



**They're living in  
areas isolated from  
the outside world.  
Invisible. Women  
and children are  
desperately in  
need of aid. Lives  
are in danger**

**Invisible Lives are at risk  
How the international community  
is failing Syrian women refugees**





# Foreword



The brutal conflict in Syria continues to fuel the biggest global refugee crisis since World War II. Millions of Syrians have seen their communities torn apart by violence and have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries and beyond, propelled into poverty and destitution.

I have seen for myself the exhaustion and desperation of Syrian refugees arriving on the shores of Greece after risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean; the despair of families in Lebanon struggling to survive as the local infrastructure struggles to cope.

Women refugees face particular challenges in trying to support themselves and their families. Often the primary carers for children and elderly relatives, women's freedom to pursue job opportunities are more limited than men's. The threat of violence and intimidation is intensified by displacement, while lack of educational opportunity blights the lives of their children and further undermines women's participation in the job market.

We tend to hear little of the everyday struggles of Syrian women to survive and build a future for their children. Their stories are usually crowded out by a plethora of other humanitarian and security challenges in the Middle East. This report aims to bring women's voices to the fore, and to shine a light on their invisible lives.

The focus of the report is the situation facing Syrian women living in Lebanon and Iraq, two of the countries where Islamic Relief is delivering emergency food and shelter, alongside interventions to support longer-term needs around skills development, health and education.

Based on a detailed analysis of programmes and funding for livelihoods, education and preventing violence against women, *Invisible Lives* provides key recommendations for the UK Government and the wider donor community to strengthen and expand current interventions aimed at building the long-term economic empowerment of refugee women. This includes working with the private sector to support the economic development of Syria's neighbours to ensure they are able to continue to host the majority of refugees in the region.

As part of our research we spoke directly to Syrian women themselves, encouraging them to speak in their own words about the daily challenges they face and their hopes and dreams for the future. By making their lives more visible to the international community we hope to improve interventions to develop the resilience of female refugees.

We also call for a significant increase in funding to fulfil the international pledges and commitments made at the London Syria Conference in February 2016. Only then can the invisible lives of Syrian women move from the periphery to the forefront of the debate and of the humanitarian response.

**Imran Madden**  
Islamic Relief, UK Director

# Executive summary

After five-and-a-half years of conflict in Syria, the situation is worsening, with increased fighting on the ground and no clear road map to peace.<sup>1</sup> Some 4.8 million Syrians have fled their country for neighbouring states, while over one million Syrians have sought asylum in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

This report focuses on the plight of female Syrian refugees who are trying to survive and make a living in two countries neighbouring Syria – Lebanon and Iraq.

Over 1.5 million Syrians are now in Lebanon and over a quarter of a million are in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. A large proportion are women and girls: around 52% of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon<sup>3</sup> and 44% of those in Iraq.<sup>4</sup> Single women now head over a quarter of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.<sup>5</sup>

The situation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Iraq is deteriorating. In Lebanon, some 70% of refugees are below the poverty line (\$3.84 per day), compared to 48% in 2014.<sup>6</sup> In the Kurdistan region poverty has more than doubled in the past two years, with the UN reporting that “income levels across the region are plummeting, putting displaced and resident families at extreme risk of impoverishment”.<sup>7</sup>

Women now find themselves not only as refugees but also trying to make ends meet alongside responsibility for paying the bills and caring in the home, away from their traditional sources of support.<sup>8</sup> The barriers they face in providing for their families include:

- ▶ A lack of good employment opportunities
- ▶ Limited access to childcare
- ▶ Gender-based violence in communities and in the workplace
- ▶ Extremely limited access to good education for their children, including girls.

**Finding good employment** in Lebanon is difficult for women because of government restrictions on work and high unemployment. Until recently the Lebanese government required refugees to sign a pledge not to work. This has now been replaced by a pledge to abide by Lebanese law but

in practice this may not be so different since it still requires refugees to acquire residency visas, which is a complex and costly process. In addition, the right to work for Syrians is restricted to the sectors of agriculture, construction and environment (domestic cleaning services). Thus the vast majority of Syrians work with no legal rights.

A recent household survey found that only 7% of Syrian refugee women had worked in the past 30 days.<sup>9</sup> Some 68% of all female Syrian refugees seeking work<sup>10</sup> are unemployed. Many women work in agriculture as farm labourers and earn less than men – the average salary for women refugees is less than half Lebanon’s national minimum wage.<sup>11</sup> Women are also more vulnerable to exploitation by employers, including sexual exploitation.

Iraq, by contrast, provides most Syrians with residency permits, allowing them to work legally.<sup>12</sup> Many girls and women work in shopping malls or restaurants, while boys and men tend to do manual labour. Jobs are often available when people are prepared to work for the minimum wage.

However, there are also some restrictions on obtaining residency permits, which excludes many from the labour market.<sup>13</sup> A recent survey among the non-camp population of Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan region of Iraq found that 16% of households reported no source of income in the past month.<sup>14</sup>

Finding childcare can be a major barrier to securing regular employment. Often separated from extended family networks, women in female-headed households have even fewer livelihood options, because of their childcare needs. Lack of schooling only compounds this problem, as women often have to choose between work or the well-being and safety of their children. Islamic Relief’s focus groups with women living in Erbil revealed that many feel they cannot leave their families to find work, for fear that their children will leave the relative safety of the camps after dark.

Another important and often related issue is **violence against women**. One recent study found that 9% of Syrian refugee women had suffered some form of physical and sexual abuse,

although the actual instances of abuse are likely to be much higher given persistent stigma surrounding gender-based violence.<sup>15</sup> Sexual harassment is prevalent in some work situations, and many women say that they have left a job, or not taken a job, because of the attitude or behaviour of employers.<sup>16</sup>

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Islamic Relief's focus groups with women found that many regard the camps more as prisons than homes, and that fear for their security means women have to be accompanied by male relatives outside their homes. Research conducted in 2015 by a consortium including UN Women and UNHCR found that women's main problems include sexual aggression, rape, sexual violence and sexual abuse by husbands, male family members, colleagues, neighbours, police, government employees and NGO staff. It found that since arriving in the Kurdistan region only 18% of Syrian women had **not** been subjected to verbal aggression and disrespect. Women had few places to go for refuge, as there were no shelters or refuges to take care of victims of violence in the refugee camps.<sup>17</sup>

To help rebuild livelihoods and prepare for the future, it is critical to support the **education of child refugees**. In Lebanon, more than 250,000 children, half of whom are girls – around half of the nearly 500,000 school-aged Syrian children registered in Lebanon – are out of school.<sup>18</sup>

The cost of education, including indirect costs such as transportation, is a major barrier to accessing school.<sup>19</sup> Many parents are also afraid of sending their children to school because they fear that schools might not be safe and children might be exploited on their way to or inside schools. The need for child labour, at a time of deteriorating livelihoods, is a further factor.<sup>20</sup>

Lebanon's Ministry of Education has taken several positive steps to enrol Syrian children in formal education, but the system has struggled to keep pace with demand.<sup>21</sup> Lebanon needs much more international financial support to respond to the educational needs of Syrian refugees, including rehabilitating and expanding schools, investing in good-quality education, fully including children with disabilities,

training and hiring more teachers, and subsidising school transportation.<sup>22</sup>

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq there are around 58,000 school-age refugee children,<sup>23</sup> of whom 54% are out of school.<sup>24</sup> Only 5% of children aged 15–17 are receiving formal secondary education.<sup>25</sup> As in Lebanon, the cost of education is a major barrier – while schooling is free, there are indirect costs such as clothing and transport.<sup>26</sup> Many children are unable to enrol since classrooms are over-crowded. The language barrier is another main reason that Syrian refugee children do not enrol in school, since most schools in the Kurdistan region teach in the Kurdish language.

