New study finds child marriage rising among most vulnerable Syrian refugees

An alarming rise in child marriages has been seen among the most vulnerable Syrian refugee populations in Lebanon, according to a newly completed survey conducted by UNFPA, the American University of Beirut and Sawa for Development and Aid.

The survey covered some 2,400 refugee women and girls living in Western Bekaa, and found that more than a third of those surveyed between the ages of 20 and 24 had been married before reaching age 18.

Among refugee girls currently between ages 15 and 17, some 24 per cent are married.

Before the devastating conflict erupted in Syria, child marriage was significantly less common among Syrians. Estimates vary, but some show child marriage rates to be four times higher among Syrian refugees today than among Syrians before the crisis. This indicates that displacement, instability and poverty are driving the underage marriages.

Even some of the data collectors, who were selected from the community being surveyed, are struggling with the pressure to marry off their daughters.

“I am convinced that no girl should get married before the age of 18. But when it comes to reality, it is different,” said Iman, a Syrian refugee who was one of the data collectors.

She explained that, as a widow and the sole breadwinner for her family, she has trouble supporting her three children and ageing father.

“For this, reason my cousin, out of his good heart, wanted to help out by getting engaged to my daughter and supporting us financially,” she said. Her daughter is 15.

Awareness needed

The survey was conducted in August and September 2016 in Bar Elias, Kab Elias and Marj, areas in Western Bekaa selected because of their large refugee populations and high levels of vulnerability.

The survey showed that school enrolment declined among girls as they aged. At age 9, over 70 per cent of surveyed girls were enrolled in school; at age 16, less than 17 per cent were. Girls with less education are more vulnerable to becoming child brides, reports have indicated.

Among all surveyed women aged 20 to 24, nearly 35 per cent were married before reaching 18 years old. Another way to look at the figures – as a percentage of married women – shows that 47 per cent of married women, ages 20 to 24 years old, were child brides.

The study also had clear recommendations for addressing the trend. For example, it called for improving school enrolment among girls, especially as they transition into secondary school, and for better enforcement of policies barring child marriage.

It also recommended raising awareness of the consequences of early marriage among refugee communities. These consequences include an increased risk of pregnancy-related complications for girls, as well as worse health and economic outcomes for themselves and their children.

Such information can be powerful. “Because of what I have learned and experienced, it is impossible for me to let my daughter get married at an early age,” said one parent who learned about child marriage from a UNFPA-supported outreach programme in the southern city of Saida.

Youth reject child marriage

These outreach programmes are engaging parents, community leaders, health-care workers and others. UNFPA is also supporting safe spaces, legal counselling and psychosocial care for vulnerable women and girls, including those affected by early marriage.

Young people are also being empowered to advocate for change. Through the UNFPA-supported Y-Peer programme, youth – including refugees – are spreading the word about the harms of child marriage to their friends and peer networks.

Youth leaders have been eager to take on the challenge.

“It is up to us to spread awareness on its negative effects to our family and friends,” said Sara, part of a peer education programme in Baalbek.

“When I saw my cousin getting married at the age of 15, my heart ached,” said Mohamad [not the Mohamad pictured], who received peer education training in the UNFPA-supported outreach programme in the southern city of Saida.

Youth leaders have been eager to take on the challenge.

Source: unfpa.org

HIGHLIGHT OF THE MONTH

DURING JANUARY 2017

UNFPA Jordan resumed providing services to Syrians stranded in the no-man’s land “the berm” between the Jordanian and Syrian borders, after months of disruption of services due to security reasons.

UNFPA Jordan with working with a local implementing partner established a new reproductive health clinic at the berm to serve more than 70,000 Syrian people living in dismal conditions.

Meanwhile UNFPA Syria delivered 17,060 reproductive health and GBV services to the crisis-affected people across the country.

