

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2013/Technical paper.4
11 October 2013
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

**ESCWA Centre for Women
Technical Material - P620**

Situation Analysis



United Nations
2013

Note: This document has been reproduced in the form in which it was received, without formal editing. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ESCWA

13-0251

FEMALE REFUGEES FROM SYRIA IN IRAQ, JORDAN AND LEBANON

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced in September 2013 that the number of refugees from the war in Syria, which started in March 2011, has crossed the two million threshold. UNHCR also declared that there are more Syrian refugees than any other nationality, and that their number will continue to increase as violence in Syria escalates.¹ The influx of refugees into the neighbouring countries has significant economic, social and political implications for both the host communities² and for the refugees themselves. With women and children accounting for up to 75% of refugees from Syria,³ female refugees are especially vulnerable to all forms of abuse and exploitation, at once by the virtue of their at-risk status and of gender inequalities.

This situation analysis explores the conditions of female refugees from Syria in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. The analysis is conducted in relation to four main issues: (1) Gender-Based Violence (GBV), (2) access to food, (3) access to healthcare services, and (4) access to education. It revolves around the following questions: What are the known facts about the living conditions of Syrian women refugees? And what do these facts indicate about their actual needs as they correspond to the four areas indicated above? Ultimately, the broad goal of this situation analysis is to gain some understanding of the effects of the current crisis in Syria on displaced girls and women, which will in turn feed into the preparation of relevant activities at the ESCWA Centre for Women. The document incorporates findings of various surveys, assessments, evaluations and studies that have been conducted by different Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies, synthesized within a rights-based framework of analysis.

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN NUMBERS

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence, and cannot most likely return home or is afraid to do so.⁴ The 1951 Geneva Convention is the main international instrument of refugee law; it clearly spells out (a) who a refugee is and (b) the kind of legal protection and social rights a refugee should receive from the countries that have signed and ratified the Convention. The 1951 Convention also defines a refugee's obligations to host governments along with the responsibilities of certain categories of people who do not qualify for refugee status. Originally the Convention was limited to protecting mainly European refugees in the aftermath of World War II, but its scope was expanded as part of the 1967 Protocol with an increasing recognition of displacement as a global problem.⁵

None of the three recipient countries of refugees from Syria is party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Iraq, however, has its own clearly defined refugee law, namely the 1971 Political Refugee Act No. 51.⁶ Both Lebanon and Jordan, on the other hand, do not have a refugee or asylum law. In fact, the Lebanese 1962 law regulating entry of foreigners clearly states that Lebanon is not a country for refuge and

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/522495669.html>.

² Host countries have become increasingly leery of the presence of refugees and about their capacities to respond to their needs. This weariness could lead to mistreatment of refugees and to repercussions against them. Most recently, foreign ministers of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey took part in a special UN meeting focused on how to reduce the effects of the swelling Syria conflict on their communities and economies. They pleaded for more international support to tackle the huge influx of refugees fleeing the civil war, warning the burden could destabilize the whole region. For more information about this meeting, <http://www.undpi.org/Syria-2011/Syrias-neighbours-demand-greater-international-assistance-for-refugees.html>.

³ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/syria.php>

⁴ <http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOwFqG/b.4950731/>.

⁵ <http://www.unrefugees.org/site/c.lfIQKSOwFqG/b.4950731/>.

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.org.iq/03%20Protection/docs/Refugees%20Profile%20January%202010.pdf>.

as such, refugees are generally treated as ‘illegal immigrants’⁷. Article 26 of this law, however, does allow political asylum.⁸ Furthermore, UNHCR signed in 2003 a memorandum of agreement with the government involving an acceptance of responsibility for determining refugee status and indicating that Lebanon is not an asylum, but rather a transit, country for refugees. Accordingly, refugees are only allowed in Lebanon for a period of up to one year.⁹ Similarly in Jordan -- where the 1952 Constitution does prohibit the extradition of political refugees¹⁰ -- a memorandum of agreement was also signed with UNHCR, stipulating that registered refugees can remain in the country for a period of up to six months while the UN agency looks for a resettlement location.

