

ADDRESSING GENDER AMONGST SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON



The humanitarian crisis in Lebanon has had a devastating impact on the lives of women and girls: Lebanese nationals, refugees from Syria and Palestine, as well as migrants. Under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP)ⁱ in partnership with the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, **UN Women works to support humanitarian stakeholders to recognize and address the unequal conditions of women and girls in protracted displacement, inequalities that are underpinned by gender discrimination.** While research conducted by UN Women continues to illustrate gender issues in Lebanese society and institutionsⁱⁱ, this research brief hones into issues of gender inequality amongst Syrian refugees in the country.

Syrian refugee women and girls of diverse backgrounds continue to confront widespread and systemic gender inequality, which manifests in less access to resources, services, and opportunities, as well as higher risks of violence, abuse, and exploitation. While Syrian refugee women and girls share the burden of gender inequity, men and boys are subject to some forms of gender discrimination. Moreover, women and girls are not a homogeneous group. Their unique needs and circumstances must be understood with an intersectional lens, meaning how identity factors such as socio-economic status, age, area of residence, sexual orientation, and physical ability, influence gender inequality. **By summarizing key findings from the gender analysis of UN and humanitarian partner assessments, across multiple sectors, this brief seeks to raise the profile and understanding of gender inequalities amongst Syrian refugees in effort to improve the gender responsiveness of humanitarian action in Lebanon.**¹

¹ This brief has been reviewed by gender and protection actors from UN, INGO, and CSO partners in Lebanon, including members of the SGBV taskforce.

Key Gender Demographics²

- Females are 50.5% of the Syria refugee population in Lebanon.^{iv}
- Nearly 1 in 5 households are female-headed households (FHH).^v
- At least 1 in 3 Syrian refugee girls are married.^{vi}
- 1 in 5 female Syrian refugees have a disability.^{vii}
- 1 in 3 Syrian refugee women have regular access to a mobile phone for their own personal use.^{viii}
- No comprehensive published data on Syrian lesbian, bisexual, queer and trans (LBQT) women.

² The following demographic statistics are aggregated from UN and partner research, surveys, assessments (based on varying degrees of representative samples)

Protection: Syrian women and girls face gender inequality in the protection sphere

Legal Residency and Right to Nationality

Syrian women are 9% less likely to have a legal residency in Lebanon, compared to men (27% and 18% respectively)^{ix}; and Lebanese sponsorship is very rarely granted to women.^x This is in part underpinned by socio-economic conditions prioritizing male residency, and women being one-third less likely to know the procedures.^{xi} Living without legal residency results in insecurity in all aspects of daily life, such as the right to work, access to education and healthcare, and heightened

risk of arrest, detention or deportation. For Syrian women, this also means fear of approaching authorities or accessing justice mechanisms for incidents of gender-based violence. Because by Syrian law women cannot pass Syrian nationality to their children, Syrian women married or separated from non-Syrian men, often lack legal rights to their children and their children can remain at a high risk of statelessness.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

Women report violence against women (VAW) as a common issue in Syrian women's lives in Lebanon, and that incidents are increasing as a result of displacement.^{xii} A large number of women (38%) say that, when violence against women happens, it is not reported, and only about a quarter (22%) of Syrian women access VAW support services when needed.^{xiii} Incidents of SGBV are not reported for several reasons including self-blame, fear of reprisal, and mistrust of authorities. Access to prevention and response services and community support is even harder for women and girls with disabilities,^{xiv} who make-up an estimated 21.4% of female Syrian refugees.^{xv} The SGBV sector continues to remain significantly underfunded in Lebanon; only 30% of funding targets have been reached for 2019 and funding for the sector is decreasing.^{xvi} This mirrors global trends where an estimated 0.12% of humanitarian funding is allocated to violence against women and girls.^{xvii} In addition, Syrian women and girls disclose that sexual exploitation and abuse remains a concern in their communities, and report that local and international aid workers are potential perpetrators.^{xviii}

