

# SEXUAL and GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REFUGEES in Jordan

## Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group June 2015

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, almost 4,000,000<sup>1</sup> Syrians have fled to neighboring countries. Over 628,427 of these Syrian refugees have come to Jordan and live in camps and non-camp settings. Additionally, 47,000 Iraqi refugees are also registered in Jordan. Traditional protection networks have broken down, which has increased the vulnerability of women, girls, boys and men to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).<sup>2</sup>

This Briefing Note is intended for distribution among a wide range of actors in the Jordanian humanitarian refugee response to support them to understand SGBV issues faced by refugees in Jordan and the response mechanisms in place. Refugee coordination sectors, Government and non-government actors, UN and non-UN agencies, donors and the media are among the targeted audience.

## SGBV among refugees in Jordan

Numerous assessments have been conducted to better understand the challenges that Syrian women, girls, boys and men face regarding SGBV in Jordan. The findings coincide with the reports generated by the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) Task Force that identifies among others the following forms of SGBV: domestic violence, early marriage, and sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> A prominent concern expressed by Syrian adolescent boys and girls is physical and psychological violence committed by family members.<sup>4</sup>

### Disclosure and Stigma

Survivors are often afraid to speak openly about SGBV and to discuss what has happened to them, because they may face abuse from family and/or community members. Men and boys who have experienced sexual violence are also reluctant to report incidents because of serious stigma attached to SGBV against males. Individuals with specific needs and diverse background face additional social challenges when disclosing violence, particularly people with disabilities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI).

### Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the most commonly reported form of SGBV both inside and outside the camps. The 2014 GBVIMS End of Year Report (2014) indicates that 50.7% of the survivors seeking support services are survivors of physical assault and psychological abuse mostly perpetrated by spouses or other close family members. SGBV incidents are most often reported as perpetrated by close relatives such as spouses or primary care givers. Syrian women have reported that their husbands have to cope with intense stress due to the lack of livelihood opportunities and that this may increase physical and psychological violence against them and against children within the home.<sup>5</sup>

### Early and Forced marriage<sup>6</sup>

Early marriage is a culturally accepted practice for many Syrian refugees in Jordan. Parents believe that marriage might secure a better future for their children and ease the financial burden on families who depend on humanitarian aid. In 2014, the SGBV SWG has noted a sharp increase in early marriages of Syrians in Jordan. Of all registered marriages in Jordan for 2013, 13% involved girls younger than 18 years old - a figure that has remained relatively consistent for the past decade.



UNFPA/IMC Women and Girls Centre, Azraq. Photo: UNOPS/Alison Cassells

1. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

2. Findings from the Inter-Agency UNHCR Participatory Assessments, 2015.

3. The GBVIMS End of Year Report 2014 is available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8326>

4. Safety Audit Zaatari Refugee Camp 2014.

5. Findings from the Inter-Agency UNHCR Participatory Assessments, 2015

6. Forced marriage is defined as "the marriage of an individual against her or his will". (GBVIMS User Guide 2010). Early or child marriage (marriage under the age of legal consent) is a form of forced marriage as the children are not legally competent to agree to such unions. SGBV against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, (UNHCR, 2003). The legal age of marriage in Jordan is set at 18 years as stipulated in article (10) of the Personal Status Law, but marriage above 15 can be allowed through a special approval from Sharia court judges.

Among Syrian refugees living in the country, the rate of child marriages has risen from 18% of total marriages in 2012 to 25% in 2013. This rate has further increased to 32% in the first quarter of 2014. In pre-war Syria, an average of 13% of marriages involved a person under 18.<sup>7</sup> Out of all GBV incidents documented through the GBVIMS in 2014; a significant percentage (32.7%) is early marriage incidents. The majority of those happened outside of Jordan (56.3%), 54.4% of which happened in Syria. Due to the fact that early marriage does not usually carry the same level of stigma as other types of SGBV, survivors of early marriage disclosed this type of incidents relatively easily through safe spaces, registration, referrals, outreach and protection monitoring. It is also important to highlight that survivors of early marriage are often at a higher risk of other types of SGBV.

## Sexual Violence<sup>8</sup>

Humanitarian agencies have found that incidents of sexual violence are significantly under-reported owing to stigmatization and fear of retaliation by family and community members. Women, girls, boys and men who have suffered sexual violence face significant obstacles in seeking support owing to a widespread culture of shame. Out of the total GBV incidents reported through the GBVIMS, only 8.4% were sexual violence. While the majority of survivors of sexual violence reported having experienced violence in Jordan (56.6%), a significant percentage also occurred in Iraq (20%), Syria (16%) and other countries. Efforts will continue to be made to strengthen the implementation of health protocols for clinical management of rape (CMR) and legal provisions in accordance with a survivor centered approach.