Jordan and Lebanon have the largest numbers of refugees from Syria, while refugees to Iraq have mainly settled in the Kurdish area located in the northern part of the country. As of September 2013, there were 536,405 registered refugees¹¹ in Jordan, 680,734 in Lebanon¹² and 164,009 in Kurdistan region of Iraq,¹³ noting that many refugees fear legal proceedings if they register.¹⁴ Thus, in Lebanon for example, the actual number of refugees outstrips the number of those formally registered, reaching as many as one million based on the estimates of the Lebanese government.¹⁵

It is important to note that refugees from Syria also include other nationals, including Iraqis and Palestinians who have been displaced for the second time. The estimated population of around 500,000 Palestinians and 750,000 Iraqis, who live in and around Damascus and Aleppo, have been displaced by the fighting: some have become internally displaced, while others fled to neighbouring countries.¹⁶ Other estimates indicate that more than 90,000 Palestinians from Syria -- 74% of them women and children -- have sought shelter in Lebanon’s 12 Palestinian refugee camps.¹⁷ These Palestinian women face the same problems that Syrian women refugees face in terms of repercussions and access to resources.

All Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 80% in Jordan and 50% in Iraq currently live in urban or rural areas, rather than in specialized refugee camps.¹⁸ Furthermore, in Lebanon and especially in the Bekaa valley, UNHCR has noted the appearance of what has been defined as “informal tented settlements”¹⁹ -- local landlords rent land to refugees who build temporary structures of plastic sheeting supported by wooden

⁷ Exception is, however, made for Palestinian refugees. In accordance with Decree No. 11770/1948 dated May 13, 1948 every person who sought refuge in Lebanon as a result of the conflict in Palestine is considered to be a refugee.

⁸ <http://ahdath.justice.gov.lb/law-nearby-Foreigners.htm>.

⁹ <http://www.ndu.edu.lb/lerc/researchpaperseries/CairoStudiesNo2SyrianRefugeesinLebanon.pdf>. P. 14-15.

¹⁰ <http://www.refugees.org/resources/refugee-warehousing/archived-world-refugee-surveys/2009-wrs-country-updates/jordan.html>.

¹¹ By end of July 2013, the UN had registered more than 1.6 million refugees and acknowledges more than 200,000 who are still awaiting registration. In addition, not all refugees approach UNHCR for registration as they fear legal proceedings. <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jul/25/syrian-refugee-crisis-in-numbers-updated#data>.

¹² <http://www.unhcr.org/522495669.html>.

¹³ <http://www.wfp.org/stories/unhcr-and-wfp-chiefs-praise-kurdistan-region-sheltering-syrian-refugees>.

¹⁴ <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC%202012%202013.pdf>. P. 11.

¹⁵ <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/interview/2013/08-22-lebanon-syrian-refugees.htm>.

¹⁶ Rochelle Davis “Syrian Refugees: Lessons from Other Conflicts and Possible Policies”. Wilson Center, August 2012. http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/syrian_refugee_crisis_pushing_lebanon_to_brink.pdf.

¹⁷ <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/lebanon-women-refugees-hardships.html>.

¹⁸ Syria: A Regional Crisis. The IRC Commission on Syrian Refugees, January 2013. <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRCReportMidEast20130114.pdf>. P. 10.