Syrian Arab Republic from all channels

186,385 reproductive health services delivered to Syrians

19,868 deliveries supported, including 7,842 C-section deliveries

29,229 family planning services

6,555 gender-based violence response services provided to Syrians

888 women accessed women safe spaces

In neighbouring countries affected by the crisis

31,098 reproductive health services delivered to Syrian refugees

7,523 Syrian refugees received family planning services and consultations

2,090 clients received gender-based violence services

14,134 Syrian refugees accessed women safe spaces and participated in activities in camps and host communities

2,419 Syrian refugees reached with gender-based violence related messages

2,417 dignity kits distributed
### Humanitarian Response

#### Syrian Arab Republic

#### Reproductive Health and Safe Motherhood

**Reproductive Health Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive health services</td>
<td>146,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Normal deliveries</td>
<td>9,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cesarean section deliveries</td>
<td>6,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Antenatal care services</td>
<td>12,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Postnatal care services</td>
<td>3,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Family planning services</td>
<td>23,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pregnancies under 18</td>
<td>1,463</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other RH Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42,697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

**Response Services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls</td>
<td>4,326</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women Accessing Safe Spaces**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women and girls</td>
<td>23,789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outreach Activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients reached</td>
<td>20,977</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supplies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dignity kits</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Fast Figures

- **Syrians Affected by the Crisis**: 13.5 million
- **Women and Girls of Reproductive Age**: 4.3 million
- **Youth**: 2.7 million
- **Pregnant Women**: 360,000

*Source: UNHCR, OCHA and UNFPA January 2017*

### Response Through Cross-Border Modality

#### Reproductive Health and Safe Motherhood

**Reproductive Health Services**

- 25,372 clients received services in the northern part of Syria:
  - 1,245 normal deliveries
  - 369 Cesarean section deliveries
  - 147 pregnancies under 18
  - 7,626 antenatal care services
  - 355 post-natal care services
  - 5,254 family planning services
- 14,185 beneficiaries received services in the southern part of Syria:
  - 1,195 normal deliveries
  - 541 Cesarean section deliveries
  - 480 pregnancies under 18
  - 4,515 antenatal care services
  - 4,618 post-natal care services
  - 889 family planning services
  - 33 reproductive health kits distributed

**Outreach Activities**

- 4,063 women reached through outreach activities in the northern part of Syria
- 375 women reached through outreach activities in the southern part of Syria

#### UNFPA-Supported Facilities in the South of Syria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of women’s spaces</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mobile clinics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of health facilities</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

**Response Services**

- 1,280 clients received gender-based violence services in the northern part of Syria
- 949 clients received gender-based violence services in the southern part of Syria

**GBV Awareness & Outreach Activities**

- 350 Syrians reached through outreach and awareness activities in the northern part of Syria.
- 331 Syrians reached through outreach and awareness activities in the southern part of Syria.

**Training**

- 14 persons trained in the southern part of Syria
## HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

### NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS

**NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS (LEBANON, JORDAN, IRAQ, TURKEY, EGYPT):**

- **SYRIAN REFUGEES AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS**: 4,812,131
- **SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN AND GIRLS OF REPRODUCTIVE AGE**: 1,203,000
- **SYRIAN REFUGEE YOUTH**: 800,000
- **SYRIAN REFUGEE PREGNANT WOMEN**: 80,200

Sources: UNHCR, OCHA and UNFPA

### REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND SAFE MOTHERHOOD

#### TURKEY

- **SERVICES**: 11,298 services for Syrian beneficiaries
  - 405 ante-natal care services
  - 749 post-natal care services
  - 2,138 family planning services
  - 72 pregnancies of women under 18

- **AWARENESS SESSIONS & OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**: 7,102 clients

- **SUPPLIES**: 450 brochures distributed

#### JORDAN

- **SERVICES**: 14,681 reproductive health services
  - 156 normal deliveries
  - 63 pregnancies under 18
  - 988 family planning services
  - 3,466 ante-natal care services
  - 544 post-natal care services

- **AWARENESS SESSIONS**: 2,578 clients

- **TRAINING**: 49 participants

#### IRAQ

- **SERVICES**: 5,119 reproductive health services
  - 4,397 family planning services
  - 130 normal deliveries
  - 61 C-section deliveries
  - 356 ante-natal care services