Sex Trafficking and Prostitution

Amongst known sex trafficking survivors in Lebanon, the vast majority are Syrian women (94% in 2016^{xix}). Reliance on survival sex is a prevalent concern amongst Syrian refugee transwomen due to severe legal, social and economic discrimination against them.^{xx}

Child Protection

At least^{xxi} 1 in 3 Syrian refugee girls are married often as household coping mechanism,^{xxii} which increases girls' risk for marital rape, domestic violence, severe health complications in child birth, school drop-outs, and prostitution.^{xxiii} New research demonstrates the disproportionate burden of working girls in agricultural settings, who work under harsher conditions, are paid less, and are more likely to be exploited compared to boys.^{xxiv} Syrian girls also shoulder unpaid care and domestic work, compared to adolescent boys.^{xxv}

Livelihoods: Despite shifts in gender roles from displacement, Syrian women still work less, for less

Working and Wages

Syrian women are 6 times less likely to be working compared to Syrian men, with labor force participation estimated at 10% for women, compared to 65% for men in 2019.^{xxvi} When women do work, they work in predominantly work in agricultural activities (38%), occasional work (10%) and cleaning (4%), and are paid less than half as much as men.^{xxvii} The gender wage gap amongst Syrian refugees on average is an estimated 0.44³, with an average income of \$209 for men, and \$92 for women.^{xxviii} This gap is exacerbated depending on the sector and region; in agricultural settings in the North, one study shows that women receive at best \$200 per month, compared to men who receive \$990.^{xxix}

Gender Roles

Overcoming restricted gender barriers to accessing economic participation, many Syrian women have become breadwinners in households due to multiple factors of displacement such as increased female headed households and the restricted movement of men.^{xxx} Challenging the narrative that Syrian refugee women do not want to work due to cultural norms, studies find women do want to work, when working conditions are decent and safe.^{xxxi}

Education: Equal opportunities to learn are becoming more equal across gender lines, but not there yet

Gender parity has been reached in primary school, and more Syrian adolescent girls are enrolled in secondary school.^{xxxii} Yet, Syrian female youth are far less likely to be enrolled in education, employment, or training with 79% unenrolled compared to male youth at 41%.^{xxxiii} UN Women survey data shows that approximately 1 in 5 Syrian refugee women in Lebanon report being illiterate, while almost most have completed primary school, and some have completed secondary school as well as university.^{xxxiv}

³ The gender wage is calculated based on more robust methodology. This figure is a rough estimate from VASyR data.

***Shelter:* Syrian refugee women confront gendered vulnerabilities to secure and safe shelter**

FHH are almost twice as likely as male-headed households to live in informal settlements/non-permanent shelters (32% vs. 17%).^{xxxv} FHH report being denied rental shelters at some point due to their FHH status (36% of FHH, according to one study's sample).^{xxxvi} Women report that gender discrimination is due to landlords' concerns over women's inability to afford rent and cultural concerns about their reputation and living alone. Sex for rent is also occurring. Transwomen confront additional barriers due to their gender identity, while there are no emergency shelter options available for trans individuals in Lebanon.^{xxxvii} For refugees considering return to Syria, women have significantly less housing, land, and property rights, compared to male counterparts.^{xxxviii}

***Sexual and Reproductive Health:* Quality care remains unmet for Syrian women and girls**

Sexual and reproductive health needs remain a critical priority amongst Syrian refugees, with high rates of unplanned pregnancies and women reporting not wanting to give birth at the time of event, or at all.^{xxxix} Access to quality pre and post-natal care remains limited and upon delivering, Syrian refugee women report increasing rates of cesarean deliveries due birth and health complications.^{xl} Menstrual health management continues to be a challenge in the response; women and girls lack adequate hygiene information, struggle to afford products, and confront social stigma, which can prevent school attendance.^{xli} Births by adolescents in Lebanese hospitals are disproportionately Syrian girls, 70% in 2017.^{xlii} The gender analysis of Syrian refugee's health in Lebanon appears largely limited to sexual and reproductive health and must be mainstreamed into all health assessments and studies.

