

# UNHCR Syria Briefing Note:

## Good practices in gender-sensitive programming

July 2022

### Operational Context

The decade-long crisis in Syria continues to affect millions of lives. The security situation in parts of the country remains unpredictable and the economic situation is increasingly dire. According to the [2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#), some 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance, a 9% increase from the previous year. Economic deterioration has become a major driver of needs.

UNHCR in Syria provides protection and assistance to refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), host community members, returnees and stateless people based on identified needs and vulnerabilities. UNHCR works with 28 partner agencies, including government ministries, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national NGOs and UN agencies. In line with UNHCR policy, Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) assessments were conducted for all partners and capacity building plans were developed for partners on PSEA.

In the context of the inter-agency coordination framework in Syria, UNHCR leads the Protection and Community Services Sector and Shelter and Non-Food Items Sector together with relevant line ministries.

UNHCR also co-leads the PSEA and the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) inter-agency working groups of the UN Country Team (UNCT). Among others, UNHCR participates in the inter-agency Gender Working Group. Promoting gender equality remains a UN-wide priority in Syria. The significant progress in gender equality that was achieved until 2011 has since retreated and the gender gap has widened, leading for instance to a significant increase in reported child marriages since the beginning of the crisis.

### Age, Gender and Diversity Approach

UNHCR Syria and its partners strictly adhere to UNHCR's [age, gender and diversity \(AGD\) policy](#) by facilitating equal access to services and activities which respond to the needs of women, girls, men and boys. UNHCR also makes efforts to identify specific partners to work on the inclusion

of LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities in relevant services. UNHCR works to ensure the concerns of LGBTIQ+ individuals are taken into account across different sectors, promoting social and cultural change and engaging in public awareness and sensitization campaigns.

### Selected Good Practices

- **Participatory assessments:** UNHCR conducts AGD participatory assessments and other strategic focus group discussions to consult and engage with refugees, IDPs, returnees and host community members to seek meaningful feedback on issues which affect their lives. In 2021, UNHCR Syria conducted a participatory assessment with 780 focus group discussions held across all 14 Syrian governorates. Over 8,600 people participated in the assessment (63% females) from the IDP, returnee and host communities. The selection of participants was planned to ensure full participation from all population groups including persons with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence and minorities. The results of the participatory assessment exercise are informing UNHCR's multi-year planning and programming.
- **Women's and men's committees:** In 2021, UNHCR supported 33 women committees to strengthen women's participation in community decision-making and encourage them to identify and design projects which will improve their protection situation. Women's committees raise awareness on issues related to gender-based violence, early marriage, domestic violence and sexual harassment, among others. UNHCR also formed men's committees to enhance the engagement of men and boys in the prevention of and response to gender-based violence in communities. Both women's and men's committees engage with their communities, intervene and prevent incidents of early marriage and advocate with parents to send their daughters back to school. Women's committees are vital in disseminating information related to available gender-based

violence services and facilitate referrals of survivors to appropriate services. They also conduct literacy courses for women in local communities to enable them to read and write and have established reading clubs at some community centres.

- **Community centres and outreach volunteers:** Community-based structures such as community centres, mobile units and outreach volunteers are at the core of protection activities in Syria. They are used to reach out to affected populations, assess protection risks and needs using a participatory AGD approach, identify community resources to respond to protection needs, and offer services and support to the affected populations. Refugees, IDPs, returnees and host community members have equal access to all services available at UNHCR-supported community centres including services related to gender-based violence response, child protection, psychosocial support, legal aid and education among others. Mobile teams and outreach volunteers provide services to people with specific needs such as older persons and those with disabilities who may find it difficult to access centres. UNHCR works with over 2,800 outreach volunteers across the country of which 60% are female. UNHCR strives to achieve gender equality among the outreach volunteer network and other community leadership structures in community centres.
- **Community-led initiatives:** UNHCR-supported community centres include programmes empowering people to design and lead community-based protection solutions through local initiatives. In 2021, UNHCR and partners supported 790 women from the IDP, refugee, returnee and host communities in leading and implementing over 100 community-led initiatives. The initiatives benefited 50,800 people in 11 governorates. Examples of successful community-led initiatives supported by UNHCR that promote the engagement of women and girls included educational sessions for children; first-aid training; awareness sessions on harmful practices during pregnancy; making winter blankets and pillows for vulnerable families, elderly people and people with disabilities; and supporting women to learn sewing skills to make clothes, school bags and other items such as stuffed toys for children and families in need.
- **Education:** In 2021, UNHCR provided education cash grants for 4,200 refugee students at primary and secondary school level (69% girls). The education cash grant aims to support refugee families to continue sending their children to school. Investing in girls' education helps prevent them from being exposed to protection risks such as exploitation, gender-based violence and early marriage. UNHCR also supported 85 students (58% female) to attend university through the DAFI scholarship programme in 2021. Most female students are studying in the fields of law, engineering, medical science and health.
- **Livelihoods:** As part of UNHCR's livelihoods programme, UNHCR rehabilitates vocational training schools including a vocational arts school for female students. Curricula include vocational courses for sewing, hand embroidery, clothes design and drawing, in addition to general education subjects such as English, mathematics, physics and computer science. These courses aim to provide women with the skills needed to find a job or set up their own businesses. UNHCR also provides people with small start-up support for businesses, reaching over 600 women in 2021. This programme focuses on empowering vulnerable people including survivors of gender-based violence through business training, mentoring and in-kind assistance to start their own businesses.
- **Menstrual hygiene:** In 2021, UNHCR conducted a pilot assessment on menstrual hygiene management in four governorates to understand some of the challenges women and girls face in terms of their menstrual health. As a result of the assessments, UNHCR was able to identify and respond to the needs of 21,100 women and girls in 2021 by providing risk reduction kits which included essential personal hygiene items.

### Further information

[UNHCR Syria Global Focus page](#) | [UNHCR Syria June Operational Update](#) | [UNHCR Syria June Factsheet](#)

### Contact

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