## Survival Sex

The protracted nature of the displacement is compounded by restrictions on access to the formal labor market for refugees. Moreover, the fact that female heads of households have less access to work opportunities than those headed by men increases their risk of harassment and exploitation by individuals in positions of influence or power<sup>9</sup> or by those delivering humanitarian aid, which may lead to survival sex.



Men's yoga classes at Collateral Repair Project, East Amman.  
Photo: Alexandre Reisdorfer

## Limited Access to Services

Of particular concern to the SGBV SWG are individuals with specific needs and diverse backgrounds. Women recently widowed, women and girls living in more conservative areas and communities, and women and girls fearing harassment have reported restricted movements. Also, refugees living in informal tented settlements<sup>10</sup> or in villages far from urban areas have more restricted movements. The Informal Tented Settlement Task Force has received the recommendations from the SGBV SWG to ensure that SGBV prevention and response are integrated in the Task Force's work plan. As for areas where outreach to the refugee population is more challenging, some initiatives have been developed including help desks and field missions, opening of women safe spaces and clinics. Also, some female refugees are not allowed to leave their homes without the presence of a male family member because of a common feeling of insecurity. One in three women stated that they felt too scared or overwhelmed to leave their homes at all.<sup>11</sup>

Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis over 628,427 Syrian have entered Jordan, of whom only approximately 20% live in camps. The sheer magnitude of this urban displacement creates increasing pressure on education, health and social services in Jordan. Since June 2014, 22,500 Iraqis were also registered with UNHCR. The government and international organizations are struggling to absorb the costs of the services provided to the increasing population. This has specific implications for the safety and security of women, girls, men and boys and their ability to participate in and access programs. Limited capacities of existing service providers, distance to service centers and limited knowledge of services for SGBV survivors are preventing access to specialized assistance for refugees.<sup>12</sup>

7. A study on Early Marriage, UNICEF 2014.

8. Sexual Violence is a category of violence that encompasses rape and sexual assault. Rape: Non-consensual penetration (however slight) of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. Also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object. Sexual assault: Any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration (GBVIMS User Guide 2010).

9. IRC, "Are we Listening?" September 2014

10. Some refugees, especially those working in the informal sectors and involved in seasonal activities, live in tents outside of urban areas in informal settlements composed of a few households.

11. IRC, Idem.

12. When refugees outside of the camps were asked about knowledge of available services, most (83%) responded that they were not aware of any services available to survivors of GBV in their community: UN Women, idem.

Refugees also express fear of sexual harassment against girls on their way to and in schools, which prevents some of them from attending school. Access to services for people with disabilities has also presented high challenges.<sup>13</sup>

## Inter-agency SGBV Response in Jordan

### Prevention

SGBV actors in Jordan engage in prevention activities at several levels. At the community level, these include awareness-raising sessions, social and recreational activities for women and girls and other prevention activities, including those tailored for men and boys inside safe spaces and developed during 2015. Specifically in relation to the engagement of men and boys, the first workshop on working with men and boys in Jordan was offered to SGBV service providers in May 2015.

The awareness campaign “Amani” was launched in March 2014. The awareness-raising activities of the sub-working group have included the production of key messages common to the protection sub-sectors<sup>14</sup>, which were developed through broad consultation and tested with Syrian women, girls, men and boys. Over 129,000 Amani campaign materials were distributed among 30 organizations. In December 2014, the 16 Days of Activism Campaign against SGBV reached over 35,000 individuals.

SGBV actors in Jordan also work to mitigate the risk of SGBV by undertaking safety surveys and/or participatory assessments in camps and non-camps, operating a protection monitoring system and other concrete measures to ensure that the delivery of humanitarian assistance does not create risks of SGBV across other sectors. In Za’atari camp a safety audit was conducted in the last quarter of 2014 and its recommendations are being taken into consideration by the relevant sectors. In Azraq camp, a safety audit is planned to take place at the beginning of the second semester of 2015.

### Multi-Sectoral Assistance

SGBV actors in Jordan have case managers trained in dealing with SGBV survivors and ensuring safe and confidential referrals to multi-sectorial services. In 2014, 10,837 refugees at risk accessed multi-sectorial services. SGBV SWG members have established 35 women and girls’ safe spaces, where case management and other services such as psychosocial support, legal aid and health care are made available.