Palestinian Syrian Refugees (PRS)

Amongst Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) residing in Lebanon, 52% are women, and 1 in 3 households are female-headed households.^{xliii} 13% of PRS young women are married,^{xliv} and intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence is a concern amongst Palestinian Refugees from Syria. Unemployment rates are higher for PRS women compared to PRS men (68% for women, compared to 48.5% of men).^{xlv}

***Masculinities:* Men and Boys**

Syrian men and boys face vulnerabilities, particularly related to exploitation in the informal economy, and sexual and gender-based violence from diverse actors, which often goes underreported due to social stigma.^{xlvi} Patriarchal social norms and masculinities can be the cause of violence amongst Syrian men; 72% of Syrian men report the need to defend their reputation with force when necessary.^{xlvii}

Gender Responsive Recommendations to Humanitarian Stakeholders

(for Member States, UN and International actors, and Civil Society)

Policy, Planning and Participation

- Integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the humanitarian response, utilizing feminist approaches which address unequal power relations in aid;
- Involve women and girls as active agents and decision makers in humanitarian action; this includes in all phases of the programme cycle: design, planning, implementation and evaluation, in order to ensure their representation in identifying specific needs and how to address them.
- Increase the engagement of women's rights, feminist, and LGBTIQ+ organizations as actors in the humanitarian response (through funding support, ensuring representation, and as frontline actors).
- Support legislative and policy reforms in Lebanon around issues such as personal status codes, family violence law, prostitution and trafficking laws, and abortion rights to enable a gender responsive legal protection environment for women and girls amidst a protracted refugee crisis.
- Promote diverse women in humanitarian positions, especially in senior and leadership roles.

Programmes and Service Delivery

- Provide mobile multi-sectoral, including GBV services, in hard to reach, agricultural settings.
- Establish women and girls spaces, a globally recognized best practice in humanitarian settings to increase females' access to aid and services, especially for GBV survivors.

- Engage women and girls in developing efficient and comprehensive mechanisms for preventing and responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.
- Education: employ more female teachers and ensure adequate WASH and Menstruation Hygiene for girls in schools.
- Livelihoods: provide viable and gender transformative skills training women and female youth, to increase female workers, and ensure with quality and free child care support.
- Health: increase availability of and access to sexual and reproductive health services.
- Shelter and Protection: ensure shelter and documentation assistance specifically targets female-headed households.

Research, Assessments, Analysis

- Utilize feminist research methodologies, which center on women and adolescent girls' issues and involves women and girls in the research process, including data collection, analysis, and integration of findings.^{xlviii}
- Ensure that the perspectives, issues, and needs of women and girls are represented in assessments, and exclusively survey women and girls to ensure their voices are heard.
- Conduct gender assessments and integrate gender analysis in humanitarian programmes, and disseminate findings to stakeholders.
- Collect and analyze SADD (Sex and Age Disaggregated Data) using an intersectional lens, to ensure the involvement of diverse women, including women with disabilities, and LBQT women.

UN Women

UN Women is committed to promoting women's rights and ensuring gender equality in all phases of humanitarian action, and works in crises prevention and response to reduce gendered vulnerabilities, address risks, promote resilience and leverage women's leadership. This is done through supporting humanitarian actors and host governments to address gender equality and women's empowerment in their interventions, modeling gender responsive humanitarian programming, and integrating issues of gender equality in humanitarian coordination mechanisms.

Since 2013, UN Women has been working under the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) to respond to the needs of those affected by the Syria crisis. UN Women Lebanon delivers services through the framework of its global flagship programme initiative, Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access, and Protection (LEAP), which serves refugees and host community nationals, with a strategic focus on women and girls.

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