## An insufficient international response

Not only has the international community failed to bring about an end to the war in Syria, but it is also failing to adequately support those who are fleeing it. The London Conference early in 2016 raised \$11.2 billion in pledges for the Syria crisis for 2016–2020, of which \$5.86 billion was for 2016 alone. However, even these pledges would be enough to fund only 76% of estimated needs. Actual performance has been far worse. The situation at mid-2016 (the latest available figures) shows that:

- ▶ The major UN appeal – known as the 3RP, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, which is requesting \$4.54 billion in 2016 – has only received \$2.2 billion, just **49% funded**.<sup>27</sup>
- ▶ The UN's 2016 appeal for Lebanon is only **38% funded**, and that for Iraq **44% funded**.<sup>\*28</sup>
- ▶ The most under-funded sector of both Lebanon and Iraq appeals is livelihoods: just **6%** and **22%**, respectively, has been funded.<sup>†29</sup>

\* Figures indicative of funding received as of May 2016, funding received after this date is not yet fully allocated to specific countries.

† Average funding for livelihoods across all 3RP countries is even lower at 1%.

# Recommendations

The international community must double current funding to meet the UN appeal targets for Syria and neighbouring countries, including Lebanon and Iraq. Without this Syrian women refugees, and indeed all refugees, will continue to live ever more precariously. This means they are likely to sink even further into poverty, and this is likely to create further social tensions in the region. In order to better support the improvement of livelihoods among Syrian women refugees in neighbouring countries, we recommend:

## Employment

- ▶ Local authorities need to ensure that refugees can reside in neighbouring countries legally without discrimination. Procedures to maintain valid documentation and registration must be clear, accessible and affordable.
- ▶ International funding for livelihoods programmes in Lebanon and Iraq must increase by US \$ 275 million in line with pledges made at the London Conference, to support job creation through business training, skills development and other employment services for women.
- ▶ Emergency livelihoods activities, including cash-for-work programmes and small business grants, must continue to be provided for the most vulnerable households including single-headed households and those with older people and/or family members with disabilities.
- ▶ Agriculture-based activities, such as small gardens to grow basic food, should be more heavily promoted to increase employment and support food security.
- ▶ Women's equality in the workplace should be promoted in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8 by supporting worker rights in relation to health, safety, childcare and remuneration.

## Violence against women

- ▶ Increased funding and policy support are needed to strengthen prevention and response programmes for gender-based violence (GBV), including the addition of specific budget lines for GBV in donor allocations and monitoring.

- ▶ Funders and international aid agencies should do more to tackle GBV across livelihoods, education and health programmes, making more effective use of available tools and guidelines, such as the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP).
- ▶ Safety in refugee camps needs to be improved by providing better lighting, establishing separate bathrooms for men and women, and increasing women's participation and leadership in helping to reduce danger zones in and around camps.
- ▶ Women must have access to legal aid and appropriate procedures for investigations, prosecutions, effective remedies and reparations in order to promote justice and end impunity for perpetrators of violence against women.
- ▶ Concrete support is needed for sensitisation and training for local police and security services, accompanied by strong monitoring to assess how protection and access to justice are progressing.
- ▶ Faith communities are key players in empowering and preventing gender-based violence, and this needs wider recognition. Religious and community leaders need to be equipped to help raise awareness, end stigma and challenge cultural norms that limit women's access to public places.

## Education

- ▶ Better access is needed to high-quality formal and vocational education through the creation of new and expanded schools. This will require an additional US \$ 228 million to fulfil pledges from the London Conference.
- ▶ Non-formal education should be fully recognised and standardised by Ministries of Education through accreditation and referral systems, to ensure pupils are better able to re-enter formal education when possible.
- ▶ Greater funding is also needed to ensure that indirect costs, such as books and transport, do not prevent children from accessing education, particularly for those attending evening classes.
- ▶ Barriers to education such as residency requirements and language barriers must be removed.

- ▶ Specific funding should be earmarked for teacher salaries and training, and for curriculum development, including measures to ensure access and participation of children and teachers with disabilities.

In addition, the international community must do much more to help resettle Syrian refugees, and ensure the provision of safe and legal routes for people seeking refuge and asylum, including increased support for family reunification. Even with adequate international financial support to the authorities in Lebanon and Iraq, it is unlikely that sufficient jobs and school places for children can be created. Thus it will be critical for significantly more refugees to find new homes in other countries.

# Deepening poverty in Lebanon and Iraq

**'Five years into the crisis, persons displaced from Syria and vulnerable Lebanese face considerable hardship, with fewer resources available and an increased reliance on humanitarian assistance. Negative coping strategies, such as withdrawing children from school, child labour and reduction of food intake, are on the rise.'**

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)<sup>30</sup>

After five-and-a-half years of conflict in Syria, the situation is worsening, with increased fighting on the ground and no clear road map to peace.<sup>31</sup> Some 4.8 million Syrians have fled their country for neighbouring states while over one million Syrians have sought asylum in Europe.<sup>32</sup>

This report focuses on the plight of female Syrian refugees trying to survive and make a living in two countries neighbouring Syria – Lebanon and Iraq. Over 1.5 million are now in Lebanon and over a quarter of a million are in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq.

A large proportion of these refugees are women and girls:

- ▶ In Lebanon, around 26% of the refugee population are women and a further 26% are girls.<sup>33</sup>
- ▶ In Iraq, 24% of Syrian refugees are women and 20% are girls.<sup>34</sup>

Many Syrian women refugees now find themselves as heads of their household:

- ▶ More than a quarter of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are headed by single women.<sup>35</sup>
- ▶ In Lebanon, one fifth of Syrian refugee households are headed by women. For Palestinian refugees from Syria now residing in Lebanon, women head almost one third of households.<sup>36</sup>

The situation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Iraq is deteriorating. In **Lebanon**, where most refugees now reside not in camps but in urban areas, some 70% of them are now below the poverty line (\$3.84 per day). This compares to 48% in 2014.<sup>37</sup>

The proportion of displaced Syrians relying on food assistance as their primary source of income has reached 54%, compared to 40% in 2014. Half of these refugees now lack the necessary income to afford the minimum spending needed to feed their families adequately. This is particularly dramatic in the Bekaa, Akkar and North governorates of Lebanon, where these proportions reach 70–80%.<sup>38</sup>

Families are also increasingly indebted since for most refugees, family savings and assets have been drained by years of economic hardship. The average debt held by Syrian refugee households in Lebanon increased from \$850 to \$990 in the first quarter of 2016 alone.<sup>39</sup> In addition, over 55% live in substandard conditions in informal settlements, overcrowded buildings and densely populated poor neighbourhoods.<sup>40</sup>

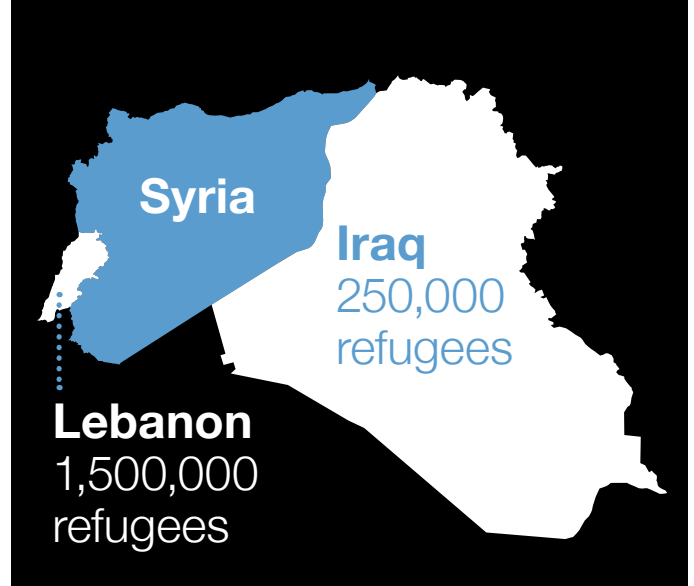
The plight of Syrian refugees is compounded by that of the Lebanese host community. Lebanon has the world's highest per capita concentration of refugees. Refugees from Syria, half of them children, now equal a quarter of Lebanon's resident population, which is placing significant strain on resources and host communities in a tiny country overstretched by the crisis. Almost 1.2 million people in Lebanon live in extreme poverty on less than \$2.40 a day, a 75% increase compared to 2014.<sup>41</sup> As public services in Lebanon come under increasing strain and competition for work intensifies, resentment towards Syrian refugees is growing.