Sources: UNHCR, OCHA and UNFPA

## GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

### TURKEY

- **SERVICES TO SURVIVORS**: 938 services
- **WOMEN AND GIRLS ACCESSING SAFE SPACES**: 5,972 Syrian women and girls
- **OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**: 226 clients
- **SUPPLIES**: 2,397 dignity kits distributed

### JORDAN

- **RESPONSE SERVICES**: 1,108 services
- **WOMEN AND GIRLS ACCESSING SAFE SPACES**: 5,929 women and girls
- **OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**: 1,742 clients
- **TRAINING**: 35 participants

### EGYPT

- **RESPONSE SERVICES**: 44 services
- **WOMEN AND GIRLS ACCESSING SAFE SPACES**: 775 women and girls
- **TRAINING**: 83 participants

### IRAQ

- **WOMEN AND GIRLS ACCESSING SAFE SPACES**: 1,458 women and girls
- **OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**: 451 clients
- **DIGNITY KITS**: 21 dignity kits distributed

**UNFPA MISSION:**

UNFPA believes that every Syrian woman and girl has the right to have access to affordable reproductive health care and be effectively protected from gender-based violence. UNFPA and partners are scaling up efforts to empower and improve the lives of Syrian women and youth and impacted communities inside Syria and in host countries, including by advocating for human rights and gender equality, to better cope with and recover from the crisis.

UNFPA: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.
SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

JORDAN
YOUTH PROGRAMMING 1,409 young people

TURKEY
YOUTH PROGRAMMING 530 young people

EGYPT
YOUTH PROGRAMMING 47 Syrian young people

IN THEIR WORDS

“Women like vocational training the most because they are income generating and these activities help empower them,” a field staff working for a women nt girls safe space in Idleb, Syria told UNFPA.

“Services provided here are better than in other places, I would have chosen to go to another location, but this one is better,” said a client in Ghanto Hospital inside Syria.

“We have received training about case management, which is very important due to the nature of the environment we deal with. We communicate with specialists and psychological therapists working with us regarding case management and health referrals,” said safe a worker in women and girls safe space managed cross border from Turkey.

“Thanks to the centre and the continuous care, I have for the first time become able to stand up and discuss very serious matters with my husband. Issues that affect my entire life and change it positively,” said one woman who attends activities in one of the women safe spaces.

“I can’t describe how happy I am... you boosted my self-confidence, to an extent that my husband and my children felt that my happiness is reflected on them after I was desperate and sad,” said one Syrian women who attends activities at one of the women safe spaces in Egypt.

UNFPA-SUPPORTED FACILITIES

Number of women’s spaces 56
- Lebanon 5
- Jordan 15
- Iraq 7
- Egypt 5
- Turkey 24

Number of field reproductive health clinics or mobile teams 74
- Jordan 18
  (8 in host communities, 10 in camps)
- Iraq 18
- Egypt 12
- Turkey 24
- Lebanon 2

Number of youth centres and safe spaces 27
- Lebanon 5
- Jordan 11
- Iraq 5
- Egypt 4
- Turkey 2
**STORIES FROM SYRIAN REFUGEES**

**JORDAN**

**Fleeing violence**

Ferial, a 27-year old Syrian woman, fled her country to Jordan in May 2016. Along with her husband and three children, she was relocated to Azraq camp.

Ferial was physically abused by her husband; he hit her almost every day. After being inflicted with regular violence, Ferial decided to leave her husband and move to her brother’s house along with her children. Ferial was pregnant when she took this decision. She stayed at her brother’s place for four months, during which her husband provided her with no support and withheld food vouchers, clothes and other items from her and the children. He also refused to help with the expenses needed to take care of their children.

Ferial disclosed her situation to the case manager at the UNFPA-supported women and girls’ center at Azraq camp and asked for help to get a divorce from her husband. The case manager provided her with the needed information. She was also referred to ARDD for legal consultation and assistance in acquiring relevant documents.

With the help of the case manager, Ferial started the needed process and managed to get a divorce from her husband and managed to obtain the official documents to register herself and her children as refugees. In addition she was provided with the support needed to register her newborn, as she faced problems due to not having documents about the father, which he was not willing to provide.