¹⁹ <http://www.unhcr.se/fi/keitae-autamme/pakolaiset/artikel/63875ec944c2ebfa07b25ddfa66598bf/a-million-refugee-children-mark-sham.html>.

frames, with unregulated access to surrounding wells and stolen electricity.²⁰ Most refugees live in poor neighbourhoods that lack the infrastructure to receive them. Some dwell in rundown apartments, while others find shelter in public buildings offered by local authorities, or yet in other unfit spaces including abandoned buildings, barns, or basements.²¹

Female-headed households are prevalent among refugee populations, mostly because men are fighting or unable to leave Syria. In a survey of the Syrian refugees in urban Jordan, an international organization (NH+GO Care) noted that 18.3% of the surveyed group were from female-headed households, 57% of them were married while 42% were widows.²² The prevalence of female-headed households has implications for women, their families, and the wider community as they signal a possible change in gender roles.²³ A September 2013 study by Oxfam and the Lebanese NGO Abaad offers a snapshot of these changing roles, indicating that while women in Syria had traditional gender roles, they have reported increased mobility in Lebanon, mainly because of necessity. For example, women are now the ones who go to aid agencies to ask for help because men feel ashamed of not being able to provide for their families.²⁴ According to the study, the fact that women have to take on these conventionally ‘masculine’ roles is considered by some to be a challenge to their ‘feminine’ identity.²⁵ Nevertheless, “for some other women this has created an increased sense of empowerment.”²⁶ How empowering are in fact these changes and how long lasting are clearly debatable questions.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Syrian women are experiencing Gender-Based Violence²⁷ in all the countries where they have taken refuge. They are subject to GBV “including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, exploitation and abuse.”²⁸ Studies indicate that violence is perpetrated at the hands of husbands, local men, and even service providers.²⁹ However, domestic violence seems to be the most endemic form of violence. Husbands were often identified as the abusers, and in 80% of reported cases in Jordan, the abuser was a non-Syrian husband. This might be an indication that refugee women face greater challenges in the absence of a protective social support of nearby family members, and due to the lack of legal protection.

²⁰ <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/problems-of-deprivation-and-crowding-all-too-stark-for-syrian-non-refugees-in-lebanese-non-camp-1.1516243>.

²¹ Syria: A Regional Crisis. The IRC Commission on Syrian Refugees, January 2013. <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRCReportMidEast20130114.pdf>. P. 10-11.

²² <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>. P. 21.

²³ Norwegian Refugee Council “Syrian Refugee Youth: Drivers of Change—ignored and marginalized” P. 2.

²⁴ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 13-14.

²⁵ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 14.

²⁶ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 4.

²⁷ In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly in its Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) defined GBV “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” GBV therefore includes practices such as early and forced marriage, rape, or forced prostitution and sexual exploitation.

²⁸ <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/Lebanon%20Policy%20Paper.%20Final%20-%20June%202013.pdf>.

²⁹ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 24.

In Jordan, Syrian women refugees have been experiencing many forms of GBV including socio-economic exploitation, psychological abuse, and in some cases a combination thereof.³⁰ Among refugee populations in Jordan, women's exposure to violence increased with age as compared to men: by the time they are 25 or older, women (6.5%) are perceived as more likely to be subjected to physical violence than men (4.1%).³¹ Sexual harassment has also been mentioned as a problem; with women indicating that they do not feel safe going to public places as they are treated differently from local women.³² This situation could lead to more social isolation evidenced by the fact that female refugees are less likely to go outside their house than others, and that one-fifth of girls never step outside their homes.³³ Women also reported that local men are offering to 'help out' in exchange for marrying their daughters.³⁴ They have described their situation as stressful, disorienting, and isolating.³⁵ Refugee women reported also feeling unsafe in crowded shelters because of lack of privacy.³⁶ In Iraq, 14 % of refugee women interviewed in one study mentioned domestic violence as an issue. The majority of them dealt with intimate partner violence as husbands were 74% of perpetrators of such violence.³⁷

Early and Forced Marriages

Rates of early marriage are high among Syrian population groups, with over 50% of females reporting marriage before age 18.³⁸ It is to be noted that marriage under 18 is a culturally accepted practice in Syria, especially among rural populations, and predates the current crisis.³⁹ However, fear of rape is quite prevalent that refugee families are marrying off their daughters very early. In some cases, families in refugee settings resort to early marriage, usually to an older male relative, as a safeguard to their 'honour' or to hide the fact that a girl has been raped.⁴⁰ It is also important to note that some surveys indicate that young Syrian girls are subjected to significant pressure to marry Jordanian men.⁴¹ Some women indicated that "Jordanian men think Syrian women are cheap" because they can command a less expensive dowry. Hence, neighbours and strangers are more likely to approach a family with marriage proposals for their young daughters. The

³⁰ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 27.

³¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 38.

³² <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 25.

³³ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 23.

³⁴ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>. P. 38.

³⁵ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 27.

³⁶ Syria: A Regional Crisis. The IRC Commission on Syrian Refugees, January 2013. <http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRCReportMidEast20130114.pdf>. P. 12.

³⁷ <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC%202012%2015.pdf>. P. 6.

³⁸ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 29.

³⁹ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 30.

⁴⁰ Syria: A regional Crisis. The IRC Commission on Syrian Refugees, January 2013, p. 7.

⁴¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>. P. 32.

vulnerable position of young women and their families places immense pressure on them to acquiesce to these marriage offers.⁴²

Families are often approached for marriage or early marriage of their daughters in most cases for a very low dowry.⁴³ Despite the low sum, dowries can be an incentive for some to marry off their young daughters. One survey identified that refugee families in Jordan had come to experience economic dependence on dowries as an income supplement, and in some cases dowries had become a primary or secondary component of household income.⁴⁴ It has been argued that offers for dowries of up to \$5000 are hard to resist for families suffering from material hardship, especially when they have more than one daughter.⁴⁵ In some desperate cases families reduced their number of dependents and acquired money for rent by ‘selling’ their daughters into marriage.⁴⁶ The Representative of the UNHCR in Jordan has noted that the agency has intervened to stop some families from offering up their daughters for early marriage.⁴⁷

The phenomenon of early marriage for financial reasons is often mentioned in NGO and UN agency reports, in addition to relevant press articles; however, there are no accurate figures on its prevalence. While in Syria marriage is generally between people of roughly the same age, it has been noted that young Syrian women and girls in Jordan were marrying much older men, who are thought to be more effective at protecting them,⁴⁸ and probably because an older man can afford the dowry. According to a UNHCR official, who coordinates efforts between the agency and partner NGOs on sexual and gender-based violence, “reported cases of child-bride marriages, prostitution, sexual abuse, and gender-based violence are the tip of a large iceberg.”⁴⁹

In addition, Amnesty International notes that some informers “spoke of ‘marriage markets’ in the Zaatari refugee camp, or matchmakers who arrange temporary marriages between young Syrian brides and suitors from the Gulf.”⁵⁰ Indeed, international press has speculated about this practice with titillating titles such as “Syrian Girls ‘Sold’ Into Forced Marriages”⁵¹, and “Syrian Refugees ‘Sold for Marriage’ in Jordan.”⁵² Reports have alleged that men from the Gulf and other Middle Eastern countries travel to Jordan and Lebanon to marry Syrian girls from refugee camps as young as 13. A report on refugees in Jordan by the international NGO Mercy Corps quoted UN and Jordanian relief agencies that estimated some 500 underage Syrians were wed in 2012. The report notes an increase in the numbers of men and of matchmakers who approach families in the camps for marriageable women. The report claimed that Arab men and marriage brokers are increasingly taking advantage of the conditions in the camps, and that non-consensual marriages

⁴² <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>.
P. 32.

⁴³ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>.
P. 38.

⁴⁴ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>.
P. 31.

⁴⁵ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/in-a-jordan-camp-outsiders-look-for-syrian-brides/2012/11/23/b7e7a31e-3544-11e2-9cfa-e41bac906cc9_story.html.

⁴⁶ Syria: A regional Crisis. The IRC Commission on Syrian Refugees, January 2013. P. 12.

⁴⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22473573>.

⁴⁸ <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/7/Report-web%20pdf.pdf>.
P. 32.

⁴⁹ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/witw/articles/2013/07/24/syria-s-female-refugees-turn-to-prostitution-forced-marriages-to-survive.html>.