In **Iraq** some 249,000 refugees from Syria are being hosted mainly in the Kurdistan region, with Erbil province containing the most – some 112,000 people.<sup>42</sup> Most refugees are living within host communities rather than in camps, making do in rental accommodation or in a range of sub-standard housing options. A minority (38%) are accommodated in ten camps, most of which are at saturation point in terms of their capacity to accommodate new arrivals.<sup>43</sup>

Of those living outside the camps, a recent survey found that 12% reported a lack of food in the seven days prior to the survey, and 45% reported that their drinking water was unsafe.<sup>44</sup>

Poverty has more than doubled in the Kurdistan region in the past two years. The UN reports that "income levels across the





region are plummeting, putting displaced and resident families at extreme risk of impoverishment<sup>45</sup>. Syrian refugees and Iraqis displaced by the war in Iraq now constitute over 25% of the Kurdistan region's population.<sup>46</sup>

The regional government is struggling to provide employment and basic public services for both resident communities and displaced families. Refugees have been particularly hard hit: although many struggle to survive on savings, personal resources are now exhausted, forcing hundreds of thousands of families to rely on outside assistance or engage in risky and potentially harmful ways to earn money.<sup>47</sup>

## THE SYRIAN MILLIONS

Pre-war population:

**22 million**

**13.5 million** people need humanitarian assistance

Over **11 million** people require health assistance

**6.6 million** people have been internally displaced

**4.8 million** refugees

**4.5 million** people in hard-to-reach areas

**2.5 million** people severely food insecure

**2.4 million** people lack adequate shelter

Over **2 million** young people out of education

**1.7 million** people in camps and shelters

**1.5 million** people with disabilities need urgent assistance

# Islamic Relief response



Islamic Relief has been working since the beginning of the Syria crisis to meet the needs of those affected, responding to the humanitarian crisis and its impact on people inside Syria as well as those who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries (Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon). Islamic Relief has supported an average of 3 million people each year since 2012 with emergency assistance in various sectors such as shelter, food, non-food items, health, water and sanitation.

## Building resilience

Islamic Relief also looks beyond emergency response to address the long-term needs of refugees through food security, livelihoods, education and psycho-social projects, which support resilience and self-reliance.

In Iraq Islamic Relief enhances food security by distributing food e-vouchers to over 20,000 families, as part of a partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP). E-vouchers increase women's control within households in coordinating and meeting food needs, by enabling them to buy the goods they choose for their families.

In Lebanon Islamic Relief delivers livelihood skills training for women, including literacy and accounting, as part of an integrated programme with health and psycho-social services, to improve women's earning potential and combat gender-based violence.



## Winter and Orphans programmes

Most livelihoods options for Syrian women remain insufficient to meet the needs of their families, forcing them to become indebted to pay for clothes, school supplies, medicines and transport. Islamic Relief provides practical support including blankets, stoves, mattresses, pillows, and shoes for children to families through its Winterisation and Orphans programmes to help women to retain household assets and avoid debt during times of economic insecurity.

## Psycho-social needs

Many people fleeing the conflict in Syria are traumatised. In response Islamic Relief has implemented several psycho-social support projects for children and families in Lebanon and Iraq. The projects engage vulnerable children and adolescents (including those who are out of school, those suffering neglect, orphans and survivors of violence)

in activities such as play, music, drama, art therapy, sports and open days. Islamic Relief has supported almost 10,000 children with various psycho-social support activities.

## Education

In Lebanon Islamic Relief is supporting two schools and 12 learning centres, providing desks, tables, play facilities, laptops and psycho-social facilities. Volunteers from the local community have been trained to run the counselling activities, designed to improve children's development and well-being. More than 5,600 students have been supported directly through the provision of school bags, stationery, books, equipment and transportation.



# Supporting employment opportunities

**'Despite a relatively high percentage of refugee households with some form of income, external or government assistance has become unsustainable and around 30% of all refugee families remain unable to meet their basic needs due to rising costs and the irregularity of employment. While the minimum threshold of having some form of income may be met for the majority of refugees, it is estimated that around 40% of households who report some amount of income are employed in unstable jobs that do not generate a sufficient amount of money to meet critical needs. These ad hoc employment opportunities have themselves become unpredictable in the context of the current conflict and resulting large-scale internal displacement of Iraqi citizens.'**

UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan<sup>48</sup>

If Syrian refugee women are to rebuild their livelihoods away from their homes, finding good employment is critical. Yet several key barriers stand in their way.

The context in **Lebanon** is that since January 2015 the Government has effectively closed the country's borders to Syrian refugees attempting to enter the country. Those already in Lebanon are now subject to new, complex and costly regulations to renew their residency visas for which they must pay a \$200 annual fee for renewals and provide identification papers and documentation about their lodging.<sup>49</sup>

As a result of this, most Syrian refugees do not have valid legal stay in the country. Without the valid legal documents it is harder to find work, and many refugees live in fear of arrest, detention and deportation if they are stopped at checkpoints across the country.<sup>50</sup>

Until recently the Lebanese Government required refugees to sign a pledge not to work. This has now been replaced by a pledge to abide by Lebanese law but in practice this may not be so different from a pledge not to work: it still requires refugees to acquire residency visas.

In addition, Syrians' right to work is restricted to the sectors of agriculture, construction and environment (domestic cleaning

services). This omits the whole retail sector and professions such as teaching. The vast majority of Syrians work with no legal rights – an estimated 92% of refugees from Syria who work lack a contract. This often leads to exploitation, as well as to further undercutting of wages, which exacerbates tensions with the host community.<sup>51</sup>

Displaced Syrians rely almost exclusively on temporary and informal work and earn little – a monthly income of less than \$300 on average, well below the minimum wage of \$450 per month.<sup>52</sup> Unemployment is high. The latest estimates are that, out of an active labour population of 240,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 80,000 are not working. Half of displaced Syrian youth are unemployed.<sup>53</sup>

All these problems are worse for women:

- ▶ A recent household survey found that only 7% of Syrian refugee women had worked in the past 30 days.<sup>54</sup> Other research shows that 68% of female Syrian refugees seeking work<sup>55</sup>, and 86% of young Syrian women<sup>56</sup>, are unemployed. An assessment by the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) found that over two-thirds of women looking for work in Lebanon were unable to find a job. Only two out of ten working refugees were female.<sup>57</sup> Thus there are more unemployed women than men among Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
- ▶ Women earn less than men. The ILO assessment found that working Syrian women earn about 40% less on average than their male counterparts; whereas Syrian men earn 432,000 LBP (\$287) a month, Syrian women earn 248,000 LBP (\$165)<sup>58</sup> – well below the national minimum wage (\$450) in Lebanon. Some 70% of Syrian refugee women who are employed work in agriculture or as domestic workers, meaning occupations which have low pay and little job security.<sup>59</sup>
- ▶ Women are more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation by employers, including sexual exploitation. Human Rights Watch found that the informal nature of most employment restricts the ability of women to turn to the authorities for protection. Some Syrian women told Human Rights Watch that sponsors or employers sexually harassed or tried to sexually exploit them but that they could not confront them





## Hazna Muhammed / 34 / Dara Shakran camp

Hazna runs a shop, selling sweets and snacks and general household goods, every day from 6am till midnight. She has six children, aged 9–14, and has been married to her husband, Mustafa Murad, for 20 years. They are from Al-Malikiyah, but left Syria three years ago because of the war.

“ They were forcing boys to go into the army. Anybody over 15 was being forced to join the army. So we walked to the Iraq border and then took a bus.

It was two to three hours walking, then five to six hours from the border. In Syria I wasn't working. I was at home – a mother for the children. My husband was working as a labourer but if there was no work we had a garden to grow food.

