



Are We Listening?

Acting on Our Commitments to Women and Girls
Affected by the Syrian Conflict

International Rescue Committee | SEPTEMBER 2014





ABOVE: A Syrian refugee walks her grandchild in the streets of Domiz camp, Iraq.

Preface

The conflagration that has consumed Syria and its neighboring countries has dominated the news, but there is a significant aspect of the conflict—one with grave implications—that continues to go mostly unreported: the plight of women and girls. According to the U.N. refugee agency (UNHCR), the number of displaced people across the world has surpassed 50 million for the first time since World War II. Women and children constitute the majority of refugees and the internally displaced. They are bearing the greatest burden, yet their voices and perspectives are often left unheard.

This report sheds light on the condition of women and girls inside Syria and those who have fled the conflict for safety in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. Many have been subject to sexual and gender-based violence, coerced into early marriages, overwhelmed by economic strife, and psychologically scarred by loss in a war that seemingly has no end. Women and girls affected by conflict must be regarded as more than victims of brutality; they are agents of change who, if given the opportunity, can transform their societies.

This report provides a timely and compelling analysis of the impact of the Syrian regional conflict on women and girls.

It contains recommendations to more effectively address the needs of women and girls in humanitarian settings. The United Nations, United States, United Kingdom and many other governments have adopted policies to address the protection of women and girls and their participation in the development and implementation of humanitarian assistance. However, there is a massive gap between policy enactments and implementation. Fifteen years since the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which asserted that women are uniquely burdened by armed conflict and are critical to resolving it, Resolution 1325 and the successor Security Council resolutions go largely unfulfilled. We must do better.

I commend David Miliband and the International Rescue Committee for their tireless efforts to deliver humanitarian relief to some of the most vulnerable populations in the world. We cannot address the violent conflicts of our time without listening to and uplifting the voices of those who are most affected.

—**Ambassador Melanne Vermeer**

Executive Director, Georgetown Institute
for Women, Peace and Security

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#AreWeListening

All the names of those quoted in this report have been changed to protect their identity, unless they otherwise consented.

FRONT AND BACK COVERS: Fatima, a woman who fled the violence in Syria and now lives in a refugee camp in Jordan. She is a prominent local artist and attends programs at one of IRC's Women's Centers.



Executive Summary

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is publishing this report, *Are We Listening? Acting on our Commitments to Women and Girls Affected by the Syrian Conflict*, to do more than bear witness to the suffering of Syrian women and girls caught in a protracted regional conflict.

This report is about putting into action what the international community has been promising for years: to bring the interests of women and girls—those disproportionately impacted by conflict—from the margins of service provision to the mainstream of humanitarian programming. This report synthesizes information from interactions with thousands of women and girls in the region since the Syrian crisis began. It amplifies their voices and sheds light on their plight and circumstances. It provides recommendations on ways to make a difference in their lives immediately. Syrian women and girls deserve more than rhetoric; they deserve action.

The issues brought to light in this report were gathered and analyzed based on materials and information from programs in 64 communities within Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey implemented by more than 260 International Rescue Committee staff and volunteers focused specifically on women's protection and empowerment activities. In addition, from May 18 to July 1, 2014, the IRC spoke with 198 Syrian women, adolescent girls and men displaced by the conflict. The primary goal of these interviews and focus groups was to understand the challenges facing displaced women and girls in the region, as expressed in their own words, and how they managed and coped with them.

There are three overarching themes that women and girls identified when asked “what are the biggest challenges you are facing.” First is the daily reality of sexual exploitation and harassment. Revealing they feel constantly fearful, women and girls told us about extreme levels of harassment. Second, women shared with us that their homes are not places of refuge and talked about increased incidents of domestic violence. Third, they discussed early and forced marriage in the context of displacement and dwindling resources. It is clear that Syrian women and girls face increased risks and multiple forms of violence as a result of the conflict and displacement. Specifically, adolescent girls are being forced to marry at younger ages, are exposed to more violence in and out of the home and find it increasingly difficult to access services such as health care and education. Parents already on the fence about the importance of education for their adolescent daughters are further deterred by safety risks their daughters face getting to school. It is clear from the conversations with

girls that the majority of them want to go to school and see it as a potent remedy for some of their challenges.

In the last fifteen years, international attention to violence against women and girls in conflicts and crisis has increased thanks to a series of important policy debates, humanitarian initiatives and commitments.¹ However, it was not until October 2000 through the passage of Resolution 1325, that the U.N. Security Council formally acknowledged that women are disproportionately affected by armed conflict and are also critical agents of conflict prevention and resolution. The three pillars of Resolution 1325—protection, participation and prevention—laid the groundwork for six related U.N. Security Council resolutions between 2008 and 2013.²

Kamar, AGE 37, JORDAN

“Syrian women are smart. Things have changed and now they are the providers of the household. They are tired, they struggle, but they are a pillar.”

There have also been a number of key international gatherings focused on this issue, such as the 2006 International Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, which was held to “strengthen our shared commitment and action to prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations.”³ In 2014, a Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict was hosted by the United Kingdom as part of their Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI). In November 2013, the UK and the Swedish governments organized a Call to Action to Protect Women and Girls in Emergencies to mobilize nongovernmental agencies, U.N. agencies, donors and other stakeholders around this issue, with the follow-up meeting to be hosted by the U.S. government in the fall of 2014.⁴

While these efforts are applauded, the frameworks are meaningful only when they are translated into action. Thus far, this global attention has made too little difference in the day-to-day lives of far too many Syrian woman and girls.

The women and girls you will hear from in this report talked about the nature and regularity of the violence they face simply



ABOVE: Northern Iraq during an influx of tens of thousands of refugees from Syria, most of them Kurdish, in January, 2014.

because they are female. Women and adolescent girls spoke of feeling exhausted by the daily negotiations—for physical and sexual safety when securing food, water, shelter or clothing. Women told us: Some of these things are not new to us; we also dealt with domestic violence and early marriage in Syria. Now, we are safe from gunshots and barrel bombs, but how do we cope with the threats we face in our own homes and the communities we now live in? They shared with us what they do in their daily struggle not only to survive but to do so with their dignity intact. They spoke to us about dangers facing sisters, aunts and mothers displaced inside Syria, where the conflict rages on, and they shared with us how they hold onto strings of hope for the conflict to end.

The time for commentary about what is happening to women and girls inside Syria and those displaced outside has passed. It is imperative that by its actions in the Syria region the international community set new, high standards in accountability to women and girls. The prospects for the next year are for a more intense, fluctuating and dangerous environment for civilians, especially for women and girls. The broadening of the conflict into Iraq, the fragmentation of the opposition, and the cruelty of the fighting conspire to make the world in which Syrian women and girls live smaller, more isolated and more dangerous. The rise of radical extremist groups like ISIS bring women's safety and security directly under attack, with actions that brutally strip women and girls the gains towards equality. Critically, for women and girls the

need is for immediate action not only to make them safe from exploitation and abuse, but safe and empowered to be active participants in their homes, communities and their own lives.

The IRC has laid out a set of eight recommendations informed by our conversations with women and girls. The most critical key to the success of these recommendations is the humanitarian community's will to prioritize the needs of women and girls in both word and deed. Increased funding is an important piece of the equation and is necessary to address the scale and scope of protection issues specifically impacting women and girls. But it will take more than funding. Even with current funding levels, the international community could significantly improve the lives of women and girls by aligning our actions to existing standards and stated commitments. The following recommendations focus on how to improve the lives of Syrian women and girls:

First, women and girls' voices must be a key force in driving humanitarian action. U.N. agencies, host and donor governments and NGOs must seek out and value the perspectives of women and girls, who account for more than 50% of the refugee population. This value is demonstrated by acting on what women and girls identify as priorities and designing programs to that end.

Second, women and girls must be safe from gender-based violence (GBV) as they seek refuge. The U.N. should commission a regional Real Time Evaluation to assess the application of minimum standards as laid out in the Interagency Guidelines for the Prevention and Response to GBV. This Real Time Evaluation would apply to cross-border work in northern Syria as well as in camp and urban areas in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.

Third, women and girls should have safe and accessible access to individual registration, in both camp and urban settings. When women are not registered or are only registered under the male head of the household, certain risks are increased and women may experience difficulties in overcoming barriers to the services they require. For example, being registered means women are eligible for services such health care and cash assistance. Their own registration also protects the women from deportation. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has made positive steps in this regard and more needs to be done to make this consistent across the region. For example where a split in a family's case is necessary, cases need to be quickly assessed by Protection Officers trained in GBV to determine the best interest of those affected.

Executive Summary (continued)

Fourth, survivors of gender-based violence must receive appropriate care when and where they seek it. This means that U.N. and humanitarian organizations must ensure multiple safe entry points for survivors, where survivors can disclose incidents of violence and receive support or immediate referrals. These entry points should be available where women and girls can go without being questioned or stigmatized—for example, schools, health clinics, women’s centers, distribution sites and via mobile services.

Fifth, programs tailored to the specific risks and needs of adolescent girls should be expanded across the regional response. This requires multidisciplinary programs ensuring safe spaces, age appropriate services and life-skills opportunities for adolescent girls.