⁵⁰ <http://livewire.amnesty.org/2013/09/05/early-marriage-and-harassment-of-syrian-refugee-women-and-girls-in-jordan/>.

⁵¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9821946/Syrian-girls-sold-into-forced-marriages.html>.

⁵² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22473573>.

of vulnerable women and cases of child brides are on the increase, further resulting in abandoned women and forced prostitution.⁵³

Survival Sex

Survival sex is when a person has “occasional commercial sexual transactions or where sex is exchanged for food, shelter or protection.” In these instances “sex is exchanged for basic, short-term economic needs and [...] is less likely to be a formal, full-time occupation.”⁵⁴ This form of forced prostitution has been highlighted as an issue of concern for refugees from Syria. Reportedly, female Syrian refugees have been led as a result of their dire situations into exchanging sex for necessary resources including money and rent.⁵⁵ In Lebanon, it has also been reported that Syrian women are becoming victims of human trafficking by organized crime groups.⁵⁶ Prostitution for survival has also been reportedly noted in Jordan, with some women supposedly acting as brokers, and selling girls to camp guards.⁵⁷ There have not been reports of survival sex in the context of Iraq, possibly because of the small number of refugees there. It is to be noted, however, that most information about survival sex among women refugees are not reliably well documented or evidenced.

Possible recourse to survival sex could be due to the vulnerability of women refugees and the high level of female unemployment in the countries where Syrian women have taken refuge. The rate of female unemployment of refugees has been estimated at close to 60% in Lebanon.⁵⁸ There is no data available on women refugee unemployment rates in Iraq and Jordan.

ACCESS TO FOOD

Women, children and female-headed households are generally considered to be most at risk of food insecurity.⁵⁹ Syrian refugees are exhibiting a number of common food insecurity coping strategies. One such strategy is for women to cut back on their own consumption of food in order to reserve precious food resources for their children. Reportedly, the vast majority of women (90%) have cut down on their own food intake so that children and men in the household can eat.⁶⁰ Another set of common hunger coping strategies are a reduction in quantity and quality of food, with most Syrian refugees no longer having the money to purchase as much food or as high a quality of food as they did in Syria.⁶¹ In Jordan, it has been estimated that monthly expenditures for Syrian refugee families were allocated for food (38%) and shelter (27%).⁶² It has also been reported that 3% of Syrian refugee households were food insecure while 18% were at risk of food insecurity.⁶³

⁵³ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Mercy%20Corps_JordanSyriaRefugee_ConflictReport_0213.pdf. P. 7.

⁵⁴ http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/docs/factsheet_genderwork.pdf.

⁵⁵ <https://www.vluchteling.nl/nl/Nieuws-Overzicht/-/media/Files/Documenten/Updated%20Syrian%20Refugee%20GBV%20Advocacy%20Note.ashx>

⁵⁶ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jul-17/223957-whether-survival-sex-or-prostitution-syrias-poorest-refugees-face-grim-choices.ashx#axzz2ec3wwiNO>.

⁵⁷ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9821946/Syrian-girls-sold-into-forced-marriages.html>.

⁵⁸ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/article.cfm?id=6627>. P. 7.

⁵⁹ <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp256922.pdf>. P. 25.

⁶⁰ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/tr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 5 and p. 24.

⁶¹ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/tr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 25.

⁶² http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/acted_-_food_security_and_livelihoods_assessment_-_northern_jordan_august_2013.pdf. P. 10.

⁶³ http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/acted_-_food_security_and_livelihoods_assessment_-_northern_jordan_august_2013.pdf. P. 13.