Technical and financial support is also provided to strengthen health facilities in delivering quality clinical care, legal aid, psychosocial support and counselling to SGBV survivors. Capacity building of medical, legal and psychosocial personnel is ongoing, as well as measures to strengthen survivors’ access to justice and safe shelter. Training is provided to specialized police (Family Protection Department) and other police departments, including the Syrian Refugee Affairs Department. Partners’ capacities are being expanded to include SGBV services tailored for male survivors. A workshop on inclusion of people with disabilities in SGBV programming prompted the amendment of Standard Operating (SOP) and awareness raising materials. Humanitarian actors were sensitized on access to services for LGBTI individuals.

### Coordination

The SGBV sub-working group’s achievements to date include: the development and endorsement of a SWG work plan; awareness raising and coordinated prevention and response work of its members; preparation and coordination of interagency assessments; development, rollout and update of inter-agency emergency SGBV and Child Protection SOPs; rolling out specialized Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) and the online module within the UNHCR refugee registration database to facilitate safe and confidential SGBV data collection and information sharing.

Several capacity-building initiatives including training on specialized case management have been implemented. Training sessions on the CP/GBV SOPs are conducted for SGBV service providers in all governorates of Jordan, as well as for actors operating in other sectors of the humanitarian response including the health, food, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sectors.

### Advocacy

With the support of the humanitarian community the Jordanian government organized a round table with relevant national and international institutions and actors to look into ways of reducing the risk and mitigating the consequences of undocumented marriages, including early and forced marriage. Among the recommendations that were submitted to the Cabinet and implemented was the exemption of fines for the registration of undocumented marriages conducted in Jordan by Syrian refugees. As of 31 December 2014, the initial exemption period, 1,947 couples (including 1,032 couples in Za’atari Camp alone) benefitted from the exemption and officially registered their marriages in the Sharia Court. Following the advocacy of the humanitarian actors, the exemption period was extended from 13 May to 13 July, 2015. Working with the government will continue during the second half of the year.

13. UNHCR Interagency Participatory Assessment for urban refugees. 2015

14. Protection, Child protection, SGBV, Mental Health and Psycho Social Services

## Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)

During the 2015 planning process, the SGBV SWG decided to include an indicator in the RRP/JRP on PSEA. The objective is to ensure that all SGBV service providers in Jordan are aware and incorporate appropriate measures to address sexual exploitation and abuse, including nominating a PSEA focal point.

A PSEA Focal Points Network, which aims to reduce the risk of exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel and others involved in the provision of services to refugees, has been established under the coordination of UNHCR. As part of the PSEA Focal Points Network, training sessions on relevant Codes of Conduct are delivered to personnel working directly with the refugee population. Focus group discussions with refugee women, girls, boys and men have taken place in the main refugee camps to agree on how best to further improve a safe and confidential complaint mechanism for cases of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse. A checklist for humanitarian actors and a system for confidential inter-agency referrals are also being established.

## What are Inter-Agency Standard Operating Procedures?

The CP/GBV emergency standard operating procedures for Jordan are specific procedures agreed by concerned organizations, which prescribe individual organizations' roles and responsibilities in the prevention and response to SGBV. The procedures include agreements on how, and to whom, to safely and confidentially refer SGBV survivors for specialized assistance.

## What is the GBV IMS?

The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) is a data management system that enables service providers working with SGBV survivors to effectively and safely collect, store, analyze, and share data related to reported incidents of SGBV.

## Media guidelines for Reporting on Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Contexts

These guidelines are intended to ensure that all actors who play a role in facilitating or engaging in media reporting on SGBV are aware of and able to prioritize the ethical and safety considerations that preserve the safety, confidentiality and dignity of survivors, their families, their communities, and those who are trying to help them. Please consult the guidelines at <http://goo.gl/h1oFA8>.

Also, in March 2015, UNFPA Syrian Hub launched a handbook "Reporting on Gender Based Violence in the Syria Crisis, a Journalist's Handbook", accessible at <http://www.unfpa.org/resources/reporting-gender-based-violence-syria-crisis-journalists-handbook>

## The Sexual and Gender Based Violence Sub Working Group in Jordan (SGBV SWG)

The objective of the SGBV SWG is to strengthen multi-sectorial SGBV prevention and response in the context of the Syrian refugee emergency in Jordan. The group is chaired by UNHCR and UNFPA. Members of the Sub-Working Group include UN agencies, international and national NGOs, ministries of the Government of Jordan and national institutions.



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