Sixth, adolescent girls need safe access to education. IRC’s years of experience implementing education programs in emergencies show that access to safe education opportunities is a deterrent to the many of the specific problems faced by adolescent girls. A learning environment contributes to adolescent girls feeling that they have options and a future, while allowing them to forge important social networks. This requires safe learning environments, the opportunity to access those learning environments, and that parents and girls have accurate

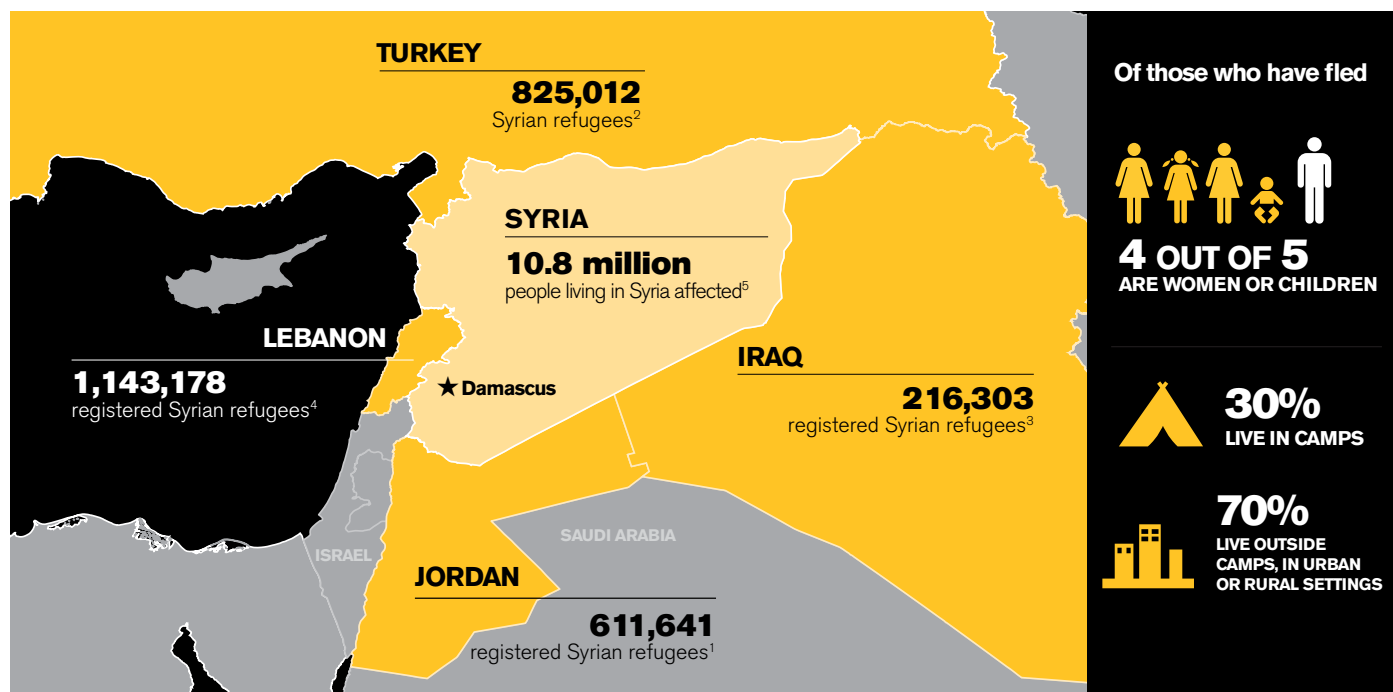
information about accredited education opportunities.

Seventh, U.N. and humanitarian organizations must recognize domestic violence as an imminent threat to women and girls’ protection, increase understanding on the causes and consequences of domestic violence, and prioritize funding to design multifaceted interventions to both respond to it and prevent it.

Eighth, women and girls must be able to live free from the sexual abuse and exploitation they spoke about facing every day. This requires UNHCR, host governments and humanitarian organizations to implement, coordinate and monitor mechanisms, and work with local partners on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).

An apparent and understandable sense of hopelessness is setting in for many Syrian women and girls. Yet, with quick action and robust programming, women and girls should be able to freely access necessary aid such as health care and safe shelter. With strong and strategic partnerships between international organizations, local organizations, host governments and the women and girls they serve, women and girls can live their lives with security and dignity. This report brings to light perils facing Syrian women and girls and is an urgent and immediate call to action. ■

More than 3 million people have fled Syria since the crisis began



¹ UNHCR, as of 16 August 2014; ² UNHCR, as of 22 August 2014; ³ UNHCR, as of 15 August 2014; ⁴ UNHCR, as of 29 August 2014; ⁵ UNFPA, as of August 2014

Introduction

“We ask for humanity—for people to treat us like human beings.”

—Nada, AGE 35, JORDAN

The peaceful Syrian uprising that began in March 2011 has deteriorated into a brutal and bloody conflict between the Assad regime and a variety of opposition forces with regional implications. Most recently the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has seen waves of displaced Iraqis arriving from Anbar, Ninewa and surrounding areas. Almost four years into the conflict, the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) noted that the Syrian conflict has created “one of the largest exoduses in recent history,” with nearly 75% of all Syrians predicted to need humanitarian aid in 2014.⁵ Inside Syria, the humanitarian emergency deepens daily, with 6.5 million internally displaced persons and 10.8 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance within their own country.⁶ Women and girls in particular are being severely and adversely affected by this conflict. As refugees, Syrian women and girls have fled all they have known for a stark, new reality where the burdens they face as females have significantly increased.

Today, the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan is one of the three largest refugee camps in the world, with an estimated population of close to 80,000 refugees.⁷ Despite efforts by the international community and host governments, the formal camps remain overcrowded and unable to fully meet refugees' needs. In addition, roughly 70% of Syria's refugees do not live in formal camps. As of late August 2014, UNHCR had registered over 3 million Syrian refugees living in host countries,⁸ with 100,000 individuals continuing to be registered every month—at an estimated rate of nearly 3,000 refugees daily. The UNHCR's most recent estimates indicate the region will have close to 3.5 million refugees by December 2014.⁹ *Nearly four of every five people who have fled Syria in the past three years have been women and children.*¹⁰ The sheer magnitude of this urban displacement creates increasing pressure on education, health and social services in the countries of refuge. Host country governments and local and international organizations are struggling to absorb the surging costs in communities where the influx of refugees has doubled and tripled the population. This has specific implications for the safety and security of women and girls and their ability to participate in and access programs.

When crisis occurs, people who have lost or fled their homes need urgent assistance: water, food, shelter and medical care. It is essential that these basic needs be met. But for women and girls, meeting the basic needs is not the only lifesaving action required. In times of crisis, women are at enormous risk of physical and sexual violence—from armed groups, strangers,

neighbors and even family members. Syrian women and girls demonstrate resilience and courage every day, yet the risks they face continue to worsen.

The first part of this report is structured around three regional themes that emerged from IRC's work and conversations with women and girls. These themes are followed by a description of programs and activities the IRC has found useful in meeting the needs of women and girls. Finally, the report concludes with regional recommendations about critical actions the international community should take, as well as country-specific recommendations.

All of the women interviewed for this report including those interviewed inside Syria have been displaced from their homes; some left with only the clothes on their backs or what they could carry. Many have lost one or more family members in the conflict. Women shared with us the devastating feeling of leaving family in Syria as they sought refuge for themselves and their children, knowing they might never be reunited with loved ones. In addition to coping with the trauma and loss of family and community, women and girls have the additional responsibility to care for children, elderly parents and extended family with little, if any, support.

When seeking services or being interviewed for this report, women and girls shared stories that leave no doubt about the nature and regularity of the violence they face simply because they are female. Walking to school, the store, the latrine, or anywhere else exposes them to threats of harassment and assault. As a response to these threats, families try to keep women and adolescent girls inside the home, making their world smaller and lonelier, but not necessarily safer. Instead of the home being a safe haven, it is also here that women and girls are exposed to violence and harm. The home has become a place where early marriages are decided and where intimate partner and family violence occur on a regular basis.

Women told us they fear for the safety of their daughters and often make choices meant to protect them in the short term, knowing these decisions could harm them in the long term. The reality is these women do not have clear or easy choices to make for themselves or for their children. Safety eludes women and girls, as violence and the ever-present threat of violence follow them from the conflict into their place of refuge—the home. ■



“ I am afraid to go out. ”

When I walk down the street I hear the comments men make. When I take public transportation to pick up aid or do the shopping, men always ask me if I am Syrian. I feel immediately objectified. In Syria, I would go out at night, even without a male escort. I enjoyed being a hostess and we were a very social family. But here, I isolate myself. There were times, especially when we first arrived, where I wouldn't leave our apartment for weeks at a time.

Even in my own home, I can't escape the harassment—I am afraid when I am inside with the door locked. Strange men call my cell phone, trying to engage me in conversation or solicit me. The result is incredible daily stress and growing depression. I feel like I am choking.

—**Farah**, AGE 36, JORDAN

The Experience of Syrian Women and Girls Across the Region

“The young men are harassing women; they are really trespassing [into our lives]... regardless of the age, harassment is happening... even if I go with my son, I don't feel safe... there is no safety at all.”

—**Layla**, AGE 32, LEBANON

A Daily Reality: Exploitation and Harassment

For Syrian women and girls, the level of harassment and exploitation as refugees is pervasive and more present now than it was back in their home country. When asked what they believed was driving this level of harassment, women noted that they were considered strangers in host countries and perceived as using community resources to which they were not entitled. Further, they noted that women had to take on roles they had not played in Syria. They also explained that people knew they had fled Syria with limited resources and, as such, were vulnerable. For example, one adolescent girl said: “Everyone harasses us now because of this conflict. People see us girls as being really cheap. Everyone harasses and abuses the girls.” —Bayan, 17, Lebanon. This fear, often borne out in reality, is shared by their families. One woman told us: “My husband won't let me leave by myself because he is afraid for me—and I agree. The harassment, the men staring...” —Mona, 37, Jordan.

Among Syrians, traditional norms place a heavy and potentially dangerous responsibility for family honor on women and girls. For example, in the eyes of the community virginity until marriage and faithfulness after marriage are often non-negotiable elements of a woman or girl's reputation. Men and boys are raised with the understanding that it is their duty to defend the honor of their families—even when it is to the detriment of women. The mere suggestion of impugning that honor can result in severe repercussions for women and girls. Until recently, the Syrian penal code permitted men to commit so-called honor crimes—including murder—with overall impunity. In 2011, the law was changed to mandate a five- to seven-year minimum sentence for homicide under the motive of honor.¹¹ In both Lebanon and Iraq, “honor motives” are considered extenuating circumstances under the law.

Women and girls have responded to harassment by changing their behavior, opting to stay home instead of leaving their house or tent. While freedom of mobility was somewhat limited for many women and girls prior to displacement, increased fear of sexual assault and harassment has placed even further restrictions on displaced women and girls. For example, a recent report

commissioned by UNHCR that surveyed 135 female heads of households taking refuge in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon showed that approximately half of the women interviewed left the house less in their host country than when they were living in Syria.¹² Women reported feeling isolated and imprisoned in their own homes.¹³ Further, 60% of women expressed feelings of insecurity, and one in three women stated that they felt too scared or overwhelmed to leave their homes at all.¹⁴ For this report a woman told the IRC: “I feel sick; I cannot stay in a closed room... I feel suffocated all the time.” —Haifa, 29, Syria.

No woman or girl is immune to harassment, but divorced women felt they were bigger targets. More than half of the divorced women interviewed told the IRC that when away from home they were more likely to be harassed by men than married adolescent girls and women. Divorced women and adolescent girls told the IRC that their families fear for their safety and their reputation and are often reluctant to let them go out alone. “She [my friend] was married and her husband left her, so now it is as if she has a red arrow pointing at her. So now she has to stay at home to protect herself and her reputation.”—Amira, 53, Jordan.

