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# Evaluation of the UNFPA response to the Syria crisis (2011-2018)

UNFPA Evaluation Office

2019

The conflict in Syria, now in its eighth year, has had a profound effect across the region. By the end of 2017, 13.1 million Syrian women, men, girls and boys were in need of humanitarian assistance, 6.1 million within Syria and 7 million in surrounding countries. Close to three million people inside Syria are in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, exposed to grave protection violations.



UNFPA Syria response: regional offices, country offices and hub, and Turkey inter-agency hub

Active in Syria and surrounding countries since before the beginning of the crisis in 2011, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has, over the succeeding years, considerably scaled up its presence and activities to meet the needs of women, children and men affected by the conflict.

Under the United Nations Whole of Syria approach, UNFPA operates within Syria and surrounding countries. UNFPA seeks to meet the needs of refugees in host countries, and also of displaced people across conflict lines within Syria from Damascus and via cross-border operations from hubs in Jordan and Turkey.

### PURPOSE AND APPROACH

In light of the scale and duration of the UNFPA humanitarian response, as well as the visibility of the crisis and response and the resources that have been devoted to it, the Evaluation Office at UNFPA commissioned an independent evaluation in 2017. It was conducted by a four-person team of international experts, with support from national specialists in the affected countries of Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, to assess the UNFPA contribution to the Syria humanitarian crisis response.

## Evaluation Quick Facts

**338**   
COUNTRY AND PROGRAMME DOCUMENTS REVIEWED



**5** COUNTRY NOTES:  
SYRIA, IRAQ,  
JORDAN,  
LEBANON,  
TURKEY



**348**  
PEOPLE INTERVIEWED:  
GOVERNMENTS, DONORS,  
NGOs, UN AGENCIES



**397**  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS  
CONSULTED VIA FOCUS GROUP  
DISCUSSIONS: 80% WOMEN  
AND GIRLS

**28**   
ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

**2**   
CASE STUDIES

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

**Despite a slow start, the UNFPA response has been appropriate to the needs of affected populations over time, with priority to hardest-to-reach populations.**

- The UNFPA response has been more effective at provision of services than prevention;
- The expertise of UNFPA in population data analysis has not been sufficiently used for the response.

**UNFPA has been a key player in delivery of quality sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services for women, girls and youth across all countries.**

- UNFPA-supported activities are positively received and are filling essential service gaps.
- However, incomplete data means effectiveness of the activities cannot be demonstrated.

**UNFPA has not systematically documented gender and inclusion analysis, or adherence to international humanitarian law, International human rights law and international refugee law.**

- Country offices are making efforts to improve this, but mainly on disability - other factors are sporadically addressed.

**Inconsistent approaches to inclusion of men and boys in gender-based violence (GBV) programming across the region impairs leadership of UNFPA in this area.**

- Different interpretations of UNFPA strategies lead to different applications of programming across country offices.
- External stakeholders do not see a consistent UNFPA position on inclusion of men and boys in GBV programming.

**The refugee response is strongly connected with longer-term development programming, but primarily at country level.**

**Programming and coordination for the whole of Syria GBV response is exceptionally good.**

- High-quality GBV outputs from the regional response hub have been a very good return on investment but could be better-leveraged to embed GBV as a life-saving response among all response organizations.

**Coordination of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) has received less attention and investment than GBV within the regional response hub.**

**There is a disconnect between emerging global youth leadership, action and investment at UNFPA and its country-level operational presence and focus within the regional response to the Syria crisis.**

**UNFPA has generated a high return on its investment in the Syria regional response hub, particularly in the areas of resource mobilization, representation, coordination and data management for GBV.**

- However, the role and functions of the hub have not adequately adjusted to meet the increasing capacity of country offices.

**UNFPA operational and financial systems and structures have not fully supported effectiveness of the response.**

- The increasing reliance of country offices on other resources, less flexible than regular resources, has inhibited their responsiveness to a rapidly evolving crisis.
- Lack of flexibility in systems and structures at UNFPA has led country offices to make inconsistent use of fast-track procedures, surge and emergency commodities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### UNFPA should...

- Address current limitations with programme monitoring, and utilize its expertise in population data to better measure and contextualize humanitarian results.
- Review the functions of the Syria regional response hub in light of changing circumstances.
- Clarify and ensure consistency in its position on the inclusion of men and boys in GBV programming within the regional response.
- Use the whole of Syria GBV sub cluster as a blueprint for coordination responsibilities globally.
- Develop a blueprint for establishing/managing future response and coordination hubs.

**HIGH  
PRIORITY**

- Review the use of fast-track procedures, surge, commodities, and continue to advocate with Member States and donors for an adequate level of regular resources.
- Address the vacuum around youth leadership, programming and coordination across the response.
- Resource and support SRHR coordination within the response to the same level as GBV coordination.

**MEDIUM  
PRIORITY**

- Document gender/inclusion analysis and adherence to relevant international principles and law.

**LOW  
PRIORITY**

# Evaluation Snapshot



## REACH

UNFPA response has been appropriate to the needs of affected populations over time, with priority to hardest-to-reach populations



## QUALITY SERVICES

UNFPA has been a key player in the delivery of quality sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence services for women, girls and youth across all countries

## CONSISTENCY



UNFPA should clarify and ensure consistency in its position on working with men and boys to end gender-based violence within the Syria response

## HIGH RETURN



UNFPA has generated a high return on its investment in the Syria regional response hub, particularly in resource mobilization, representation, coordination and data management for gender-based violence



## GOOD AND NOT SO GOOD

Programming and coordination for the whole of Syria gender-based violence response has been exceptionally good, although less so for sexual and reproductive health and rights



## YOUTH LEADERSHIP

UNFPA should strengthen youth leadership, programming and coordination across the response

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