Everything's difficult for women wanting to work here. Especially because most things are missing or are very expensive. But women are forced to work and support their husband and keep their family.

We opened a shop in the first year after we arrived. My husband's brother gave me money and credit to open the shop. Three years later I'm still waiting to pay them back [a debt of 475 IRD (\$400)].

I don't know when we'll be able to pay off the debt. The money we earn is not enough to live off. Clothes and shoes are expensive, especially in the winter. Everything is expensive.

From morning till midnight I'm here, standing. It's difficult for me. It's affecting me, and my children. I would like to work in any other job – perhaps in Erbil in an office

or restaurant or with another organisation, to be a cleaner and have a great salary.

I have children so I cannot leave them. I can't leave the house or the camp. There are problems. We don't know what will happen. The first thing we are afraid of is our children leaving the camp. We don't know where they are going. We worry that once they go out they can't come back. It's difficult.

Our hope is to go back to Syria. Once we came to Kurdistan we thought that we would stay here for two to three months but it's now been three years. In Syria we were free. Here there's no freedom. We can't easily go out or come back in so we just spend our days in the camp.

The children haven't been outside the camp. In Syria every two to three weeks we were going out and we had holidays. Here, I'm working for long hours just to make my children not need any help from others.

In Syria we used to go to the garden and to playgrounds. The children would play and I was happy. But here, we don't have anything. This is the only thing I can do with them. Of course it affects my relationship with others but I have one aim: to not let my children need help from others. For that reason I come here and stay here till night. ”

# Supporting employment opportunities

for fear of losing residency.<sup>60</sup> Oxfam also found that the precarious work in which most refugees engage exposes women to harassment and verbal and sexual abuse. Some women, particularly those who work in shops, indicate that they have been subjected to actual or attempted sexual blackmail.<sup>61</sup> In extreme circumstances, there are reports of women resorting to sex as a source of income, which carries well-known risks of violence and exploitation.<sup>62</sup>

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## Palestinian women in Lebanon

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**There are 42,000 Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) in Lebanon, alongside a pre-existing population of over 270,000 Palestine refugees in Lebanon (PRL).<sup>63</sup> Although the latter have been in Lebanon since 1948, they are still considered as foreigners under Lebanese law and face legal and institutional discrimination: they are denied the right to own property and face restrictive employment measures such as a ban from some professions and from joining labour unions. Thus many have relied on the United Nations agency, UNRWA, as their main source of assistance and service provision since 1950.<sup>64</sup>**

**The PRL unemployment rate stands at 23% (a significant increase from the 2010 rate of 8%), and rises to around 31% for women. The PRS unemployment rate is even higher – 48% for men and a staggering 68% for women.<sup>65</sup> According to ILO surveys, both populations work almost exclusively in the informal economy, with no social protection. They tend to work long hours and, on average, to earn less than the Lebanese minimum wage.<sup>66</sup>**

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The lack of legal status for many Syrians over 15 and their inability to work has led to a rise in child labour. Many Syrian refugee children – favoured by employers because they are cheap labour – end up working to support their families.<sup>67</sup> A recent report by Coventry University estimates that 60–70% of Syrian refugee children under 18 in Lebanon are working. Rates are even higher in the Bekaa Valley in the east of the country, where children aged as young as five harvest beans, figs and potatoes.

In towns and cities Syrian children can be seen begging or working on the streets: selling flowers or tissues, shining shoes and cleaning car windscreens. Children also work in markets, factories, auto repair shops, aluminium factories, grocery and coffee shops, in construction and running deliveries.<sup>68</sup>

At the London Conference on Syria in February 2016 the Lebanese Government agreed to facilitate access for Syrians to the job market in certain areas, such as agriculture, construction and other labour-intensive sectors, by waiving the requirement of a pledge not to work.<sup>69</sup> The Conference co-hosts estimated that up to 1.1 million jobs could be created for refugees from Syria and host country citizens in the region by 2018.<sup>70</sup>

Despite this, few jobs are currently being created. Since the conference the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has delivered a blunt assessment, stating in July 2016: "It is striking to see how little of the commitments and pledges on economic opportunities and jobs made at the London conference have materialised after five months."<sup>71</sup>

**Iraq**, unlike Lebanon and other neighbouring countries in the region, provides most Syrians with residency permits. This allows them to work legally, even while residing in camps.<sup>72</sup> Many girls and women work in shopping malls or restaurants, while boys and men do manual labour, and jobs are often available when people are prepared to work for the minimum wage. However, there are also some restrictions on residency permits, which excludes many from the labour market.<sup>73</sup>

Women tend to be the caregivers for children and elderly relatives. Looking after dependants limits the hours women can work and the distances they are able to travel to and from work. Islamic Relief's focus groups with women living in Basirma camp in Erbil revealed that many were unable to leave their families for long hours each day to find better paid jobs outside the camp, for fear that their children would also leave the relative safety of the camp unaccompanied.

Often separated from extended family networks, women in female-headed households do not enjoy the same freedom



## Hannan Abdullah Arab from Aleppo / 38 / Basirma camp

Hannan is an experienced primary school teacher and passionate about her work. In 2012 she left their three-bedroom duplex apartment in Aleppo with her husband Mohammed Bashar and children Gazel (11) and Bashar (9) to come to Erbil. The family now lives in a caravan with one bedroom and a living room. The first caravan they lived in burned down after a gas explosion.

“ I’m a teacher but it’s difficult for me to find work here. At first I was working in an NGO but now as a volunteer [for an NGO] I’m providing training in how to read and write for over-15s who are illiterate. Of course it’s not enough to feed my family so most of the time we are taking credit from the shop. Our debt currently stands at 700,000 IRD (\$590).

Finding jobs here depends on whether you have friends or relatives to help you. I have 15 years’ experience in teaching but till now no employers have replied to me. I’ve applied to all the NGOs, giving them my CV, but I’ve seen that they’ll take another person who doesn’t have any experience or knowledge about the job. I was the only person to be graded ‘excellent’ in the test but another woman still got the job over me.

We have some families here who have friends and relatives living in Erbil, working for NGOs and they talk to each other. The NGOs coming here are from Erbil and where there’s already a connection they’re more likely to employ that person. My wish would be that everyone would employ people using the same criteria and treat everyone in the same way.

In the camp they have to change the employees every 7–12 months so that everyone has the same opportunity to work. But there are some employees who have been working non-stop for three years.

Because I don’t have the opportunity to teach, most of the time I feel angry, aggressive and nervous, having pressure because I can’t do what I’m supposed to do.

It’s difficult for us to go out and bring the papers and permission from the police. The women can’t go out alone. The police made that rule last year. It’s for safety. I want to go out shopping or to the market or to the hospital and I feel like I’m in prison. I have to get permission to go anywhere.

The difference between living here and living in Syria is the difference between the sky and the earth. I can’t tell you in words how different things are. ”

# Supporting employment opportunities

to participate in the job market as they used to enjoy in Syria. With over 50% of school-age children out of school, regulated childcare facilities and other safe spaces for children within camps are required to support women's full participation in the job market.

A recent survey among the non-camp population of Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan region found that 16% of households reported no source of income in the 30 days preceding the assessment and that average debt levels exceeded average household incomes across all assessed districts. For refugees in camps, 60% of households earning an income reported facing difficulties accessing employment, largely due to increased competition for jobs, while 58% of refugees were found to be in debt.<sup>74</sup> Most Syrian refugees work in agriculture, construction or in small-scale exchange and services in camps.<sup>75</sup> While research suggests that many households are drawn from the poorest socio-economic strata of Syrian society, many are also highly skilled, highly educated business owners and service providers.<sup>76</sup>

While surveys find that most Syrian male refugees are working, only a tiny proportion of women are. UNHCR found in 2015 that, among the non-camp population of refugees in the Kurdistan region, 67% of men were engaged in income-generating activities in the 30 days prior whereas only 4% of women were reported as working, despite the fact that they constitute 26% of the total non-camp population. UNCHR notes that "this indicates that women either face restrictions due to conservative social norms, or are prevented from working due to the type of available employment opportunities".<sup>77</sup>

## What can be done?

Much can be done to improve the livelihoods of Syrian women refugees. They need to be able to reside in neighbouring countries legally without discrimination, hence procedures to maintain valid documentation and registration must be clear, accessible, and affordable.<sup>78</sup> The provision of basic services must improve, and greater international support must ensure that all refugees, including the most vulnerable, are reached.