Thana, AGE 42, JORDAN

“My teenage daughter was applying for a job when the shop owner said to her, ‘I crave you—if you refuse to give yourself to me then you can forget about a job.’”

In addition, women and adolescent girls told the IRC about being sexually harassed and exploited by individuals charged with delivering humanitarian aid or by those in positions of relative economic and/or political power in their own communities. They reported being asked to engage in “special friendships,” have sex or agree to marriage by leaders in camps, staff in community-based organizations, religious leaders, community leaders, employers and others.

The psychological, physical, and economic consequences of this harassment are not always visible. Psychological

The Experience of Syrian Women and Girls Across the Region (continued)

consequences such as shame settles deep into the women's and girls' consciousness. Physical pain, bruises or burns are inflicted by male family members who respond violently when they learn of harassment. Economic opportunities are lost because women and adolescent girls alike must curtail activities outside the home to protect themselves from additional abuse.

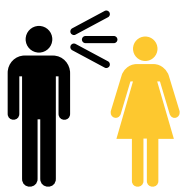
In urban areas, where refugees are not in camps and are spread out, restrictions on mobility limit women and girls' ability to access goods and services provided by the government and/or humanitarian organizations. Additionally, women and girls are far less likely to participate in social and economic activities, restricting their ability to ease the financial burden on their families, and to engage in activities that would help to create a stronger sense of community and build social support among refugee families.

The vast majority of women and girls we spoke with were reluctant to seek help when harassed, fearing for their safety or the safety of their families, as well as possible deportation or retaliation by their host community. For those abused by

landlords or employers, their greatest fear was losing their income or their home—a precious commodity in a very unstable life. Many women spoke of being approached by their landlords for sexual relations or favors in return for rent 'payment.' "Now that they [the humanitarian organizations] stopped the rent problem, the landlords want something other than the rent..." —Mohammed, 35, Lebanon, referring to landlords harassing women even when rent payment is made.

Syrian women need safe access to economic opportunities. IRC's experience demonstrates that women's economic activities are most safe and impactful when paired with social activities. Economic activities without community-based support and mechanisms for safely managing money can lead to increased violence against women and girls. This happens, for example, when men feel threatened by women's improved economic status; managing large amounts of money can also put women at risk in the community.¹⁵ Participating together in social and economic activities creates unique protective mechanisms for women and girls, helping them to rebuild social connections and networks that have been severed because of conflict and displacement. In addition, increasing economic opportunities and access to these can be a protective factor by itself, as economic empowerment allows women and girls to avoid harmful activities such as sexual exploitation, which are a huge risk for women and girls in refugee situations.

Women's experience with harassment



Walking to school, the store, the latrine, or anywhere else exposes women and girls to threats of harassment and assault.



60% of women expressed feelings of insecurity.



One in three women stated that they felt too scared or overwhelmed to leave their homes at all.

No Refuge: Increased Violence in the Home

Domestic violence is one of the most common threats to the health and well-being of women and adolescent girls everywhere in the world. Globally, approximately one in three women will experience violence during her lifetime, often at the hands of an intimate partner.¹⁶ The physical and emotional toll of this violence on women and adolescent girls impacts every aspect of their lives. As women are abused, children in the home suffer as well.

Despite the stark impact of domestic violence, the humanitarian community has been reluctant to address it, seeing such violence as a private matter outside the scope of *traditional* aid mandates. This hesitance must stop. Women the world over, including most recently those in and from Syria, are telling the IRC about how domestic violence is present in their lives and the lives of their children.¹⁷ Women make it clear that the consequences of domestic violence are far-reaching, keeping them isolated, afraid and dependent on those who abuse them. Women need programs that confront this multifaceted reality.

This requires a change in both the scale of programming and the approaches being used. As rape by armed actors has been the most commonly understood form of violence against women and girls in conflict, many programs that exist to treat violence do so as one-time occurrence, with discrete one-off interventions to heal wounds or prosecute perpetrators. These programs do not correspond to the on-going, repeated violence women and girls experience in the home.

The Syrian women and adolescent girls we spoke with said that domestic violence clearly existed prior to the conflict. A 2005 survey conducted by the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) reported that in Syria, 13% of husbands surveyed admitted to committing violence against their wives, and 67% of women reported having received “punishment” from their husbands—87% of which was physical violence.¹⁸ A November 2011 study by the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) found that one in three women living in Syria suffered from domestic violence.¹⁹

Women and adolescent girls shared with us their perception of increased physical and emotional violence from their husbands since fleeing Syria. Some women attribute this “yelling and beating” as men’s way of coping with the stress

of trauma and of being a refugee. One woman told the IRC: “My husband beats me, and I think this stems from a psychological problem...he is relieving the stress because he is beating me.” —Mona, 21, Lebanon. Other women spoke about the lack of employment opportunities available for their husbands, resulting in their inability to fulfill their traditional role as the family provider, another perceived cause of the increase in physical and emotional abuse: “When a woman goes out to do the shopping or get coupons, he isn’t grateful. No; he is the opposite. He gets more angry, making comments like: “You didn’t cook; you didn’t work today. His anger increases.” —Haifa, 41, Jordan. Women also mentioned other refugee realities: men being frustrated by the lack of privacy to engage in sexual relations with their wives, a sense of hopelessness regarding the future, and constant concern over meeting basic needs for the household (i.e., rent, food, water, shelter, clothing, and health care costs).

Samira, 19, TURKEY

“I have to think with my husband how to pay the rent...we are always fighting, especially because of these living conditions.”

BELOW: A young Syrian girl collects water in a refugee camp in Jordan



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A GLOBAL PROBLEM: PREVALENCE AROUND THE WORLD

71% Ethiopia^a

53% Bangladesh^a

37% Brazil^a

36% United States^b

67% Syria^c

^a Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Heise, & Watts, 2005. Note these statistics were taken from one province, city or district in each country.

^b Black et al., 2011

^c UNIFEM, 2005, Violence Against Women Study: Syria 2005 p. 2

The Experience of Syrian Women and Girls Across the Region (continued)

Women also shared with the IRC how domestic violence was impacting the children in the home: “Men are becoming angry—they can’t provide for their family. My husband wasn’t a smoker—now he is. He is extremely irritated all the time and takes it out on the kids. He is violent towards the kids; he is violent towards me.” —Haifa, 38, Jordan. Another young woman accepted this violence as being unfortunately preferable to an alternative: “I’m glad at least that my husband is taking out his frustration by hitting me and the children instead of other people outside—that would bring us even more problems.” —Layla, 38, Jordan.

One woman said: “When his pockets are empty, yes, I am beaten by my husband. I handle it by taking it out on the kids”—Raniya, 28, Jordan. In some instances, women confided that they had beaten their children as a way to relieve the stress and anger they felt after being beaten themselves: “I’m depressed; I’m short-tempered—I never was before. But

here...I beat my daughters—this one I beat every two to three days; this other all the time. I don’t want to; I just—I’m angry all the time.”—Nour, 38, Jordan

A man from Turkey shared his concerns that “the kids are all trapped 24 hours in the house...there is no childhood at all.” Women added that children experienced increased anger and frustration because of this lack of freedom to move around, in addition to trauma, the fact that they were unable to attend school, and the general difficulties of daily life as refugees. All these factors can increase violence in the home. One mother stated that she used violence as a means of disciplining her children, whose behavior had changed since fleeing Syria. Yet, she noted that the violent response left her and her children more distant and sad: “My oldest son was a very good friend of mine; he would tell me everything, but right now he is in a different world. I have lost him.” —Nada, 36, Jordan.

“ I want my voice to be heard everywhere—so that everyone can feel with us. ”

In late 2013, I fled Syria after my husband was briefly detained. In Jordan, our once loving relationship quickly grew tense and my husband became more violent. It is illegal for him to work and growing frustrated with his inability to provide for our family, he began hitting me and our children. I’ve lost all respect for him because of how he treats our children. I have so much love for my children—they have missed out on a lot of things, and I blame him for not being able to help them and not treating them well. When he is hitting me or them I just cry a lot—I try not to, but I do.

Despite taking contraceptives, I recently learned that I am pregnant. I feel suffocated. My husband can’t handle any more kids. We both felt that we did not

want to have another child with each other. I’ve tried to get an abortion, but here it isn’t allowed. I see similar situations happening with my neighbors and relatives. I still have hope—every moment I feel guilty that I can’t help my husband and I know deep down I still love him, but for now...the world is dark.

—Zaemah, AGE 34, JORDAN





LEFT: A Syrian woman and her niece in a refugee camp in Jordan. TOP RIGHT: A Syrian woman looks outside her family's small apartment in Jordan. BOTTOM RIGHT: A gynecologist sees a Syrian refugee patient at the IRC clinic in Jordan.

Understanding Early Marriage in the Context of Crisis

Around the world in times of instability, adolescent girls often face specific risks because of their gender and role in society. One of the most common types of violence adolescent girls face is forced and early marriage.²⁰ Statistics reveal that early and forced marriage is a global problem; one-third of the world's girls are married before the age of 18.²¹ Early and forced marriage overwhelmingly impacts adolescent girls differently than their male counterparts. For example, in Jordan, fewer than half of 1% of marriages registered from 2005 to 2013 involved boys under age 18.²² There is also a distinct spousal age gap in marriages involving Syrian adolescent girls. Statistics for 2012 showed that of all known Syrian girls who married between the ages of 15 and 17, 16.2% of them married men who were 15 or more years *older* than them, compared to 6.3% for Palestinian girls and 7.0% of Jordanian girls who married early.²³

Not only are the consequences of early and forced marriage traumatizing, they can be fatal. Pregnancy is consistently among the leading causes of death for girls aged 15 to 19 worldwide.²⁴ Girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s.²⁵ Domestic violence poses a significant danger for married adolescent girls. A study conducted by International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in two states in India found that girls who were married before the age of 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped or threatened by their husbands as girls who married later.²⁶

Traditionally in Syrian families, marriage is the means by which community ties are created and sustained. Marriage marks the union of families as well as individuals. Under personal status law, it is required, as a condition of marriage, that the man be "equal or equivalent to the woman" in religion and wealth as part of ensuring the marriage forms a long-term union and establishes a stable family. A dowry,

The Experience of Syrian Women and Girls Across the Region (continued)

paid by the groom to a bride's male family members, is a precondition for the marriage certificate to be issued by the Syrian court.²⁷ As the conflict in Syria destroys towns and villages, community ties that served as social and economic safety nets have ruptured and the means of marriages have altered. Women spoke about the changes they have seen since the conflict began. Before the conflict, strong social networks and cultural ties enabled families to verify the groom's reputation and capacity to provide for the bride and the family. This helped to protect the bride from exploitation and harm in an arranged marriage.