“Thank you for standing by my side and supporting me. Due to this support, I managed to get my life back. I feel more confident and free now,” Ferial told the case manager.

**UNFPA conducts a mock session for neonatal resuscitation**

Based on the action plan of the neonatal assessment conducted in Zaatari and Azraq camps by the Gates Foundation and UNHCR, in collaboration with UNFPA and UNICEF in March 2016, a mock session for neonatal resuscitation was conducted by the pediatrician in the UNFPA-supported maternity clinic in Zaatari camp. The mock training was preceded by a summary of Neonatal Resuscitation Program (NRP) guidelines and the scope of the activity. One obstetrician, two midwives, and two nurses participated in the resuscitation simulation; a scenario for a premature delivery was prepared. The mock session was followed by a debriefing session where gaps and challenges were discussed.

**Bringing positive change through coding knowledge**

UNFPA Syria organised “Change Makers” courses, where 20 young people attended a 15-week class to learn coding basics and to discuss topics that help young people identify their passion.

“Change Makers”, is a youth friendly space, supported by UNFPA-Syria, that stimulates youth’s innovation and catalyses positive social change by providing them with skills, tools, opportunities and a global network of like-minded entrepreneurs and innovators. The initiative was launched during 2016 and will continue through 2017.

Its goal, broadly, is to create the future generation of innovators and problem solver, as well as minimise the gender gap in computer sciences.

“Web development is an interactive subject where boys and girls can engage in learning. We at UNFPA Syria are committed to support youth and when girls learn how to code, they become more active and confident of themselves,” said Massimo Diana, UNFPA country Representative.

“Learning how to code changed my perspective about life and made it more organised,” said Baraa, one of the participants. Loulia, another youth participant, said: “her communication skills have been developed notably throughout the course and she is now more encouraged and motivated to stand up to talk in public”.

Ahmad Sufian Bayram, one of the mentors, who joined the team in an online discussion on technology and entrepreneurship said: “Innovation is limitless. Success is not limited to an age. Experience is what makes it happen.”

“According to studies, almost half of the routine jobs will disappear in the future. Young people should be aware of that to choose what they want to continue their education in,” he added.
STORIES FROM SYRIAN REFUGEES

JORDAN CROSS-BORDER

Combating GBV
“Before visiting Mseifrah safe house, I thought that I deserved to be beaten and insulted. After going to the centre, I discovered that it is my right to live with dignity. Thank you for supporting and helping me,” said Lana, one of the beneficiaries from Mseifrah Safe House in Daraa, Syria.

Basic reproductive health services
Nasra had been suffering from a painful uterine fibroid for about one year. After the tumor became bigger and the pain became unbearable, she decided to visit Al Noor hospital that is supported by UNFPA to undergo a medical check. Doctors there decided to conduct a fibroid excision surgery for the patient. After the surgery, Nasra had some complications, but doctors were able to follow her case closely and stabilise the condition. Nasra spent five days in hospital and after being discharged, she recovered at home. Nasra was extremely grateful to the care she received and for her safe recovery. Without the help medics at Al Noor hospital, she would have been forced to travel to Damascus to receive the needed medical health, which was almost impossible due to the security situation and lack of money.

UNFPA Jordan opens RH clinic at the Berm
UNFPA with the support of its implementing partner JHAS established a new reproductive health clinic at the “berm” in no man’s land between Jordan and Syria. Photo credit: UNFPA Jordan

UNFPA Jordan supported clinic at the “berm” in no man’s land between Jordan and Syria. Photo credit: UNFPA Jordan

UNFPA Jordan opened a RH clinic at the Berm

UNFPA took part in the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) working group meeting that took place in Ankara, Turkey, where participants discussed the draft work plan for the current year.

UNFPA attended protection and health working group meetings and co-chaired the SGBV sub-working group meeting in Gaziantep.

UNFPA participated in the protection working group strategic planning workshop and presented findings of the participatory assessment on protection as well as on registration, documentation and SGBV for boys and men.

