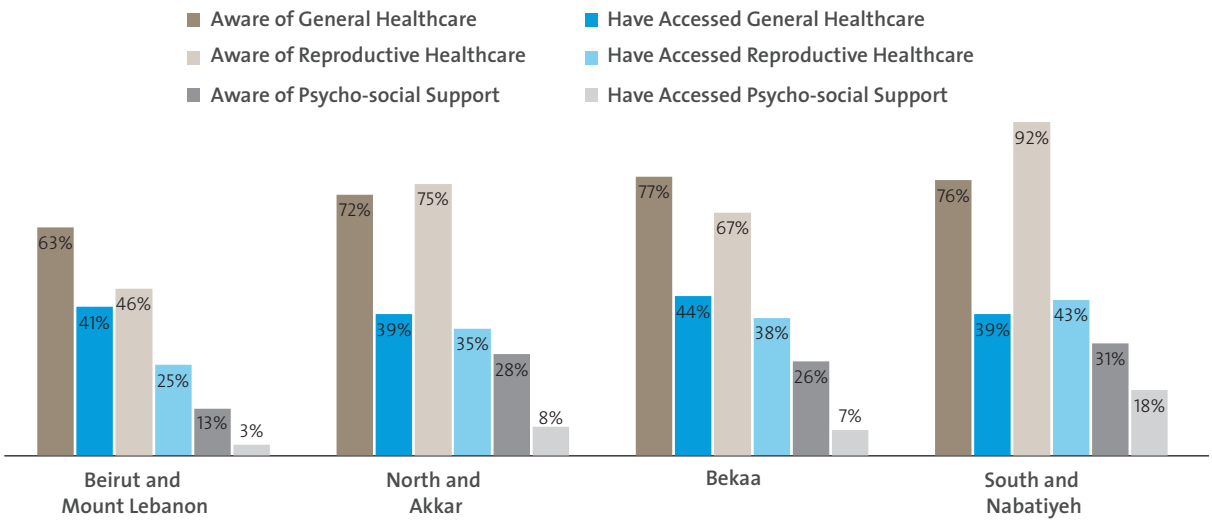
In general, awareness of available healthcare services was much higher for general healthcare (71%) and reproductive healthcare (65%) than for mental or psychosocial support services (23%). Awareness generally improved with the education level of the respondent, and decreased with age.

Similarly, those who had used healthcare services was higher for general healthcare (42%) and reproductive healthcare (34%) than mental or psychosocial support services (7%). Reproductive healthcare services in particular were well utilized among married women (38%, compared to 11% of unmarried women) and by women living in informal settlements (40%, compared with 28% of women living in formal settlements).

Healthcare availability and usage varied geographically, with women in Beirut and Mount Lebanon far less likely to be aware of or have accessed services than those in other regions, as shown in Figure 23 below.

FIGURE 23:

Awareness and Access to Healthcare Services



The qualitative interviews reinforced that healthcare was the one service that all women knew was provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, although not all had accessed it. The women reported that the cost for treatment and medicine were high, and sometimes prevented them or family members from seeking care.

In previous studies, a very high proportion (85%) of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reported poor mental health in particular.[51] This is concerning when the same research shows that only 9% of Lebanon-based Syrian refugee women who are survivors of violence

51 Government of Lebanon and UN, "Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: 2017-2020," 91.

have accessed mental health services.[52] In our qualitative study, women expressed a need for psychological support services regardless of whether they had experienced violence, citing the stress of being forced to leave their homes and being unable to meet their basic needs in Lebanon.

"I need mental and psychological support. Someone to listen to me whenever I am stressed out and worried. Right now I have no one to resort to. This should be provided to all Syrian refugees in Lebanon." – REEMA

However, in this study, access to mental and psychosocial support services was higher where households had experienced safety issues. Only 6% of women whose household had not experienced safety issues had accessed mental health services, compared to 10% of those with a male family member who had experienced safety issues, and 19% of those with a female family member who experienced the same, suggesting that some women are able to get the support they need.

Use of reproductive healthcare for the participants of this study is consistent with existing data on use of labor and delivery services, which show that most refugee women who give birth in Lebanon are able to do so in hospitals (82%), as opposed to at home (6%).[53]

However, these statistics only refer to women delivering in Lebanon and it has been previously reported that frequently, pregnant refugee women will return to Syria, where labor and delivery services are more difficult to access,[54] due to the high cost of delivering in Lebanon.[55] Studies have also shown that only 26% of women who had given birth in the previous two years have received postnatal care,[56] indicating shortcomings in reproductive services that women access.