Now, with little hope of an income or job security, refugee families are accepting unknown men outside of their community and accepting lower dowries for their daughters than they would have before the conflict. A 16-year-old adolescent girl from a camp in northern Syria said: "Men are able to marry as the dowry is cheap now, only a tent."—Hawa, 16, Syria. All too often, families do not have access to Sharia or other courts that would offer formal protection to the girl. One 18-year-old adolescent girl interviewed said: "Now they don't do an official marriage contract or document the marriage, so the Syrian girls are

abused more. Nobody understands that the Syrian girls [need legalized marriages] to preserve or prevent themselves from being harassed or abused." —Fayza, 18, Turkey.

Layla, 38, LEBANON

“Many girls are being beaten by their husbands. She [a community member] is only 16 years old and beaten every day.... God help these girls. Girls should not be married. They are getting miscarriages, they are being beaten, they are getting married so young.”

As stated in previous reports, early marriage is not a new phenomenon among Syrian girls.²⁸ According to Article 16 of Syria's personal status law, the age of marriage in Syria is 18 for males and 17 for females, with an exception in Article 18 to decrease the age of the girl to 13 years old if three conditions are met: puberty, the approval of a judge, and the consent of a guardian, father or grandfather. What is new are the conflict-related drivers contributing to girls marrying at increasingly

One day I came home to find my father arguing with my mother, saying it was time for me to get married. He wanted to arrange a match with my cousin, putting me under a man's protection and reducing the family's financial burden. I told my father that I didn't want to get married—that I didn't love this man, and my mother said she thought I was too young. However, less than a week later I was called into the house and found a Sheikh waiting with my father and future husband. We were wed right there and then—it was a total shock for me, but I wasn't able to do anything to stop it.

I had such big dreams—I wanted to be a fashion designer, but now I'm trapped in this marriage, which for me is like a prison. I am not allowed to go to school, I feel depressed. I used to ignore what is happening inside me, but all of these feelings are accumulating, and I am afraid I will explode.

—Sabeen, AGE 15, LEBANON





ABOVE: A Syrian refugee mother living with her family in a refugee camp in Jordan.

younger ages. In addition, because of economic pressures on conflict-affected Syrian families, these marriages are often conducted in haste, without formal registration or other traditional mechanisms that would provide some protection to a girl in the event of a divorce.

Women and men told the IRC that with dwindling options and scarce resources, early marriage is the most viable alternative available to families. In fact, some adolescent girls themselves talked about marriage as a way to obtain a level of freedom and security they don't currently have. Driving this perception is growing fear for the safety and honor of adolescent girls, who now face additional risks from the restrictions placed on girls' ability to leave their homes safely. One adolescent girl stated: "When I first got here, I wanted to return to school, but my parents refused to let me go anymore. They were afraid for me and didn't want me to go outside the house." —Rasha, 16, Jordan.

Fear for refugee girls' safety is exacerbated by overcrowding in homes and tents, financial considerations, and questions parents and girls have about the utility of girls attending school in the host country. For example, when talking with the women and girls for this report it was clear parents and girls were

Bana, AGE 42, JORDAN

“Our neighbors had engaged their 13-year-old daughter and when I heard the news I went to speak with them. I told them what I had learned at the [IRC] women's center—that she wasn't physically or mentally mature, that it would be a huge disadvantage for her to be married so young. They changed their mind and broke the engagement—her father, in fact, was so relieved he celebrated by buying everyone sweets. Now the mother and daughter come to the center. The daughter is like a different person—she has come out of her shell—she is outgoing and confident.”

not sure whether Lebanon and Jordan would honor previous schooling and vice versa. This lack of information created doubts among parents and resulted in girls not attending school. These factors strongly influenced the justification for early marriage. Women and adolescent girls, and in several cases men as well, said if there were other options available, these early and forced marriages would not take place or would at least be delayed. There can be no question that displacement from Syria, compounded by obstacles to education, contributes to early marriages and increases threats for adolescent girls already experiencing dangerously challenged lives.

Seen as a way to create safety for adolescent girls, in many instances these marriages increase vulnerabilities and risks for them, especially as the harrowing challenges of poverty and displacement add undeniable pressure to these new relationships. Newly married girls face a host of challenges including ongoing displacement, difficulties in dealing with the responsibilities of marriage and taking care of the household, physical and emotional abuse inflicted by their husband or husband's family, and difficulty conceiving or experiencing health complications associated with adolescent

The Experience of Syrian Women and Girls Across the Region (continued)

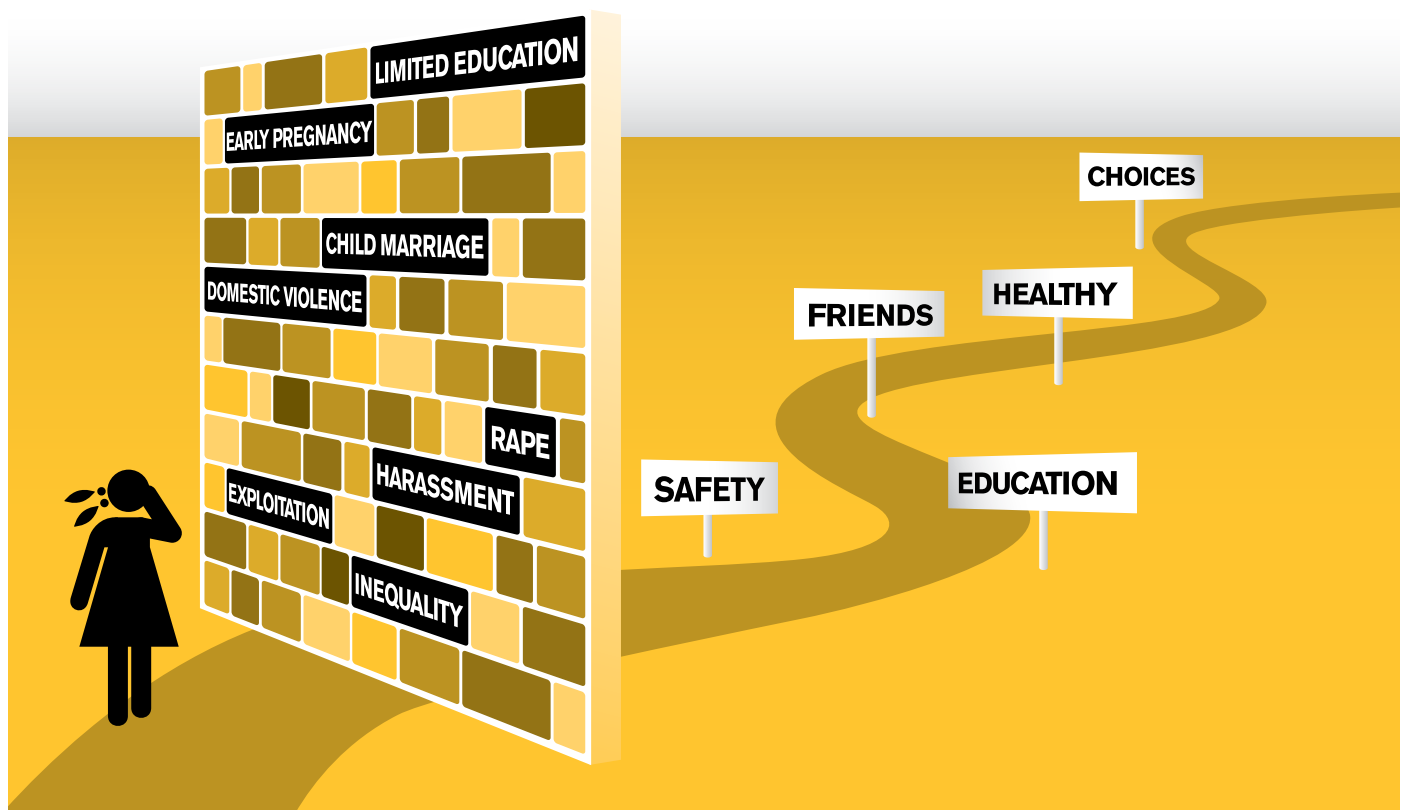
pregnancy. An adolescent girl exposed her pain to us: “In my case, I got married really young [at 13]. It’s very hard for me to get pregnant. It was really hard to get a child; I had 5 miscarriages. I am now in debt because I paid for the injection to get pregnant. ... My husband wants to divorce me.” —Zain, 18, Lebanon.

In many instances, married women and adolescent girls report that these challenges became grounds for divorce, and they were sent back to their homes. Because divorce represents a stain on the sense of family honor, violence against the woman or girl may increase and her social mobility may be further restricted. Numerous such cases were shared with the IRC; one 16-year old divorced girl from a Syrian displacement camp said: “My father does not allow me to go out because I’m divorced and I need to protect my honor. Neighbors look at me when I [do] go out, even to a close place, as if I’m eccentric. I always hear that they talk badly about me. My eldest brother hits and insults me if I insist on going out.” —Haya, 16, Syria. ■

Liliane, AGE 47, JORDAN

“My daughters were in college but they all needed to stop their education because of the conflict and because of our displacement. They don’t work. I don’t work either. But I will not sell myself for anything and I will not sell my daughters for anything. My daughters don’t work specifically because I am afraid of exploitation—they have each had suitors but I tell them all—I am not selling my family. I don’t even take them to [aid] distributions because they are treated disrespectfully.”

A wall of obstacles: what adolescent girls face in pursuing their future



A Complex But Not Intractable Problem: Partnering with Women and Girls on Solutions

“A skill for a woman is a weapon. It allows her to stay independent, to protect herself and her family.”

—Yana, AGE 65, JORDAN

Steps have been taken by different agencies to address the numerous issues women and girls are facing. In Lebanon, for example, UNFPA and UNICEF have supported trainings of health care staff on the clinical care of sexual assault for survivors of violence. In both Jordan and Lebanon, interagency trainings on case management and Caring for Child Survivors have taken place. These are steps towards meeting minimum standards yet more implementing agencies, coordinated efforts and accountability are needed to meet the scale and scope of need women and girls have expressed.

Below are some of the approaches that women and girls have told us are currently working. While not exhaustive, they are examples of what IRC has seen work in response to what women and girls are asking for in programming.

Safety Audits

Women and girls were clear in telling us they want to have a say in their own safety and want people to act to reduce the risks they are identifying. Safety Audits are one way to ensure women and girls' voices drive programming decisions. A Safety Audit is a rapid way to identify and respond to risks in the community (camp, informal settlements or urban neighborhood) identified by women and girls themselves. This one page tool is used with women and girls and includes questions such as:

- › “Are there schools open in the community?” If yes, is access to those schools safe?
- › “Does night lighting exist?” If yes, is it functioning each night?
- › Are latrines, water points and health posts well lit and safely accessible?