Above all, there must be increased international funding to promote livelihoods and support refugees to become more self-reliant. In **Lebanon**, the UN is already committed to promoting programmes of job creation, including support such as training and grants for small and medium-sized Lebanese companies and cooperatives.

Providing skills training, internships, apprenticeships, career guidance and access to employment services for all population groups, especially women, could be vital – but again depends on increased funding. In order for this support to translate into tangible job creation and additional income opportunities for vulnerable households, the UN's livelihoods strategy focuses on the priority sectors of agriculture, construction and services.<sup>79</sup>

Stimulating the Lebanese economy to create high-productivity jobs is of critical importance. This can be achieved partly by addressing the business environment and infrastructure constraints. Providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Labour could help to enforce international labour standards and drive labour policy towards a Decent Work agenda for refugee women that promotes equal pay and flexible childcare arrangements.

Other effective approaches in Lebanon include cash-for-work activities that could benefit both the host community and refugees through rehabilitating local infrastructure and investments in local agricultural or agro-processing activities and services, all of which could benefit women refugees.<sup>80</sup> But humanitarian aid also remains vital because it provides refugees with a lifeline. Employment initiatives are also not as quickly implemented as humanitarian support is delivered.

If humanitarian assistance and employment initiatives go hand in hand, then a positive dynamic for the Lebanese economy may develop.<sup>81</sup> The ILO suggests that new non-traditional sectors could be promoted, such as encouraging the development of solar, wind and other alternative sources of energy, which would diversify productive employment in the country and engage a large number of semi-skilled and skilled people.<sup>82</sup>



In **Iraq**, the key need is also to promote inclusive economic growth, job creation and sustainable livelihoods. As a short-term response strategy, there is still a need for emergency livelihoods activities, such as cash-for-work programmes and small business grants. These are particularly needed for single-headed households and other vulnerable households with elderly and/or disabled members, who do not have any income source. However, the UN argues that the focus of livelihoods interventions needs to shift to programmes tailored to build the capacity of small businesses, improving value-added products and services, and establishing market linkages in camp and non-camp settings.<sup>83</sup>

Agriculture-based activities, such as small gardens to grow basic food, can also be promoted in the Kurdistan region.<sup>84</sup> The land around all four Erbil refugee camps is arable and has potential for agricultural development and livestock husbandry, areas that are currently underdeveloped by the land-owning community. Further developing these sectors could create employment in producing agricultural goods and in processing agricultural products. By bringing further economic activity to the target areas, these markets would also support social cohesion between the host community and camp-based refugee populations.<sup>85</sup>

An assessment of livelihood opportunities for camp-based refugees in Iraq by the Danish Refugee Council concludes that attention should be paid to activities that enable access to employment. These could include connecting employers with skilled refugees, developing transport options that reduce costs faced by refugees when traveling to Erbil, and setting up services within the camps, such as the provision of safe child care that would allow women to travel to and work in Erbil.<sup>86</sup>

# Preventing violence against women

**'During the first half of 2016, the gender-based violence information management system and assessments indicate that the most commonly reported types of violence continue to be physical domestic violence, sexual violence and forced marriage ... Although it is difficult to ascertain patterns, given the sensitivities around these issues, refugee women are reporting increased concerns about being subjected to various forms of sexual exploitation and abuse.'**

OCHA, Lebanon<sup>87</sup>

Addressing violence against women is a key factor in promoting women's livelihoods. If women are not safe, they can be deterred from working or undertaking basic activities outside or inside the home. In fleeing Syria, many women fled violence, including sexual violence. Rape and the fear of rape have been seen and used as weapons of war, documented in cities across Syria.<sup>88</sup>

However, women have not found safe havens from such harrowing circumstances as refugees in neighbouring countries.

A report by the International Rescue Committee in 2014 highlighted "the daily reality of sexual exploitation and harassment" endured by Syrian refugee women in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. The report concluded that Syrian women and girls faced increased risks and multiple forms of violence as a result of the conflict and displacement, and that adolescent girls were being forced to marry at younger ages. Women and girls were being exposed to more violence in and out of the home, the report said, and found it increasingly difficult to access services such as health care and education.<sup>89</sup>

Since then, a plethora of studies have highlighted the risk of violence faced by Syrian refugee women. A study funded by the UN Population Fund in **Lebanon** found that 9% of Syrian refugee women surveyed had suffered some form of physical and sexual abuse. Across the Syrian female refugee population in Lebanon, this would mean some 35,000 women.

The abuse these women suffered occurred both in public and in private, but the main perpetrators of sexual violence were husbands, neighbours and owners of the homes where respondents lived. The report noted that women and girls felt that severe poverty, men's and women's inability to continue in traditional gender roles because of the crisis, and rising prices were contributing factors when it came to women and girls' experience of gender-based violence. Women and girls also felt that Syrian women were perceived as easy targets for coerced sex perpetrated both by individuals in public and by their husbands because they lacked traditional family support and protection due to displacement.<sup>90</sup>

Data collected by OCHA through its Gender-Based Violence Information Management System in Lebanon highlights how displacement has increased the risk of violence against women. Most at risk are child mothers, early married girls, unaccompanied girls and adolescents, women and girls with disabilities, and single heads of households. One in four reported cases of violence involves children. Some 24% of reported cases involve incidents of sexual violence, of which 8% are rape. Around 68% of reported incidents are involve family members, and 73% take place inside the home.

OCHA notes that "overcrowding and lack of privacy in shared accommodation, such as in collective shelters and tented settlements, also places persons at increased risk".<sup>91</sup> The absence of adequate lighting in refugee camps can have a significant effect on safety and security. Without light, simple activities such as visiting the toilet, collecting water, returning to the shelter from work or completing homework after dark can become difficult and dangerous, particularly for women and girls.<sup>92</sup>

Research by Coventry University found that landlords and employers in Lebanon are commonly coercing refugee women into providing 'sexual favours' in return for rent, food and/or employment for themselves and their families.<sup>93</sup> A report by Amnesty International also highlights sexual harassment in the context of employment, with several women saying that they had left a job, or not taken a job, because the attitude or behaviour of employers caused the women to become suspicious of the employer's intentions.<sup>94</sup>



## Noor Hussain / 33 / Qushtapa camp

Noor is from Derbassiyeh. She works to a limited extent in the camp supermarket, stacking shelves. It opens for one week each month, when people with e-vouchers from the World Food Programme – 23,000 IRD (\$19) per person – come to buy provisions. Noor uses her wages to buy medicine for her eye problems (disciform keratitis, conjunctivitis and corneal haze) which started when she first moved to the camp.

“ I left Syria because of the bombs and came here with my brother. We set off by car till we got to the border, then the Peshmerga helped us by bringing buses and giving us food and water. My father and mother are still in Syria.

I don't have any family members to help me so I have to work. I came here from Syria with savings – 100,000 Syrian pounds (\$460). But now I'm in debt.

I don't want to have to depend on anyone else. I can't get this medicine if I don't have money. And I can't see if I can't get this medicine. I saw that the supermarket had opened so I came here and asked for work. I asked one of the people that already worked here. But I'm worried that my eyesight has become so bad that from now on I can't work anymore.

My dream job would be as a humanitarian assistant but I don't know what standards they're using to recruit and why I don't qualify. There are restaurant jobs in Erbil, from 4pm to midnight. I could get one of those jobs but my brother won't let me.

Here they are talking a lot about girls who go out till midnight and come home late. They are saying that

maybe she's not working in 'clean' work. My brother said: 'If you go, I will kill you.'