TURKEY - CROSS BORDER

The gender-based violence sub-committee in coordination with the reproductive health working group organised a training of trainers for 27 participants.

UNFPA presented to partners the framework through which the calculation methodology and HRP indicators and results were presented to 25 partner organisations.

UNFPA conducted the monthly learning session for psychosocial support providers.

UNFPA developed an English-Arabic glossary for gender-based violence technical terms.

UNFPA and the reproductive health group started preparation for the midwifery capacity building training that is scheduled to take place in March 2017.

JORDAN

UNFPA in coordination with Health Ministry will conduct Implanon NXT a long-acting contraceptive, training for 20 gynecologists who work with UNFPA implementing partners.

UNFPA chaired the reproductive health sub-working group meeting, where reproductive health referral criteria were discussed and a presentation on the findings of focus group sessions for involvement of males in reproductive health was shared with the participants.

JORDAN- CROSS BORDER

UNFPA participated in the health sector working group for southern Syria, where key issues where discussed including the continued obstacles of organising cross-border training for Syrian staff in Jordan, reporting of three cases of measles in Jizeh facility in Dara’a and preparations to provide services in southern Syria.

In the aftermath of Aleppo’s fall, UNFPA contributed to the interagency preparedness plan and provided the gender-based violence input as part of the health and protection component.

UNFPA also initiated contingency planning discussions directly with the implementing partners and will establish an additional warehouse in Eastern Dara’a in case access is cut.

UNFPA participated in a cross-border convoy from Jordan to Syria.

SYRIA

UNFPA followed up with donors especially the European Union and the Government of Japan, to ensure timely resource mobilisation.

UNFPA carried out a preliminary needs assessment mission to Aleppo.

LEBANON

UNFPA led with UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Affairs the monthly national sexual and gender-based violence task force meeting where members reviewed last year’s achievements and initiatives.

UNFPA led the monthly sexual and reproductive health sub-working group, where members shared updates on ongoing and new activities and reviewed the group’s work plan.

UNFPA led with UNHCR the National Case Management working group meeting of the month dedicated to GBV inter-agency M&E.

COORDINATION & CAPACITY BUILDING

TURKEY

UNFPA took part in the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) working group meeting that took place in Ankara, Turkey, where participants discussed the draft work plan for the current year.

UNFPA attended protection and health working group meetings and co-chaired the SGBV sub-working group meeting in Gaziantep.

UNFPA participated in the protection working group strategic planning workshop and presented findings of the participatory
DONORS & PARTNERS

UNFPA IS GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING DONORS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE SYRIA CRISIS:

Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Norway, OCHA/CERF, Saudi Fund for Development, United States, United Kingdom, UNDP.

Private sector: MBC

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS IN SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC: Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSA), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Syrian Family Planning Association (SFPA),


IN JORDAN: Ministry of Health (MOH), Institute for Family Health (IFH), International Medical Corps (IMC), Jordanian Health Aid Society (JHAS), Family Protection Department (FPD), Jordanian Women’s Union (JWU), Youth Peer Education Network (YPE), NCFA (National Council for Family Affairs), Questscope.

IN IRAQ: Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth (MCSP), Ministry of Labor & Social Affairs (MoLSA), JORDAN Cross border: Relief International and Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS).

IN EGYPT: Ministry of Health (MOH), CARE International Arab Medical Union and Regional Centre for Training.

IN TURKEY: The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) of the Prime Ministry of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Family and Social Polices (MoFSP), ASAM (Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants), BUHASDER (The Association for the Prevention of Infectious Diseases), HÜKSAM (Hacettepe University Women’s Research and Implementation Center), IMPR (International Middle East Peace Research Centre), KAMER (Women’s Center Foundation), CVF (Community Volunteers Foundation), Osmangazi University, PYD (Positive Life Association), SPoD (Social Policies, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation Studies Association).

CONTACT INFORMATION

Daniel Baker,
UNFPA Syria Regional Response Advisor
baker@unfpa.org
+962797225829

RELEVANT RESOURCES

www.unfpa.org
www.ocha.org
www.unhcr.org
http://syria.humanitarianresponse.info