Audits can be done quickly and at multiple points in time to determine where risk reduction efforts should be focused and whether or not those efforts are working. IRC uses Safety Audits throughout our programming. For example, in February 2014 the IRC led a Safety Audit in Zaatari camp in Jordan. The IRC was immediately able to bring critical risks identified by the women and girls to the attention of camp management. Additionally, IRC provided basic safety

equipment, such as locks for latrines, to immediately address some of the risks identified.

Community-Based Safety Planning

In Lebanon, the concept of the Safety Audit has been successfully modified to a longer more comprehensive exercise referred to as the Community-Based Safety Planning approach. This more involved process is conducted separately with adolescent girls, adult women and adult men to identify risks facing women and girls in the community and plan for community-based responses. Key steps include:

- › **Community mapping**—conducted separately with adolescent girls and adult women and using tools adapted from IRC's Emergency Response and Preparedness toolkit.²⁹
- › **Community mapping with men**—adapted to a community dialogue or focus group type of activity as men were more inclined to participate in this type of discussion than other methods used with the women and girls.
- › **Safety planning**—conducted separately with each group (adolescent girls, adult women and men) to prioritize the most at risk group or population. This is centered around a series of questions that help participants think through options to create a safer community and their own role within that safer community.
- › **Provision of basic safety equipment**—such as locks for latrines, flashlights, and other materials to support the implementation of the community safety plans.³⁰

The most relevant point in either rapid Safety Audits or the Community-Based Safety Planning is the centrality of women and girls' voices in identifying risks and remedies. Neither approach will be effective if solutions to the identified risks are not promptly acted on in partnership with women and girls.

Cash Assistance

Globally, women consistently tell us that having access to and control over economic resources is an important part of their safety and we hear the same from Syrian women. Cash assistance has been an important feature of IRC's emergency

What Can Happen When We Ask Women and Girls About Their Safety A Lebanon Case Study

Four months after starting weekly counseling activities in an informal settlement in north Lebanon, the IRC's Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE) Outreach Team conducted a community mapping exercise with adolescent girls living in the settlement.

During the conversation the girls identified a particular group of latrines in the settlement as not safe, although they were reluctant to go into details about what made them unsafe. Almost immediately after the conversation, three girls came forward and requested to speak privately with the IRC caseworker. This caseworker had been trained specifically on dealing with survivors of GBV. All three girls independently disclosed having been sexually assaulted by the same man while visiting the toilet. None of the girls were aware that someone else had experienced the same violence within the settlement and they all had a strong fear of the perpetrator, as he is a powerful man within the community. The IRC caseworker later received a fourth disclosure from an adult woman living in the settlement.

While individual safety plans were created with each of the girls accessing case management, it was clear that all children, adolescent girls and women in the settlement were facing a high risk of sexual assault and that wider measures had to be put in place to prevent further assaults. Men, women and adolescent girls all took part in a community mapping exercise, and everyone then agreed upon specific actions. In addition to providing locks for all of the latrines and procuring flashlights for women and girls, the IRC's Women's Protection and Child Protection teams conducted a collective safety planning exercise with all adolescent girls living in this area. During this exercise, girls agreed to call on each other whenever they wished to visit the toilet so as not to go alone, and to not use one particular latrine where most of the attacks had happened. As most of the attacks occurred at night, they decided to ask an adult to accompany them to the toilet after dark. They requested locks for the latrines and agreed on an alert sound they would make to attract attention to



ABOVE: Women paint henna patterns on each other at IRC women's center in Lebanon, where Syrian refugee women and girls come together to network and get support.

anything suspicious within the camp. The IRC procured locks as well as whistles and flashlights for the girls to attract attention if necessary.

The IRC's Women's Protection and Child Protection staff also organized a series of activities for adolescent girls in the village, to allow girls to leave their settlement and enlarge their support networks. These activities included discussions about "good touch" and "bad touch" and will soon be complemented by assertiveness exercises as well. The WPE and Child Protection teams also collaborated and delivered three sessions of positive parenting skills involving both mothers and fathers to stress the importance of open communication with their children, as adolescent girls had expressed strong fears of being blamed by their parents for such attacks. This also served as an first opportunity for the IRC and the WPE team in particular to interact with men in the community and build a relationship of trust with them.

response. As a result of IRC Safety Audits and Community Based Safety Planning, cash assistance was identified as a response to reduce multiple risks for women and girls. Some of the ways this intervention impacted women and girls safety and well-being was: by allowing families to pay rent in urban areas, reducing sexual harassment by landlords and cases of early marriage; and by allowing women and girls to purchase menstrual hygiene items not included on their refugee vouchers.

In IRC's recently completed impact evaluation on the UNHCR winter cash assistance program in Lebanon, there were two key findings of particular relevance to this report.³¹ First, while there are no formal school fees for Syrian refugee children to attend government schools in Lebanon, Syrians need to pay for transportation to and from school, and for books and other supplies, which can be prohibitive. Thus, cash assistance can have multiple effects on increasing children's access to school, notably: increased ability to cover necessary education costs, and a decreasing need to send children to earn money. These programs can be delivered in ways that increase adolescent

Delphine, AGE 41, JORDAN

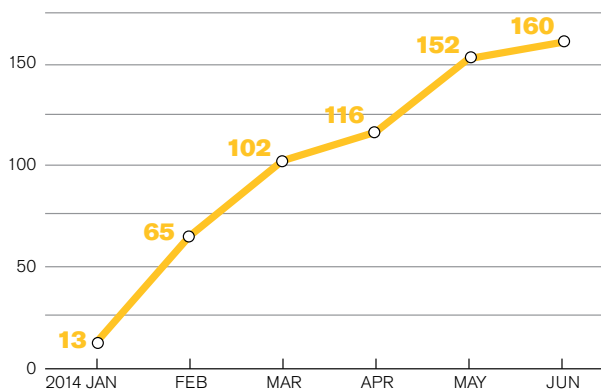
“A Syrian woman is independent; she is responsible. We feel like men in the home—we don't fear obstacles. Life has taught us a great deal.”

girls' access to education and address the specific barriers they face.

The second finding of this evaluation relevant for this report found that increased cash in the household can reduce stress that contributes to intra-household disputes. With this finding it is important to note that 85% of the primary respondents of this survey were male and that questions were not geared toward violence in the home. Through multiple country evaluations, the IRC's Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE) programs have found that coupling cash assistance with discussion groups for men and women contributes to women having safe access to and control over financial



Incidents of violence against women, reported to the IRC in Jordan



Only 1 in 10 women come forward to report violence perpetrated against them.

Globally, the IRC sees an increase in reported cases of violence when quality and trusted services become available. The increase in reporting in this graph corresponds to the increase in IRC services and outreach to women and girls.

LEFT: A Syrian woman stands with her little sister looking out of their caravan in a refugee camp in Jordan.

A Complex But Not Intractable Problem (continued)

resources. For example, the IRC in Turkey facilitates cash transfers for vulnerable households with payments of \$150 per month. These households have the opportunity to participate in the IRC's gender discussion group curriculum to help make financial decisions more equitable and reduce the risk of domestic violence that may occur.

Community-Based Education (CBE)

In Lebanon the IRC is implementing community-based education programs for 8,500 vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian out-of-school children in areas where no other education services are available to them. Community-based education has shown itself to be a way to keep girls safe and in school. The flexibility of CBE allows the IRC to adapt learning spaces, materials, and teaching techniques to meet girls' safety and counseling needs. For example, communities play a key role in deciding the location of CBE sites and creating systems where cases of abuse can be reported and acted upon quickly.

Safe Spaces

In the Syria region, IRC supports over 20 centers for women and girls across northern Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan. These centers serve as "safe spaces" for women and girls that are refugees, have been displaced, or are from the host community. The IRC centers are safe spaces that focus on strengthening informal support networks among women and girls to promote coping with the trauma of displacement

and building on the resilience of women and girls to support community-based mechanisms. The IRC supports a broad range of group activities in the form of skills training, information sessions, non-formal education, reproductive health classes, and business trainings that are designed, informed, and led by women and girls in the safe space. These women centers serve as entry points for survivors of physical and sexual violence where they will not face the stigma attached to being a survivor of violence; by extension the centers promote help-seeking behavior. Survivors can report incidents confidentially and access services including counseling and health care.

Depending on the context and resources, these centers are divided for women and girls, and have age-appropriate services and support in the same center. In Syria, close to 150 women and girls a month come to IRC-supported centers for women and girls. In Iraq, IRC supports a local partner in running two centers—one in Domiz camp and one in Gawilan camp. In 2013 in Jordan, over 11,000 women and girls took part in activities or services at IRC-supported centers. In Lebanon, to overcome barriers to access linked not only to cost of transportation, but also to protection concerns that often limit women and girls' mobility, transportation to and from IRC safe spaces is provided. The IRC invests time in ensuring the community understands the purpose of the centers and men feel comfortable allowing women to go to them. Women and girls have told us without these spaces many women and girls would not be allowed to go anywhere. ■

Women's responses to hearing the results of IRC's report and the sharing of it with the international community

“ I am happy that someone is hearing us. I feel like the problems we are facing are those faced by all and this helps me—that it is not just me. We are all facing these issues together. ” —LAYAL, AGE 32, JORDAN

“ I feel more unity with women. ” —SARA, AGE 39, JORDAN

“ It gives me strength. I feel like I can handle these problems now. All these women are strong—so I must be strong. She has suffered the same thing and made it through—so I can as well. ” —LIMA, AGE 32, JORDAN



Conclusion

“A Syrian woman is someone who likes work, who is productive, who has a strong character, who when faced with obstacles will overcome them. Most of all she is a hard worker, someone who makes things.”

Hadeel, AGE 44 JORDAN



ABOVE: A Syrian refugee woman and her daughter stand outside their small apartment in Jordan.

Attention to violence against women and girls in crisis, particularly during armed conflict, has increased over the past decade, and it is time that this attention leads to more changes in lives of Syrian woman and girls. Built on the IRC's program experience working with displaced Syrians in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Syria and on the voices of Syrian women, girls and men, the regional recommendations in this report do not call for funding as *the* most important solution, but rather for a *radical change in the way the international community works* to safeguard the well-being of women and girls in crisis.