Things have changed so much. In Syria I was working till 9 or 10pm. I was wearing whatever I wanted. But here I am not free.

All the other people here are also from Syria but they're now talking in a different way.

Back there, we were living as you do in Europe. We were free, with no one noticing what you are doing, but in the three years I'm living here I didn't go out of the camp even once for anything other than my medicine.

Even then, I take a bus and taxi to the doctor in Erbil and I'm back in a little over an hour. ”

# Preventing violence against women

Amnesty International concluded: “The vast majority of Syrian refugee women and all the Palestinian refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International said that they did not feel safe in Lebanon” given their experience of sexual harassment in public places. Women also complained of their lack of trust in the Lebanese authorities’ willingness to effectively and impartially investigate complaints brought by refugees.<sup>95</sup>

In the **Kurdistan** region of Iraq, Islamic Relief’s focus groups with women found that many regard the camps more as prisons than homes and that fear for their security means that women have to be accompanied by male relatives outside their homes. Some women report that men’s tensions and frustrations at being unemployed can translate into perpetrating violence at home.

OCHA reports that incidents of gender-based violence “remain of paramount concern” and that “due to economic hardship and persistent violence... child labour and early marriage are increasingly being used as negative coping mechanisms”.<sup>96</sup>

Research conducted in 2015 by a consortium including UN Women and UNHCR found that women’s main problems include sexual aggression, rape, sexual violence and sexual abuse by husbands, male family members, colleagues, neighbours, police, government employees and NGO staff. It found that since arriving in Kurdistan, only 18% of Syrian women had **not** been subjected to verbal aggression and disrespect. The implication being that a staggering 82% of women have experienced verbal abuse or other forms of violence, mainly in public places. Women had few places to go for refuge from such violence because there was no shelter to take care of them within the refugee camps.<sup>97</sup>

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## Psychological impacts of violence

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**Few studies have been carried out on the psychological impact of refugees’ experience of flight, war, violence and the difficulty of ensuring a livelihood – a major gap in understanding the plight of refugees and improving assistance. The extent of the problem is likely to be serious**

**and widespread, yet there is little international or domestic funding or support to refugees for the mental stresses they are living with.**

Oxfam research found “high levels of distress among respondents, almost all of whom reported experiencing high levels of stress, loneliness and alienation, and many had experienced highly traumatic events prior to their decision to leave Syria”.<sup>98</sup> This stress resulted from displacement and difficulties obtaining income, finding work and providing for the family.

Children were found by Oxfam to be increasingly unruly and ill-tempered, or depressed and listless, while couples experienced more tense relationships involving more frequent and intense arguments, sometimes involving shouting and physical assault towards women by men, towards children by men and women, and between children. Outside the home, most refugees described feeling unsafe in their current surroundings, which they attributed partly to being in a foreign land but partly to being victims of verbal abuse by host community passers-by or sometimes neighbours, who would shout at them to go home or accuse them of ‘stealing jobs’.<sup>99</sup>

At the extreme, it is reported that some Syrians are turning to suicide as an escape. A 2014 United Nations Population Fund study found that 41% of Syrian youths in Lebanon said they had suicidal urges. It quoted a psychiatrist working with displaced Syrians as saying that there was only one way to prevent young refugees from reaching the level of despair that prompts a suicide attempt: investing in their future.<sup>100</sup>

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## What can be done?

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Islamic Relief’s experience on the ground is that Syrian women are in urgent need of support to help them combat violence. If they are not already victims, they are at high risk due to where they live and (for some) where they work.

More and better counselling, legal and referral services need to be made available, through increased funding and





## Roksan Suleiman from Al Hasakah / 28 / Basirma Camp

Roksan works for a non-governmental aid organisation (NGO). She arrived in Erbil in August 2013 and lives with her mum, dad and brother. Only Roksan and her brother are employed and they are also sending money back to family members in Syria. Roksan worked as a primary school teacher in Syria but says teaching salaries in the refugee camps are too low. You can earn \$300 in a school but \$500 with an NGO.

“ There are opportunities for women to work. In Erbil you can find jobs easily. But it’s difficult to go outside the camp and look for jobs.

Firstly, the police will not let any girl go out of the camp alone. Secondly, the family will not let girls go out to find a job. And thirdly, once she has left the camp and found a job, how is she going to come back alone?

Women are not like men. They don’t feel confident or comfortable alone outside the camp. There may be violence. They are scared about these things.

I tried to leave and asked for permission just to go to the hairdresser in a nearby village but they would not let any girl go out alone. There was a woman working as a hairdresser outside the camp but inside the camp they started talking about her and now she’s not working any more.

They talked about how she was going out alone and coming back alone. The men and the police were asking what she was going to do outside the camp? Was she going to work really? You know what I mean - I am thinking of bad things.

All I wanted was to get a haircut. It causes psychological pressure. I’m always thinking about it. I wanted to go to the

dentist but my mother couldn’t come with me and I couldn’t go alone. Here it’s like a prison.

There’s a border here and we cannot cross it alone, or even with friends. We have to think and plan for days just to go out and do a simple thing. We have to take a brother, mother or father with us. Once we go outside the border of the camp we breathe again.

I’m always stressed out. We are under pressure and we have this stress all the time. We are refugees. We lost our houses, jobs, relatives but here the stress is more. It feels like we are going to explode. In Syria we were free to go and come back freely without worrying about these things.

I do want to marry but I don’t want to marry young. First the girl should make herself strong and once she can speak loudly and have a strong mind then she can marry. If I was married from a young age, as soon as problems happened between me and my husband I wouldn’t be able to solve it. But now I’ve graduated, I’ve worked and I’ve faced problems so if I got married now it would be easier for me. ”

# Preventing violence against women

explicit recognition of gender-based violence within funding allocations. Increased awareness raising and advocacy need to be undertaken to convince the local and national authorities to step up measures to combat violence against women

More studies need to be conducted to assess the extent of violence and what strategies are most effective. This is especially the case in the Kurdistan region of Iraq where less information is available. Most women will not seek formal services, hence there is much that community-based organisations can do to enhance the support that women and girl refugees receive.<sup>101</sup> This includes working with religious leaders to challenge the stigma surrounding sexual and gender-based violence, and involving faith groups in community-based counselling services and referral pathways.

Improving access to reproductive and sexual health services – and reducing their costs – could ensure that healthcare providers screen for exposure to violence in order to help those most at risk. Child protection services could be better integrated into gender-based violence support programmes, since many children have been abused or have witnessed abuse – and intervention with the children of those who have been through violence is needed to avoid perpetuating the cycle of violence.<sup>102</sup>

More work could also be undertaken to understand how men and boys can be better integrated into violence prevention initiatives, to prevent marital rape and sexual assault, child marriage and child abuse.<sup>103</sup> This could include developing strategic partnerships to support female and male faith leaders and their communities in addressing harmful cultures, beliefs, attitudes and practices and supporting the development of a non-violent model of masculinity based on faith traditions.<sup>104</sup>

Improving safety and security for refugee neighbourhoods and camps is needed to support an enabling environment for women to better access employment opportunities. Training police and security services in protection issues and gender sensitivity will encourage more women to seek justice and end

impunity. Refugee camps in the Kurdistan region need more police officers and more trained professional staff, especially female employees and aid workers, to better prevent and respond to violent crimes against women refugees. Victims of violence also need legal centres and free lawyers to punish those who commit offences against them.<sup>105</sup>

Providing solar street lights allows refugee women more freedom to continue income-generating activities after dark or travel to and from work in the early morning or evening. Solar technology is becoming an increasingly affordable source of energy (after the up-front costs there are no recurring fuel costs, as is the case for generators), and should be more widely used by NGOs to empower refugee populations, particularly women. Solar-powered lanterns and mobile phone battery packs have a positive multiplier effect on women's lives by increasing their freedom of movement and access to information and services.