Food prices were reportedly especially high in Lebanon in 2012 because of several border closures with Syria. Furthermore, between 2011 and 2012 there was the general inflation rate of about 6% to 12% for food prices, which was compounded by an increase in prices for competing household necessities including 34% for medicines, and 6% for water and utility bills.⁶⁴ UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) define the nutritional status of refugees present in Lebanon as acceptable based on a less than 5% prevalence level of acute malnutrition, and less than 1% for severe acute malnutrition.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, these figures do not account for more recent influx of refugees. Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR are able to apply for food assistance in the form of food vouchers, but they report limited reliance on this coping strategy with only 25% households using these vouchers as their main source of food while 66.7% mainly sourced their food with their own means. Accordingly, 27% of Syrian families in Lebanon were considered food insecure - food access seems to be a concern among the majority of refugees from Syria, with only 54.2% of respondents of a survey in Tripoli and 61% in Bekaa and Saida saying they had enough food for their families.⁶⁶

In Iraq, 82% of refugees receive aid from UNHCR and the Kurdistan Regional government; however, respondents to a recent study maintained that aid does not cover all their food needs, therefore 83% of aid recipients complemented aid with food purchases.⁶⁷ When the financial resources of these families dwindle further, it is feared that women will have to resort to the same type of coping strategies that have been noted in Jordan and Lebanon.

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Health and the adequacy of medical care are major concerns for refugees, both those with pre-existing conditions or disabilities, and healthy families. The medical picture for refugees from Syria is bleak according to the international NGO Doctors without Borders. In a recent survey of refugees in Lebanon, the NGO indicated that more than half of the people (52%) cannot afford treatment for chronic diseases, and nearly one-third have had to suspend treatment because it was too expensive.⁶⁸ Fear of being unable to afford medication or healthcare is a major source of stress even for families without any chronic issues.⁶⁹

According to a UNHCR report released in April 2013 on the health of Syrian refugees across the region during the first three months of the year, there is an unmet need for drugs to treat common health conditions – particularly diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases – as well as those generated by the conflict, such as mental health problems and injuries.⁷⁰ Some of these findings from Lebanon may be extrapolated to refugees in Jordan and Iraq.

In Iraq and Jordan, most refugees have free access to healthcare services. However, the refugees in Jordan reported that they were unable to access public healthcare clinics, and that some private hospitals and healthcare facilities refused to treat them for a variety of reasons. More than half of the respondents to a CARE survey claimed that they paid for private healthcare services in Jordan.⁷¹ The CARE report indicates

⁶⁴ <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp257003.pdf>. P. 7.

⁶⁵ <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp257003.pdf>. P. 15.

⁶⁶ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/article.cfm?id=6627>. P. 8

⁶⁷ <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC%202012%2015.pdf>. P. 5.

⁶⁸ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/article.cfm?id=6627>. P. 4.

⁶⁹ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>. P. 33.

⁷⁰ <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/91/6/13-020613/en/index.html>.

⁷¹ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>. P. 34.

that “the vast majority of interviewees expressed concern that the health services available were inadequate, expensive, and/or difficult to access due to limited availability or transport issues. Medicine was also seen as extremely expensive.”⁷²

Based on available records from UN agencies and various NGOs, women in refugee camps suffer from several physical and psychological conditions such as anaemia (due to food insecurity) and mental distress (due to PTSD from war, rape, and displacement). They also have to deal with sexual and reproductive health issues, such as menstrual problems, and vaginal and urinary tract infections due to the lack of water and adequate sanitation facilities and infrastructure.⁷³ Indeed, 54% of women surveyed in Lebanon as part of a study conducted by UNFPA and Yale School of Public Health, had symptoms of reproductive tract infections.⁷⁴ But it has also been noted that there are increasingly more free clinics that offer medical services, especially to women in refugee camps, including three UNFPA supported health clinics in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan. In July 2013 these clinics provided services for 940 women who requested family planning.⁷⁵

Pregnancy and child delivery are also important issues of concern among women refugees. In Syria, 88% of women were receiving prenatal care in 2009 and 96% of women were attended by a midwife or a gynaecologist when they gave birth.⁷⁶ On the other hand, an assessment among Syrian refugees in Lebanon by the Healthy Newborn Network reports low prenatal coverage and lack of awareness on where to seek care during labour and delivery. The assessment also observes that Syrian women refugees raised significant concerns regarding newborn prematurity and other problems.⁷⁷