This means no longer viewing women and as girls as a population that has to be “fit into” existing programming but rather seeing women and girls as a population whose voices and experience drive the design of programs that meet their needs—and as a population defined not by their vulnerabilities but by their daily contributions, which are recognized and valued. We must work to ensure women's and girls' strength and resiliency are not exhausted by violence and oppression but are

spent on contributing to communities and countries. By shifting the paradigm, women and girls can refocus their strength and resiliency on themselves and on contributing to communities and countries with safety and dignity. This shift requires the active engagement of women and girls, even when they are hard to reach, and especially because they are hard to reach. It requires actions that demonstrate accountability to women and girls is not optional, but essential. That means we are accountable for addressing the violence that stands between them and the aid we provide. This report lays out eight action-oriented recommendations that urge immediate attention. Syrian women and girls have told us what they need: *Are we listening?*

Following are eight regional recommendations for U.N. agencies, host country governments, donors, and humanitarian organizations. These are followed by country-specific recommendations. All recommendations are premised on the understanding that basic needs as defined by international humanitarian standards must be met as protection threats are addressed. ■



“ I want so many things for my life. ”

For the first year I lived in the camp, I was depressed—I struggled to cope with the living conditions and the stress of trying to make sure my family was taken care of. But then one day I said to myself—I have to deal with this. I have to move on and rebuild. I changed my whole mindset and worked really hard—I was lucky enough to find a job, and I began to rebuild my sewing business, which was destroyed in Syria. I managed to save up and buy a sewing machine and now I have a backlog of orders.

I consider myself an activist—not necessarily a political one, but I go out and help others—even in the camp. I have some medical training so I walk around to see if anyone is sick or wounded—I also assist doctors and EMTs from time to time. It has been a constant struggle, but now I am more powerful. I want my daughters to finish school. I want my business to grow. I want stability. And I am slowly making things happen.

—Dalal, AGE 38, JORDAN

Regional Recommendations for Donors, U.N. Agencies, Host Country Governments and Humanitarian Organizations

Women and girls' voices must be a key force in driving humanitarian action

Consultation with women and girls leads to effective programs with greater inclusion and impact. Women and girls' voices must be included in needs assessments, program design, implementation and evaluations. Humanitarian organizations, U.N. agencies, and host and donor governments must include women and girls' voices to ensure that their priorities inform all elements of humanitarian action, in line with the "Call to Action" Communiqué.³²

Women and girls must be safe from gender-based violence

The U.N. should immediately commission a regional real-time evaluation on the application of minimum standards as laid out in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for the Prevention and Response to GBV in Humanitarian Settings. This evaluation should assess the extent to which humanitarian action—including shelter, site planning, non-food item distribution, education, water and sanitation, health, assessment, monitoring and coordination—is reducing the risks women and girls face on a day-to-day basis. The findings should inform time-bound action to address the issues identified by women and girls.

Women and girls must have safe, easy access to registration and services

UNHCR and host government programs must make individual registration safe and accessible for all women and girls so they can access aid and services independently—without dependence on a head of household—in both camps and urban settings.

Survivors of gender-based violence must receive appropriate care immediately, when and where they seek it

Survivors need to access care within 72 hours in order to prevent the potential transmission of HIV and unwanted pregnancy. The following actions are necessary to achieve this goal:

a. U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations must ensure safe entry points to services for survivors. This

means ramping up mobile service delivery, including outside of camps and urban centers, and creating age-appropriate safe spaces designated for women and girls.

b. Host countries, U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations must provide accessible, comprehensive health services. This includes ensuring that all health facilities and mobile teams have staff trained in sexual and reproductive health care including clinical care for sexual assault survivors.

c. Host countries, U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations must provide accessible legal counseling and advice for GBV survivors.

Adolescent girls must be safe and programs should be tailored to the unique risks they face

Donors, U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations must develop and implement programs that focus on creating opportunities for girls and providing services that respond to their experience of violence, including early and forced marriage. Integrated programs addressing girls' specific needs include ensuring safe spaces and life skills opportunities, economic opportunities for girls and families, and information-sharing and skill-building with parents and caregivers.

Adolescent girls need access to safe, relevant and quality education

Access to safe learning opportunities is crucial to both ensuring girls are safe from sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, as well as providing them with the foundational skills they need to promote their own safety and future.

Donors, U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations must address the specific needs and barriers to adolescent girls' accessing education and remaining enrolled in school by:

a. Ensuring that girls have safe and secure transportation to school, safe learning environments, and a balance of academic and social and emotional skills needed to make healthy life choices.

b. Ensuring that parents, caregivers and girls have accurate information about accredited education

Regional Recommendations (continued)

opportunities. Providing non-formal education opportunities that are flexible, close to refugee communities, employ Syrian teachers where possible, and are accredited or increase pathways into accredited or formal education or livelihood opportunities.

Women and girls experiencing domestic violence must benefit from humanitarian action addressing the problem

- a. U.N. agencies must act on the understanding that domestic violence is an imminent threat to women and girls' protection and must support programs designed to respond to it and prevent it. Re-frame domestic violence as a protection concern in key humanitarian strategies and guidance, including U.N. agency plans and policies that guide inter-agency efforts.

- b. U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations must incorporate into health, food security, cash assistance and other aid programming specific measures that address domestic violence as a key obstacle to women and girls accessing the benefits of these programs.

Women and girls must not face sexual exploitation and abuse

UNHCR, host governments and humanitarian organizations must monitor and coordinate mechanisms for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), ensuring that aid agencies adopt multi-pronged mechanisms that include: (a) training staff providing aid and services on PSEA; (b) putting in place and enforcing organizational codes of conduct on PSEA, ensuring that staff and refugees can effectively report sexual exploitation and abuse; (c) disseminating information to refugees on how to report abuse; and (d) working with local partners to implement PSEA mechanisms. ■

BELOW: A refugee family prepares breakfast in their tent in Domiz camp, Iraq.



Country-specific Recommendations

SYRIA

In northern Syria, the IRC provides women's protection and empowerment services through eight safe spaces for displaced and host community women and girls in six camps and 11 communities in two governorates. Activities in the women's centers are currently being implemented by 12 full-time staff and 32 volunteers.

Since January 2014, a total of 15,699 women and girls have been served through IRC-operated health clinics; over 1,200 have been provided psychosocial support, recreational and education activities, and support services for survivors. Between 100–150 women and girls come to IRC-supported centers each month, most attending on a daily basis, with volunteers providing home-based services for women with disabilities and limited mobility.

UNHCR should:

Improve women and girls' protection and access to humanitarian aid in Syria.

In line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2165, UNHCR should coordinate efforts to identify programming gaps; ramp up protection programs; and coordinate with aid agencies to address the specific needs of women, girls, and gender-based violence survivors across Syria.

Donors should:

Increase support for the U.N. appeals for the Syria regional response and enhance resource-sharing efforts.

- Increase their support to the U.N. appeals for inside Syria and for the refugee response, which are currently less than 50% funded. Increasing access to services and decreasing risks of violence for women and girls can be achieved by prioritizing protection and gender-based violence programs through these appeals.
- Increase funding for educational opportunities inside Syria, focusing on the provision of secondary education, and for accelerated learning programs and vocational training to provide alternatives for girls who don't have access to formal education.

Humanitarian Agencies should:

- Develop a long-term capacity building plan with international and Syrian organizations that are

providing services to women and girls throughout the country together the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility and the High Level Group on Humanitarian Challenges in Syria.

- Build capacity among all medical providers on gender-based violence response in partnership with the Global Health Cluster. This action includes dissemination of training packages for clinical and non-clinical workers, enhanced and innovative monitoring, and mentoring of trained staff to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how to respond to gender-based violence survivors.
- Ensure that sex and age disaggregated data are gathered during joint assessments to better evaluate the needs that are specific to women and girls.
- Ensure camp management agencies and community organizations harmonize registration and documentation. In addition, ensure that female-headed households, single women and girls, and widows are prioritized for humanitarian assistance.

BELOW: A displaced girl working in her father's shop in Atmeh camp, Syria.



Country-specific Recommendations (continued)

IRAQ

The Women's Protection and Empowerment refugee assistance program operates in Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) as well as in Al Qaim, in the Anbar Governate. Iraq currently hosts 218,040 Syrian refugees, with the vast majority having fled to the KRI in the northern part of the country. At the time of the writing of this report, the security situation in Iraq has deteriorated significantly due to attacks by the group calling itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, which has taken over large swaths of the country. This has led to successive waves of displaced persons, many fleeing to the KRI for safety.

IRC suspended its refugee program in Al Qaim, as the region is currently inaccessible. In Dohuk, the IRC initially supported a

women and girls center and has since transferred management to a local organization and the IRC still continues to provide staff training. This partner organization now operates in two centers—one in Domiz Camp and one in Gawilan Camp. In addition, the IRC is establishing a community center with a mobile clinic for non-camp refugees in the Dohuk Governorate. In Sulaymaniyah, the IRC is managing a woman and girls listening center in Arbat Camp.

The Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq should:

- ▶ Enable women to pursue economic opportunities by continuing to grant residency to camp and non-camp Syrian refugees, thus allowing all refugees to work legally and to move freely among KRI provinces.
- ▶ Permit direct assistance to all refugees living in the KRI, including those living outside camps, with cash transfers and non-food item distributions.
- ▶ Allocate greater resources to the Directorate for the Tracing Violence Against Women program to allow for a more robust response to refugee survivors of GBV.
- ▶ Update government's procedures for clinical management of rape to reflect international standards that allow women to choose whom to report cases to and to receive immediate treatment.

U.N. Agencies and humanitarian organizations should:

- ▶ Work with their partners and the government to establish an interagency complaint mechanism in cases of abuse or exploitation, including sexual exploitation and abuse.
- ▶ Ensure that information about program services reaches women and girls consistently in camps and urban areas via safe spaces and aid worker outreach.

Donors should:

- ▶ Increase support to the Federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to improve conditions of host communities, refugees and internally displaced persons including prioritizing access to basic services.

BELOW: A Syrian refugee mother and her baby in Domiz camp, northern Iraq.



JORDAN

The IRC started Women's Protection and Empowerment programming in 2007 with programs for Iraqi refugees and Jordanian communities. Since 2012 in response to the Syrian conflict the IRC has supported two reproductive health clinics and three centers for women and girls in Ramtha, Mafrq, and Irbid. All are open to Syrians and Jordanians. The IRC is also supporting four women and girls centers in Zaatari refugee camp.