# Improving education

‘This population influx in Lebanon has increased the demand for education services, not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of variety of needs and impact on quality of the education system. Children impacted by displacement have often had their education disrupted. If they are able to access schools, they have to cope with a different curriculum and educational challenges. Many are not able to resume schooling due to their socioeconomic situation, or because they are over-age or discouraged. Some have also witnessed serious acts of violence and are in need of psychosocial support.’  
OCHA, Lebanon<sup>106</sup>

After over five years, it has become clear that the Syria crisis is not only an immediate, short-term (humanitarian) tragedy but also a longer term (development) one. To help rebuild livelihoods and prepare for the future, it is critical to support the education of child refugees. Yet there are big challenges in education that, despite some efforts, are not being adequately faced by local and international funders and institutions.

In **Lebanon** more than 250,000 children, half of whom are girls – around half of the nearly 500,000 school-aged Syrian children registered in Lebanon – are out of school.<sup>107</sup> Even starker, just 3% of secondary school-aged Syrian children registered in Lebanon are enrolled in public schools.<sup>108</sup>

There are several reasons for this low attendance. In numerous assessments, the cost of education, including indirect school costs such as the cost of transportation, has been identified as the main barrier to accessing school.<sup>109</sup> In addition, many parents are afraid of sending their children to schools because they fear that schools might not be safe and children might be exploited on their way to or inside schools. This problem is compounded by the use of evening shifts to accommodate Syrian refugees into the Lebanese public schooling system.

The need to work is another major factor for the 10–14 age group; seasonal child labour is particularly prominent in the Bekaa, North and South of the country due to increased poverty and reductions in humanitarian assistance. Other

deterrents for school enrolment are lack of literacy in English or French and the prevalence of corporal punishment and abuse.<sup>110</sup>

Lebanon’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education has taken several positive steps to enrol Syrian children in formal education, but the system has struggled to keep pace with demand.<sup>111</sup> Authorities have allowed refugees to enrol in school without providing proof of legal residency, waived school enrolment fees, and opened up afternoon ‘second shift’ classes in 238 public schools to provide Syrians with formal education.<sup>112</sup>

But although the number of classroom spaces in public schools has increased, there are still not enough for Syrian refugees. There were 200,000 places available for Syrians in public schools for the 2015–2016 school year – less than half those needed for the 495,910 school-age Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR at the beginning of the year.<sup>113</sup>

Following the London Conference, Lebanon reaffirmed its commitment to getting all children aged 3–18 into good-quality education.<sup>114</sup> Human Rights Watch has recently argued, however, that Lebanon needs much more international financial support to respond to the educational needs of Syrian refugees, including rehabilitating and expanding schools, investing in good-quality education, fully including children with disabilities, training and hiring more teachers, and subsidising school transportation.<sup>115</sup> Currently, international funding for education in Lebanon is grossly inadequate, as shown in the following section.

In the Kurdistan region of **Iraq** there are around 58,000 school-age refugee children.<sup>116</sup> Of these, an estimated 46% are attending formal education, meaning that 54% are not.<sup>117</sup> Attendance rates are lower for boys (42%) than girls (51%), probably because of the high rate of child labour.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, only 5% of children aged 15–17 years are attending formal secondary education.<sup>119</sup>

As in Lebanon, the cost of education is a major barrier. While schooling is free, there are additional indirect costs such as clothing and transport.<sup>120</sup> Many children are unable to enrol,

# Improving education

as classrooms are over-crowded because of insufficient space.

The lack of birth registration certificates and/or other relevant school certificates also results in low enrolment of refugee children. The language barrier is another main reason that Syrian refugee children do not enrol in school, since most schools in the Kurdistan region teach in the Kurdish language.

The UN notes that “the quality of basic education provided is poor due to limited planning capacity, a poor governance system, and an unequal allocation of resources”.<sup>121</sup> The Ministry of Education is no longer able to provide teachers with salaries, which affects the motivation of teaching and education support staff and has also resulted in increased class sizes, irregular school weeks and under-qualified teachers taking up positions.<sup>122</sup> There is a great demand for textbooks, yet the Government and other stakeholders are unable to print text books because of limited financial resources.<sup>123</sup>

A World Bank analysis in 2015 noted that \$16.3 million per month – a relatively small sum – was required to provide basic education services to school-age children of refugees and IDPs in the Kurdistan region. Priorities were school infrastructure, including renovation and rehabilitation of schools, expanding classroom capacity, opening schools in urban areas, and procuring supplies for schools, children, and teachers.<sup>124</sup>

## What can be done?

It is critical to enhance access to good-quality formal education in both Lebanon and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. More international funding is needed to open up formal schools and expand classes in some areas in order to reach a higher number of children in need, while ensuring quality of teaching and good learning outcomes.

At the same time, non-formal education needs to be expanded to ensure all children can access education and are prepared to re-enter the formal system when possible. Special attention is needed to target children living in areas

that are geographically difficult to reach and children in need of additional educational support.<sup>125</sup>

The Lebanese authorities should ensure that residency requirements are not imposed as a condition for school enrolment, and waive the residency requirement to enrol in secondary school. With greater international funding, the Government should also ensure that indirect costs, like transport and supplies, are not barriers to primary education.

More funding needs to be allocated to teacher training and inclusive education for children with disabilities.<sup>126</sup> There is a great need to improve the infrastructure and equipment in public schools, and a large number of schools need major rehabilitation work. Some 50% or more of Lebanese public schools that welcome displaced Syrians do not have sanitary facilities that meet minimum requirements.<sup>127</sup>





## Batoul Nejim / 19 / Lebanon

Batoul lives with her mother, and eight younger brothers and sisters. She left Hama in Syria with her family in August 2015. On the way her father went missing, and she has not seen or heard from him since.

“ We were comfortable in Syria, my parents’ income was really good and we were happy. The war began to get closer and people we knew began to die, so we had to leave. It became really hard, without my father. We didn’t know what to do, we didn’t know where to begin.

Some of our relatives helped a little with clothing and blankets, but we still didn’t know how we were going to live. We used to get more help from the camp at the start, but now each family is given barely \$13 a day.

We’re a big family. How can \$13 a day be enough? Toilets, clean water, we don’t have them. Our toilets are just holes in the ground.

We’ve tried to work. My sister and I go to the fields and work as much as we can, but it’s really hard.

All our dreams are gone. My sister is six years old. She should be in school at this age, she should have a future, but no. It’s really heart breaking. In terms of the future, it depresses me to think about it. There’s nothing I can see that will make us happy.

There’s no hope to go back to Syria. Even if we do go back, what are we going back to? There’s nothing there. I had dreams when I was at school, doing well. In Syria, I was doing my baccalaureate [A-level equivalent]. I had finished my second- last exam, and had to miss my last

exam because the area where my school was in Syria became too dangerous.

I wanted to go to university, I could’ve done really well. I wanted to be a journalist and travel, and meet different people and hear their stories. But now, there’s nothing. Life is too hard to live now, let alone dream of anything.

The situation in the camps is really bad. It’s sad that girls like me have to go to the field and work all day just to get some money to spend on their family. We had a future, but not anymore. Even living in a camp, you have to spend money. At the end of every month, lots of people are in debt. People think about going back because they can’t afford to live here. But what are they going to go back to, death? ”

# An inadequate international response

**‘While some sectors are relatively better funded than others, underfunding is undermining the ability of 3RP programming to mitigate further impoverishment of refugees and host communities and to stem the protection risks associated with increasing poverty. Diminished livelihoods programming will mean that families contending with extreme socio-economic vulnerability will continue to struggle with burgeoning indebtedness and rising living costs – factors which exert increasing pressures to undertake negative coping strategies’.**

United Nations<sup>128</sup>

Not only has the international community failed to bring about an end to the war in Syria, but it is also failing to adequately support those who are fleeing it.