Data also indicate that pregnant women awaiting registration as refugees in Lebanon face a large fee to deliver a child in hospitals; in addition one in every seven registered refugees finds these hospitals unaffordable.⁷⁸ Hence, according to the study of UNFPA and the Yale School of Public Health, about 24% of births among refugee women happened at home, 26% of women gave birth prematurely,⁷⁹ 11% of deliveries reported low birth weight, and 29% of refugee women indicated bleeding during delivery. Moreover, 40% of these women had pregnancy related complications, yet only 51% sought medical care.⁸⁰ Only 8.1% of the Doctors without Borders sample in Lebanon were able to access antenatal care, with two in three of pregnant women do not access the services they need.⁸¹ To be noted, however, UNHCR currently covers 75% of the delivery costs for Syrian refugees regardless of their registration status; but even that remaining 25% may be more than many refugee families can actually afford.⁸²

⁷² <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>. P. 34.

⁷³ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=980>.

⁷⁴ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Oct-29/193026-refugees-suffer-from-critical-lack-of-womens-health-care-report.ashx#axzz2eNnRWmJI>.

⁷⁵ <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/14949>.

⁷⁶ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 30.

⁷⁷ <http://www.healthynewbornnetwork.org/sites/default/files/resources/Syria%20Crisis%20Newborn%20Technical%20Brief%202012.pdf>.

⁷⁸ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/article.cfm?id=6627>. P. 6.

⁷⁹ <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2012/Oct-29/193026-refugees-suffer-from-critical-lack-of-womens-health-care-report.ashx#axzz2eNnRWmJI>.

⁸⁰ http://www.iussp.org/sites/default/files/event_call_for_papers/long%20abstract_0.pdf.

⁸¹ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/article.cfm?id=6627>. P. 8.

⁸² <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news/article.cfm?id=6965&cat=field-news>.

Available studies indicate that some women refugees talked about delaying pregnancy because of the high cost of delivery,⁸³ while others are sometimes pressured into having babies to compensate for lost lives and to honour a relative who died during the conflict.⁸⁴ A survey among Syrian refugees in Lebanon showed only 37% of non-pregnant married women used contraception.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Doctors without Borders has noticed a high demand for family planning services among refugee women⁸⁶ probably because of an increasing awareness that a refugee camp is not a suitable place to have or raise a child. In addition, there is an awareness raising campaign by an online group called “Refugees not Captives”⁸⁷ that calls on refugee women to postpone pregnancies until they are back home. The campaign specifically “rejects transforming Syrian women [...] into cheap goods to be trafficked on the slave markets under the pretext of marriage and protection.”⁸⁸

In Jordan, based on available reports Syrian refugee families had little knowledge of available prenatal care. Some indicated concerns that staff in hospitals and healthcare facilities tended to be all-male. Women seemed to be relieved when they can deal with a female gynaecologist, and show more willingness to go see the doctor. This was especially clear after one woman gynaecologist started working with refugees in the Zaatari camp in Jordan and more women came to see her.⁸⁹ Transportation to healthcare facilities was also raised as an issue for refugees in Jordanian rural areas who do not have a car and for whom the trip represents a major expense.⁹⁰

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

One million Syrian children have been registered as refugees, 740,000 of them children under age 11.⁹¹ In Syria, 93% of girls and 94% of boys were in primary school in 2011, while 68% of boys and girls were in secondary school.⁹²

In Jordan, a CARE survey found that over 60% of school-age refugee children are not being sent to school for many reasons including, the “inability to afford auxiliary costs surrounding schooling, safety on the way to school, bullying and discrimination in school, children having missed schooling, difference in curriculum, distance between home and school, and psychological issues of the children.”⁹³ Syrian refugees also complained that there were no schools that could cater to the needs of disabled children. Among the 40% of parents who sent their children to school, some were unhappy with the experience and were

⁸³ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=980>.

⁸⁴ <http://www.irinnews.org/report/98118/born-into-crisis-unwanted-pregnancies-in-syria>.