The IRC Women's Protection and Empowerment program provides services to an average of 2,000 women every month in Jordan. To date, 5,733 women and girls have received psychosocial support from IRC psychologists and over 13,400 dignity kits³³ have been distributed to women and girls of reproductive age. In 2013, more than 11,000 women and girls

BELOW: A Syrian refugee girl paints at a children's play area at an IRC women's center at Zaatari camp. While women meet to take part in programming, the IRC provides a space for children to play.



participated in healing activities at IRC-supported centers. In addition, the IRC provides cash assistance to vulnerable refugee families, with women and girls being the primary recipients.

The Jordanian Government should:

- Fully implement Article 306 of the Penal Code on verbal harassment and disseminate information about this law to women and girls from host and refugee communities.
- The Department of the Chief Justice and Sharia Courts should strengthen the protection mechanisms for girls in the Directive under which marriage of children between the ages of 16–18 is permissible.³⁴
- The Department of the Chief Justice should ensure that early marriage cases that have been refused by one court cannot apply in another.
- Sharia Courts should ensure that marriage contracts involving girls include a clause ensuring girls' continued education.

Humanitarian agencies should:

- Design programs to address the links between girls' lack of access to education, experience of early and forced marriage, and fear of harassment and violence. This effort must be multidisciplinary through coordination with the GBV, child protection and education working groups and must also emphasize the need for safe learning environments
- Ensure that protection and gender-based violence programs target women and girls with disabilities and women who are caretakers of persons with disabilities.

Donors should:

- Increase support to the Jordanian government to improve the conditions for host communities and refugees, including prioritizing women and girls' access to basic services with an emphasis on supporting Jordanian health services.

Country-specific Recommendations (continued)

LEBANON

Since November 2012, the IRC has established five women and girls centers in the north of the country and in the Bekaa Valley, more specifically in Batroun, Wadi Khaled, Berqayel, Arsaal and Bar Elias. Over 7,600 Syrian women and girls have used these and close to 10,000 Lebanese and Syrian women and girls have used mobile services. These mobile teams are developed to reach dispersed and remote groups of refugees who often cannot access existing stationary services. The IRC also has distributed over 20,000 dignity kits to mitigate the risks of sexual exploitation for newly arrived refugee women and girls. In addition, in 2014, the IRC organized targeted activities aimed at adolescent girls with focus on developing positive coping mechanisms and establishing networks of friends and supporters. Finally, the IRC has supported capacity-building of local health care providers and organizations to ensure that women and girls are safely referred to services and quality clinical care.



The Government of Lebanon should:

- Support programs that foster cohesion between refugees and host communities in areas with a high concentration of refugees.
- Continue to support Syrian girls' and boys' access to education. Address girl-specific barriers with initiatives such as community-based education programs.

U.N. and Humanitarian agencies should:

- Work closely with the government to address the barrier of army checkpoints on registration for refugees that entered the country irregularly.
- UNCHR should lead and increase internal capacities and mechanisms to identify refugees' protection needs during registration.
- Increase programs such as counseling that address adolescent girls' risks and challenges, to include safety planning, life skills curricula reflecting gender-based violence, mobile approaches, and interventions with caretakers.

Donors should:

- Increase support to the Lebanese government to improve conditions for host communities and refugees living in tented settlements and urban areas, prioritizing women's and girls' access to basic services.
- Invest in transportation and mobile health services, ensuring that they systematically include reproductive health services to increase access for refugee women and girls.

LEFT: A Syrian refugee woman at the entrance to her tent in an informal settlement in northern Lebanon. The IRC is providing cash assistance to hundreds of refugee and Lebanese families in Lebanon.

TURKEY

Since late 2013, the IRC has been implementing economic recovery, youth, and protection programming in two cities in Turkey's Hatay province: Reyhanli and Antakya.

The IRC in Turkey facilitates cash transfers for vulnerable families, covering 945 households in 2014 with regular payments of \$150 per month. These households have the opportunity to participate in the IRC's gender discussion group curriculum to help reduce the risk and incidence of intimate partner violence. In addition, the IRC runs a youth center in Reyhanli that focuses on life skills and vocational training, recreational activities, Turkish and English language courses, cash for work, dissemination of legal and protection-related information, facilitating referral pathways for individuals with protection concerns, and psychosocial and peer support groups for adolescents.

The Government of Turkey should:

- Enable Syrian service providers to support education initiatives through formal and non-formal education programs facilitating language learning.

U.N. and Humanitarian agencies should:

- Work with the government in finding the right mechanisms to support communities in building cohesive relationships with refugees they are hosting. Support the capacity of local and community-based organizations to provide programming specifically for women and girls.
- Increase programs that address the language barrier faced by the refugee population and ensure their accessibility to women and girls.

Donors should:

- Increase support for host and refugee communities where tensions between these have been identified and support integrated programs in identified areas. ■

BELOW: A Syrian father and daughter at a refugee transit camp near Turkey's border with Syria.



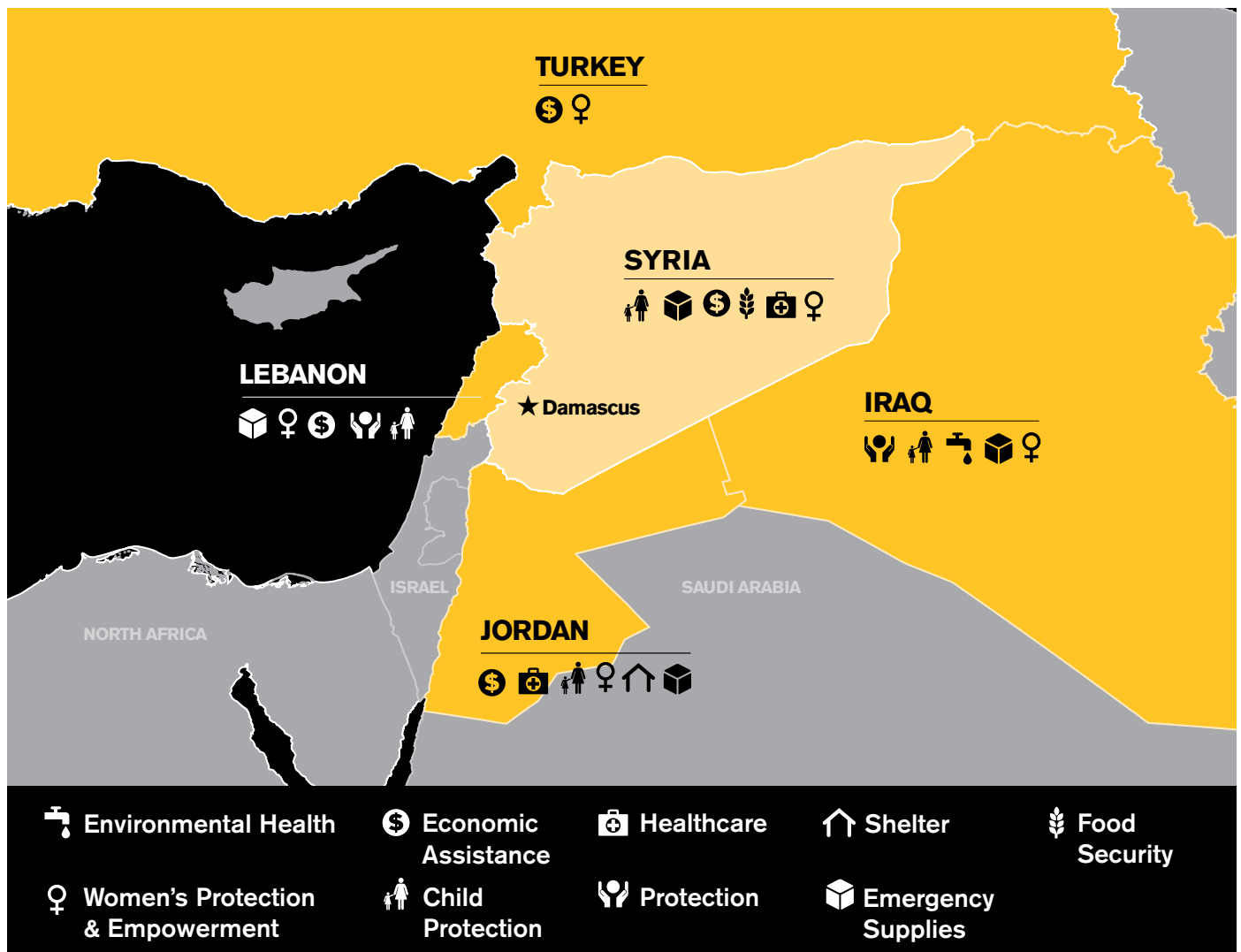
The IRC's Work in the Region

As of June 2014, the IRC had 1,130 staff members and volunteers serving close to 4 million beneficiaries in the region. This group includes: refugees living in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey, those displaced within Syria, those displaced in Iraq during the latest crisis, as well as host populations within each of these countries.

The IRC's regional response provides a range of services to those who have lost everything when fleeing their homes. We provide primary and reproductive health services, along with clean water, sanitation infrastructure and hygiene education. The IRC has established child and youth protection and education programming, including formal education as well as case management of unaccompanied and separated

children. We provide cash assistance, information and legal services and we distribute non-food items—kits with household necessities such as lights, mattresses, and cooking utensils; personal hygiene items for men and women and seasonal clothing. The IRC also runs specific programming for women and girls through our Women's Protection and Empowerment programming.

The IRC is reaching more than 4 million people in the Syria Region



Women's Protection and Empowerment

Since 1996, the IRC has designed and implemented programs to respond to the needs of women and girls in over 33 conflict affected countries around the world. Our Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE) programs facilitate the healing, dignity and self-determination of women and girls who have experienced violence. These programs create opportunities for women and girls to transform their lives and to make their voices heard in pursuit of a safer, more equitable world. In partnership with communities and institutions, IRC programs promote and protect women's and girl's rights and contribute to conditions in which they can enjoy those rights.

Regionally, IRC Women's Protection and Empowerment programs focus on four key objectives:

1. Providing quality survivor-centered services, including case management and psychological support.
2. Supporting and increasing women and girls' decision-making power and their access to, and control over, economic resources.
3. Empowering women, girls, men and boys to challenge attitudes and practices that oppress women and girls through effective, evidence-based prevention interventions.
4. Working with civil society organizations, humanitarian agencies and government institutions to effectively address the priorities expressed by women and girls.

The programs in the Syria region combine prevention, empowerment, response and coordination activities. Services are the bedrock of IRC programming in the region and our programs ensure that survivors can quickly and safely access medical care, psychosocial support and case management services. In addition, we provide safe spaces where both refugee and host country women and girls can come to participate in skill building and psychosocial activities. This is an opportunity for women and girls to get and give support and receive information and referrals to other services.

