



ISSUE BRIEF

The Syrian Humanitarian Crisis

Described as “the defining crisis of a generation”, the Syrian conflict has torn apart the lives of millions. With the conflict entering its fourth year, more than 136,000 people are estimated to have been killed and more than a third of Syrians are displaced; 6.5 million internally and over 2.4 million across the borders of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. While no one denies that the needs are great and the challenges daunting, assistance from the international community is failing to meet the escalating need. As of mid-February, the unprecedented 2014 UN Syria crisis response appeals of almost \$6.5 billion were only 11% met.

While concerned about the livelihood of all people, CARE recognizes that women and children suffer disproportionately in conflict. When men are called to war, it is women who are left behind to care for their families. And, it is women who, when equipped with the proper resources, have the power to help entire communities build stronger futures. Syrian women exhibit incredible resilience in securing the livelihood needs of their families. They simply cannot do so alone and in environments where survival options are limited. Therefore, in all efforts to enhance a community’s security and well-being, women must be prioritized.

Economic Needs

Having previously enjoyed the comfort of living in a middle-income country, many Syrians are now struggling to meet their basic needs. As the crisis prolongs, savings accounts and access to credit are diminishing and debt expanding. More than 80 percent of refugees live outside of official refugee camps where access to assistance and services is more readily available and they rely heavily on the generosity of their hosts. Unfortunately, cities across the region were already limited in resources and the coping mechanisms of local populations are becoming strained.

“The cost of everything is going up. Only the human beings are cheap.”

(Jordanian mother of five)

Regionally, Syrians are rarely able to obtain work permits and employment opportunities that do exist are limited by local competition and ensuing hostility and discrimination. While incomes are often static, financial expenditures are escalating. Rental prices have risen, compelling refugees to live in overcrowded, low-quality conditions. Securing adequate food, water, and other essential commodities is an additional problem as service providers struggle with current and anticipated funding shortfalls while prices in many areas are rising to meet inflated demand.

Women in particular remain disadvantaged in pursuing economic security. Women have fewer income-generating opportunities as cultural mores prohibit most forms of female employment. The situation is especially challenging for women who are single or widowed or whose male relatives are abroad. They face difficulties in accessing credit or rental agreements due to doubt regarding their ability to pay. They are vulnerable to risks of transactional sex, temporary marriage, and other possible coping mechanisms and are sometimes even forced to endure sexual harassment when seeking assistance.

Health

Access to health care ranks high among the many concerns faced daily. Many refugees suffer from recurrent conditions while new needs arise as individuals confront inferior sanitation and hygiene, fewer funds to maintain health care visits, greater stress, and less access to food, clean water, and other basic goods. While host governments have opened their doors with generous offers of medical assistance, they lack the capacity and funds to meet escalating refugee needs.

Women in particular are vulnerable to gaps in provision. They often de-prioritize their health and consumption relative to that of their families; they might require sexual, reproductive and maternal health (SRMH) services, and some need additional assistance as survivors of genderbased violence (GBV). There is a pressing need for psycho-social services, as well as the creation of safe and secure spaces for women to socialize with one another and play with their children.

“Our children are afraid. If our kids hear the planes nearby, they want to hide....We’re alive and not alive at the same time.”

(Syrian refugee in Jordan)

Barriers to access health and counseling services are also greater for women. Female victims of violence are more likely to seek out a family member or religious official for help due to the perception that other service providers are not as discrete or culturally-sensitive. There also exists a shortage of institutions offering SRMH and GBV-survivor services and often, where services do exist, they are not sufficiently well-known.

“My 15-year-old relative Hasan works seven days a week, 10 hours a day, at a supermarket. He receives 3 dinar a day. When he comes home, he’s so tired he eats and goes straight to sleep.... He wants to live his childhood and go to school.”

(Syrian refugee in Jordan)

Education

An entire generation of children and adolescents are being shaped by violence, displacement, and persistent lack of opportunity, and at risk of becoming a “lost generation,” with many out of school for over two years. Prior to the crisis, in Syria approximately 93% of girls and 94% of boys attended primary school. However, refugee attendance remains low. Of school-age registered refugee children, only 29% in Jordan, 10% in Lebanon, and 10% in non-camp settings in Iraq are enrolled. Children are missing school for many reasons including schools’ limited capacity to absorb students, students’ lack of official documentation, high incidental expenses, overcrowding, protection concerns, and the difficulty of the local curriculum. An additional hurdle is child labor. One CARE study estimates that about 50% of refugee children aged 15-18 in Jordan are

working. Among refugee families the safety of school-age girls is another prominent source of anxiety as Syrian students face discrimination and bullying by host community students, as well as by adults they might encounter. There is an additional fear that the public presence of girls will invite unwanted marriage proposals. Unfortunately, as adults, uneducated girls are less likely to pursue employment or participate in civic affairs, and experience worse health outcomes.

Recommendations:

1. CARE calls on all international actors to **sustain diplomatic efforts at the highest levels to bring pressure on parties to the conflict to immediately comply with international humanitarian and international human rights law**. Urgent needs include the opening of humanitarian access to besieged areas, the immediate cessation of all indiscriminate violence targeting civilians and civilian properties and facilities, and the facilitation of humanitarian aid delivery to reach those in need in Syria.
2. CARE calls on donor governments to **address the specific needs of women and girls** by ensuring that humanitarian programmes are more effectively and consistently informed by sex and age disaggregated data and gender analysis, and that they fully account for the increased vulnerabilities to gender-based violence (GBV) that women and girls especially face in the context of conflict and displacement. This further necessitates ensuring that all other initiatives **mainstream culturally-sensitive means to prevent and respond to GBV and gender-based discrimination so that women and girls are able to fully meet their economic, social and health needs**.
3. CARE calls on donor governments to ensure that **flexible, predictable, longer-term funding is available** to enable aid and development agencies to plan for the growing and changing needs of those affected by the crisis. This will include humanitarian support to new refugee and asylum seeking populations as well as support for long-term initiatives which recognize the scale, depth and protracted nature of the crisis and its enduring affect on individuals across the region. Further, it requires efforts to **enhance the capacity of local governments and host communities** to provide for all residents in terms of security, infrastructural development, logistical capacity and livelihood opportunities, and to create an enabling environment for civic engagement.

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