⁸⁵ <http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/news/2013/Humanitarian%20Factsheet%202.pdf>.

⁸⁶ <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/news/article.cfm?id=6965&cat=field-news>.

⁸⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Lajjaat.Lasabayaa>.

⁸⁸ <http://internationalboulevard.com/arab-world/199-jordan/204-fleeing-war-syrian-women-find-an-over-eager-embrace-in-jordan>.

⁸⁹ <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/12119>.

⁹⁰ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>.

P. 33.

⁹¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/521621999.html>.

⁹² <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 28.

⁹³ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>.

P. 32.

considering pulling their children out of school because of concerns about cost and quality of education.⁹⁴ It was also reported that almost 50% of teenage boys were working and not attending school.⁹⁵

In Lebanon, reportedly only 25% of refugee children attend school because of limited space for new students, language barriers linked to a preference for English, and problems with transport from home to school.⁹⁶ Surveys also indicate that girls were also unlikely to go to school because of concerns for their safety, especially from sexual harassment, and for cultural reasons as parents were uncomfortable sending them to co-ed schools.⁹⁷ Refugee children are also supposedly sometimes bullied, which contributes to an unsafe environment especially for girls. Sometimes schools are just too far away for children to attend, a problem that is complicated by expensive or limited transportation opportunities.⁹⁸ Recently, however, the Lebanese Ministry of Education (MEHE) issued a circular requesting public schools to register Syrian children when there is sufficient space, on condition that they pay tuition fees that may be later reimbursed by UNHCR, UNICEF and other agencies. Refugee parents have since expressed their concerns over their inability to pay these fees, and UNHCR has been liaising with MEHE to address and resolve this impediment.⁹⁹

A 2012 study of the Domiz camp in Iraq found that only 24% of children are registered in school. Families reported that the reasons for not enrolling their children in school were: need to work (35%), cost of study (24%), and the fact that some parents did not have their children's school records (24%).¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

As the events in Syria continue to unfold, reliable data is not always available, especially on sensitive topics such as survival sex and early marriage. In many cases, available findings are based on anecdotal evidence or journalistic accounts. While research on such topic is hard to conduct because of its cultural sensitivity, getting more data is crucial to find solutions and adequate support for refugee families. It is important to point out, however, that research on another equally sensitive topic – GBV -- has been successfully conducted with reliable data. This indicates that what is needed is developing new (culturally sensitive) research tools that would allow greater understanding of the prevalence of harmful practices among Syrian refugees. It is also to be noted that there is very little data on Syrian refugees in Iraq, and what is currently available is about one year old.

Although there are clear gaps in the data describing the conditions of female refugees from Syria, this review has identified a number of findings that are common across the three host countries:

1. Women lack physical security in the three countries. They experience various forms of violence, including rape, trafficking and early or forced marriage.
2. Access to food is inadequate in each of the three countries, and women have reportedly resorted sometimes to survival sex to acquire food and meet other competing household demands.

⁹⁴ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>. P. 32.

⁹⁵ <https://www.care.org/emergency/syrian-refugees-in-jordan/pdf/CARE-Syrian-Refugees-in-Urban-Jordan-April-2013.pdf>. P. 32.

⁹⁶ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 6.

⁹⁷ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 6 and p. 18-19.

⁹⁸ <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>. P. 29.

⁹⁹ http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=21.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC%202012%2015.pdf>. P. 5.

3. Access to healthcare is quite problematic, especially for prenatal and reproductive health services.
4. Young girls in the three host countries do not have access to adequate education. School fees and transportation represent serious obstacles for most refugees.

In addition to the common conditions of Syrian refugees across the three neighbouring countries, the Lebanese context provides unique problems. One such emergent problem is the settlement of refugees in numerous clusters of informal temporary housing, often on private land. The living conditions in these clusters and their illegal status, pose public health and safety risks to the well-being of their refugee population, and to the surrounding Lebanese host communities.