Using a mix of host country and Syrian teams the IRC conducts outreach in the communities to provide information on available services and builds community networks. Our regional response works with key decision makers and communities—host country and refugee women, girls, men and boys—to strengthen existing community based mechanisms and increase cohesion and dialogue in order to prevent multiple forms of violence against women and girls.

The IRC plays an active coordination role working with national and sub-national working groups, governmental departments, as well as local and international humanitarian organizations to ensure women's and girls' needs are taken into account across humanitarian sectors and that services for GBV survivors are comprehensive.

BELOW: IRC volunteer Rania speaks with a Syrian refugee at a refugee camp in Jordan. Rania is a Syrian refugee who meets with as many as 50 families per week to inform them about available programming and support in the camp.



Methodology

This report synthesizes information from three main sources:

Review of Programmatic Experience and Service Delivery Data

This report includes information from Women's Protection and Empowerment programs in 64 communities in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Jordan implemented by more than 260 staff and volunteers.

Qualitative Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with 198 Syrian Women, Adolescent Girls and Men

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with displaced women, adolescent girls, and men currently living in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Syria from May 18 to July 1, 2014. IRC researchers and staff members conducted 56 in-depth interviews and 17 focus group discussions throughout the region, with an overall total of 198 individuals participating. The primary focus of the research was to understand the main challenges facing displaced women and girls in the region. The majority of the women, girls, and men interviewed had received services from IRC.

Review of Secondary Data

A literature review of reports published in the last three years covering topics related to challenges faced by displaced Syrian women and adolescent girls was conducted in order to place our research findings and programmatic experience within the broader context of knowledge that had already been generated by partners in the field. The literature review highlighted the following key challenges facing displaced Syrian women and adolescent girls.

- 1. Gender Based Violence** Evidence indicates that the risk of exposure to gender-based violence for Syrian women and adolescent girls has intensified since the conflict began.³⁵ Domestic violence has been found to be endemic in refugee communities in the neighboring countries of Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq, where the stress of displacement, overcrowded housing, and the lack of privacy in tents and apartments has led to increased tensions within the family.³⁶ Clinical management of rape services for Syrian women and girls is severely limited and of poor quality, providing few options for help for survivors of GBV.³⁷

- 2. Sexual harassment, restricted mobility and isolation**

Sexual harassment was another major theme found in the literature review. Women reported being harassed by employers, landlords, aid distributors, taxi drivers, bus drivers, service providers, and men in shops at the market, and while traveling on public transport.^{38 39}

- 3. Sexual and reproductive health** Current statistics indicate that pregnant women and adolescent girls are under-utilizing pre-natal and ante-natal care, likely due to the cost of care, barriers to accessing transportation—particularly for refugees living in remote locations—cost of transportation, lack of trust of medical professionals, and lack of access to information regarding where to receive care.⁴⁰ Overall, women's reproductive health care needs are largely unmet, often compromising the safety of deliveries and increasing the risk for emergency obstetric care.⁴¹

- 4. Forced and early marriage** Reports indicate that early marriage was an accepted practice in Syria prior to the beginning of the conflict. However, displacement has influenced rates of early and forced marriage among Syrian adolescent girls.⁴² ■



RIGHT: A Syrian refugee woman in a neighborhood of Irbid, Jordan.

Endnotes

- 1 Annex II provides a more detailed overview of some of the key international, regional and national commitments.
- 2 These six resolutions are annexed in the report.
- 3 <http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/symposium06/>
- 4 This Call to Action resulted in a Communiqué with 12 global principles and 201 individual commitments in areas ranging from prevention to capacity building and response to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in emergencies. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/256872/Final_Communique_v_11_Nov_4.pdf; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greening-girls-and-women-must-be-kept-safe-in-emergencies>.
- 5 See the Syria Regional Refugee Response *Inter-Agency Regional Sharing Portal, Regional Overview*, <http://www.unhcr.org/tr/?lang=en&content=417>
- 6 <http://www.unocha.org/syria>
- 7 <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/settlement.php?id=176®ion=77&country=107>
- 8 See the Syria Regional Refugee Response *Inter-Agency Regional Sharing Portal*. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>
- 9 See the 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan Strategic Overview Mid Year Update. <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/midyear/docs/syriarrp6-midyear-full-report.pdf>
- 10 See *Woman Alone A fight for survival by Syria's refugee Women UNHCR*. http://www.unhcr.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/Woman_Alone_ENG_2_July_2014.pdf
- 11 Syria: NGO Stakeholder Report to the U.N. Universal Periodic Review, Mar. 2011 <http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/session12/SY/KARAMA-eng.pdf>
- 12 We Just Keep Silent—*Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, U.N. WOMEN (April 2014) <http://uniraq.org/images/documents/We%20Just%20Keep%20Silent%20final%20English.pdf>
- 13 See the Syria Regional Refugee Response *Inter-Agency Regional Sharing Portal*. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/settlement.php?id=176&country=107®ion=77>
- 14 We Just Keep Silent—*Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, U.N. WOMEN (April 2014) <http://uniraq.org/images/documents/We%20Just%20Keep%20Silent%20final%20English.pdf>
- 15 IRC Gender discussion research brief <http://gbvresponders.org/empowerment/eae-evidence/>; Economic household discussion group tools <http://gbvresponders.org/empowerment/eae-tools-resources/>
- 16 See WHO Violence Against Women—Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Against Women Fact Sheet <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>
- 17 See the IRC Report *Let Me Not Die Before My Time: Domestic Violence in West Africa*. May 2012. http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/resource-file/IRC_Report_DomVioWAfrica.pdf
- 18 See UNIFEM, 2005, *Violence Against Women Study: Syria 2005* p. 2. http://www.cepal.org/mujer/noticias/paginas/7/42837/VAW_study_2005_syria.pdf
- 19 See the Amnesty International Annual Report 2011: Syria <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/syria/report-2011>
- 20 See United Nations Security General's Campaign Unite to End Violence Against Women fact sheet http://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/pdf/UNiTE_TheSituation_EN.pdf
- 21 See International Center for Research on Women. *Child Marriage Facts and Figures*. <http://www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures>
- 22 A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan, UNICEF, 2014 [http://www.unicef.org/mena/UNICEFJordan_EarlyMarriageStudy2014.pdf]
- 23 A Study on Early Marriage in Jordan, UNICEF, 2014 http://www.unicef.org/mena/UNICEFJordan_EarlyMarriageStudy2014.pdf
- 24 See International Center for Research on Women. *Child Marriage Facts and Figures*. <http://www.icrw.org/child-marriage-facts-and-figures>
- 25 Ibid
- 26 Ibid
- 27 The "Mahr" is the money/property given by the husband to the wife. Mahr can be paid in total at the beginning of the marital life or delayed in total to another time. It can also be divided; part of it to be paid at the beginning of the marriage (muqaddam) and the other part is delayed (mu'akhar)
- 28 Early marriage was not uncommon in Syria prior to the conflict. UNICEF estimates that roughly 3% of Syrian girls were married by age 15 and 13% by age 18. Further, study respondents reported that this practice was more common in rural areas such as Daraa where strong tribal traditions remained intact. See UNICEF At a Glance: Syrian Arab Republic. *Statistics*. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/syria_statistics.html
- 29 Available at www.gbvresponders.org
- 30 Methodology for the modified Community Based Safety planning was adapted from the IRC's *Emergency Response and Prevention Toolkit*, GBVResponders.org
- 31 Lebanon Winterization Evaluation Report 21-08-14
- 32 *The Call to Action* is a U.K.-initiated multi-stakeholder process to prioritize gender-based violence in emergencies currently being led by the U.S. government. For more information, see <http://www.state.gov/j/prm/policyissues/issues/c62377.htm#CALLTOACTION>
- 33 Dignity Kits distributed by the IRC generally contain sanitary material/towels, buckets, soap and other material as defined together with the women and adolescent girls. Kits vary according to location and risks identified.
- 34 These recommendations follow those made by UNICEF in its 2014 report *A study on Early Marriage in Jordan*.
- 35 U.N. WOMEN, We Just Keep Silent—*Gender-based violence amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (April 2014) <http://uniraq.org/images/documents/We%20Just%20Keep%20Silent%20final%20English.pdf>
- 36 Refugees International *Syrian Women and Girls: No Safe Refuge* <http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/syrian-women-girls-no-safe-refuge> (November 16 2012)
- 37 Syria Regional Response Plan, UNHCR, July 2014
- 38 Human Rights Watch, Lebanon: Women Refugees From Syria Harassed, Exploited, www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/26/lebanon-women-refugees-syria-harassed-exploited
- 39 Women Alone, UNHCR, July 2014, file:///C:/Users/IRCUser/Downloads/Woman%20Alone%20(1).pdf
- 40 Ibid
- 41 Ibid
- 42 Inter-agency Assessment of Gender Based Violence and Child Protection Among Syrian Refugees in Jordan, With a Focus on Early Marriage file:///C:/Users/IRCUser/Downloads/Report-webpdf(1).pdf (July 2013)

Thank You

Are We Listening? Acting on Our Commitments to Women and Girls Affected by the Syrian Conflict, is the result of the voices of Syrian women and girls and the International Rescue Committee staff that work side by side with them every day. We are grateful to the women and girls of Syria for sharing their experiences, aspirations and opinions, and for contributing to the recommended solutions. A debt of gratitude to the IRC Women's Protection and Empowerment Coordinators and their teams for their unwavering determination to amplify the voices of women and girls with the work they do every day. Thank you to all of the IRC Syria Regional Response staff for their time and commitment and for their expert analysis and guidance.

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Thank you to the many donors who have supported our work, the foundation of this report, bringing to light the partnerships and specific steps that can affect change in the lives of women and girls.

With gratitude, we acknowledge our partner organizations without whom we would not be able to reach as many Syrian women and girls as we do together. We thank them for their dedication, and for sharing so freely their time and experience to make this a report of action and relevance.

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The International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the IRC offers lifesaving care and life-changing assistance to refugees forced to flee from war, persecution or natural disaster. At work today in over 40 countries and 22 U.S. cities, we restore safety, dignity and hope to millions who are uprooted and struggling to endure. The IRC leads the way from harm to home.

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“A barrier is something that prevents you from accessing something—something you don’t have, something that you need. It can be a physical thing, but it can also be something abstract. It can be fear. For example, in Syria, fear of violence and the conflict. Here it can be fear of being harassed. Fear that my children will be harassed or bullied on the street. That fear—fear of being harassed or attacked—stops me from leaving the house.”



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