In addition, some women reported struggling to access needed healthcare services as a result of geographic location and cost. Eighteen percent (18%) of women expressed wanting to access general healthcare services but were unable to. This is consistent with existing literature, which found that 16% of Syrian refugees reported needing primary healthcare in the previous six months but having been unable to access it, primarily due to cost.[57] Seven percent (7%) of women reported that they wanted to access reproductive health care services, but could not. These women were more likely to be less educated. Just 2% of women could not access mental health services despite expressing that they wanted to do so.

"My brother had a good financial situation in the beginning. He lost his job because of a heart attack. He spent 3 days in the emergency room. They said they would not operate on him because there was not an approval from the UN." – ZEINA

Across healthcare types, this study suggests that while cost and other barriers are a reality for many, there is generally geographic access to healthcare services for most refugee women in Lebanon.

52 Masterson, 6.
53 H Tappis, E Lyles, A Burton, S Doocy. "Maternal Health Care Utilization Among Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan." Matern Child Health J. 2017; 21:1801.
54 Dale Gavlak, "Syrians flee violence and disrupted health services to Jordan," Bull World Health Organ, 2013;91(6):395.
55 R Yasmine, C Moughalian, "Systemic violence against Syrian refugee women and the myth of effective intrapersonal interventions," Reproductive health matters, 2016;24(47): 31.
56 Government of Lebanon and UN, "Lebanon Crisis Response lan: 2017-2020," 91.
57 World Food Programme, "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, 2016," 32.

CONCLUSION

Syrian refugees are struggling to meet even their most basic needs in displacement in Lebanon, and women and girls are no exception to this. However, the challenges they face are compounded by entrenched gender inequalities and norms, which constrain their options, access, and opportunities – increasing the risks they face to food insecurity, poverty, violence, and isolation. Whether they were head of the household or not, the majority of women in this study reported taking on increased responsibilities within the household since the Syria crisis, most often in terms of providing for their families (be it in terms of securing aid or working) or making financial decisions. Female-headed households tend to fare worse than most refugee households on issues related to livelihoods, income, food security, and violence, yet at the same time, women in these household also tended to report that they had more freedom than women in households with male heads.

Most women reflected that increased responsibility had brought with it increased stress, yet some women expressed appreciation at the opportunity to expand their role within and outside of the household. Similarly, some women reflected on how the more relaxed culture in Lebanon had provided them with opportunities they would not otherwise have had in Syria. However, this shift in household roles and responsibilities has challenged existing gender roles, disempowering men and putting women and girls at a higher risk of physical, sexual, and emotional violence both within the household and the larger refugee community, adding to the pressures they face.

These risks and the resultant fear has meant that for some women, their husbands have constrained their movements for fear of physical and sexual violence at the hands of the neighboring communities, especially in cases where families could not afford transportation. This fear was actualized by stories of women being abused and exploited most frequently at the hands of those within their own families and communities, including landlords and neighbors. This perceived lack of safety prohibits female Syrian refugees from contributing to their household incomes, accessing humanitarian aid, and integrating into their neighboring communities. Verbal harassment was common to the extent that women and girls have now come to expect it, especially where they are traveling alone.

For the most part, this violence and harassment has gone unpunished. Many women feel that they are unable to report violence for a number of reasons, from lacking proper identification, to fear of retribution or being blamed themselves for the incident, being forced to return to Syria, or lack of faith in the authorities. Alongside a lack of accountability, women report a lack of comprehensive and quality psychosocial services for survivors of violence, perpetuating trauma. Women reported the need for mental health services – both more generally and in response to an incident of violence – that are currently either too costly or not perceived to be available to them.

The stress of displacement, perceived and actual fear of violence within the household and beyond, and the inability to provide for their families are all burdens that women in this study bore. However, despite the struggles they face in displacement, many of them are appreciative of the opportunities they have and optimistic about the potential for the future.

"If empowered, Syrian women could improve their personal situations as well as the people around them, especially their families. On a macro level, the situation of all Syrian refugees could be improved if this happened." – REEMA

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