The major UN appeal – known as the 3RP, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan – is requesting \$4.54 billion in 2016. Yet only received \$2.2 billion in 2016 – just over 49% funded.<sup>129</sup>

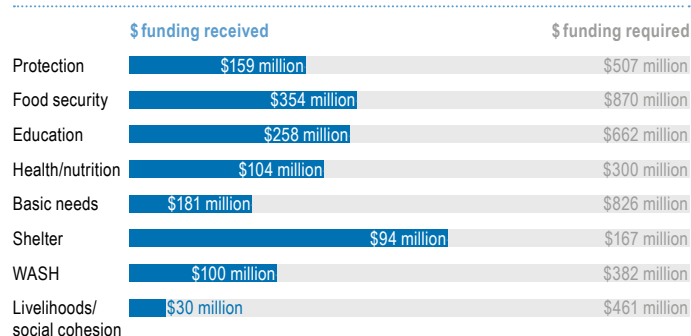
The London Conference raised \$11.2 billion in pledges for the Syria Crisis for 2016–2020, of which \$5.86 billion was for 2016 alone. However, even these pledges would be enough to fund only 76% of the estimated needs in Syria. The UN’s funding appeals for Syria have been increasingly under-funded the longer the crisis has gone on – just 59% funded in 2015, 64% funded in 2014 and 73% funded in 2013.

Some donors – such as the European Union, Norway, the UK, Germany, the US, Kuwait and Sweden – have pledged considerable funds for 2017–20. However, 28 out of 47 donors made no humanitarian aid pledges to the Syria appeal for the same period.<sup>130</sup>

The livelihoods sector is the most under-funded of the sectoral areas requiring support, having received just 6% of estimated needs as of June 2016.

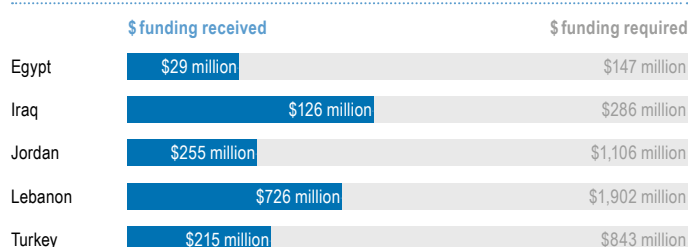
The UN’s 2016 appeal for Lebanon is only 38% funded,

## FUNDING BY SECTOR



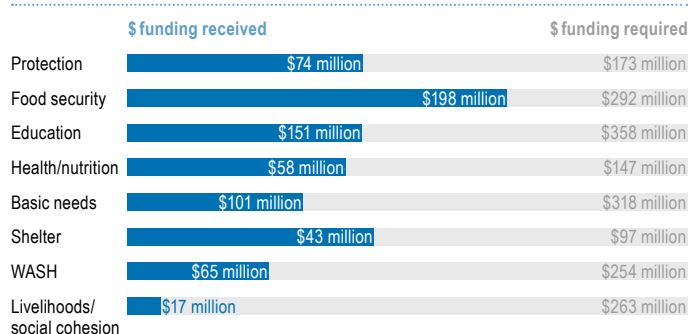
Source: UN, 3RP: Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016–2017: Mid Year Report, June 2016, p.6, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/3RP-Mid-year-Report.pdf>

## FUNDING BY COUNTRY



Source: UN, 3RP: Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016–2017: Mid Year Report, June 2016, p.5, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/3RP-Mid-year-Report.pdf>

## LEBANON: FUNDING BY SECTOR



Source: UN, 3RP: Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016–2017: Mid Year Report, June 2016, p.43, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/3RP-Mid-year-Report.pdf>

## IRAQ: FUNDING BY SECTOR

	\$ funding received	\$ funding required
Protection	\$23 million	\$36 million
Food security	\$13 million	\$37 million
Education	\$18 million	\$45 million
Health/nutrition	\$7 million	\$19 million
Basic needs	\$15 million	\$42 million
Shelter	\$25 million	\$38 million
WASH	\$14 million	\$33 million
Livelihoods/ social cohesion	\$8 million	\$36 million

Source: UN, 3RP: Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016–2017: Mid Year Report, June 2016, p.48, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/3RP-Mid-year-Report.pdf>

and that for Iraq 44% funded, as of June 2016. Similar under-funding occurred in 2015, when the Lebanon appeal was less than 50% funded by the end of the year.<sup>131</sup>

The most under-funded sector of the Lebanon appeal is livelihoods: just \$17 million out of the \$263 million estimated need had been received by mid-2016.

UN reports consistently implore funders to meet their pledges of funding for livelihoods and highlight the consequences of failing to do so.<sup>132</sup> The UN notes, for example, that in Lebanon, “the livelihoods sector still faces a major obstacle in scaling up its activities and is therefore unable to effectively mitigate the impact of the crisis on economic opportunities and jobs”.<sup>133</sup> It adds that “gaps remain enormous for all priority interventions of the sector, and some of the most vulnerable areas, such as Wadi Khaled, Tripoli and Saida, have remained largely untouched by partners”.<sup>134</sup>

Livelihoods is also the most under-funded sector of the Iraq appeal – just \$8 million out of the requested amount of \$36 million had been received by mid-2016.

## What underfunding means

Because of a long-term, chronic shortage of funds, the UN is not able to reach everyone in need and has cut the

numbers of refugees receiving its support and the amount of assistance provided to them. About one quarter of refugee women in Lebanon interviewed by Amnesty International for a recent report had had their monthly financial support for food from the UN stopped in the past year. Those still receiving the payment had seen the amount reduce substantially.<sup>135</sup>

In January 2015 the amount dropped from \$27.70 per person per month to \$19 and in July 2015 a further reduction was made to just \$13.50 per person per month. A late injection of funds towards the end of 2015 meant that the World Food Programme was able to increase the monthly payment to \$21.60 per person from October 2015. But refugees still receive only \$0.72 per person per day, significantly below the World Bank’s global poverty line of \$1.90 per day.<sup>136</sup>

The UN notes that in Lebanon, due to the funding gap, partners are “increasingly forced to assist only those individuals and families with the highest degree of vulnerability within the vulnerable target population, leaving many essential needs unmet”.<sup>137</sup> While 52% of the Syrian refugee population is in need of cash assistance, only 17% have been assisted to date.<sup>138</sup>

While poverty is rising, the UN-funded National Poverty Targeting Programme has been able to reach only 72 households out of a total of 20,000 extremely vulnerable households.<sup>139</sup> In Iraq the UN notes that lack of funds has meant that the shelter sector has not been able to address the growing needs of the out-of-camps refugee population, such as upgrading of dwellings, rental support and support for community infrastructure, including adequate lighting in camps to help keep women and children safe.<sup>140</sup>

Humanitarian aid works. UNHCR and the UN Development Programme recently commissioned an analysis of the impact of humanitarian aid on the Lebanese economy in order to assess the impact of the combined aid of UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and UNDP. It concluded that every \$1 spent on humanitarian assistance has a multiplier value of \$1.6 in the economic sectors, ie \$800 million disbursed in 2014 corresponded to injecting \$1.28 billion into the Lebanese economy.<sup>141</sup>

# An inadequate international response

## More than aid

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Helping female refugees to become self-reliant requires more than aid. Integrated humanitarian and economic national plans are needed to enhance the business environment and address infrastructure constraints in order to deliver economic growth and job creation in Lebanon and the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Cash-for-work activities, for example, can benefit both the host community and refugees through rehabilitating local infrastructure.

Support to small and medium-sized companies and co-operatives, including business training, in-kind and cash grants, is vital to open up markets. Establishing local trading linkages, in camp and non-camp settings, increases economic activity to the target areas, and supports social cohesion between the host community and camp-based refugee populations.<sup>142</sup>

Increasing access to regional and international markets for Lebanon and Iraq is essential to ensure their job markets grow sufficiently to absorb the productive capacity of Syrian refugees, who will likely reside in those countries for many years to come.

As the UK renegotiates its trading relationships with Europe and the rest of the world, Brexit provides an opportunity for UK trade and diplomacy to act alongside the Department for International Development to support the resilience and self-sufficiency of refugees residing in Syria's neighbouring countries.



# Recommendations

The international community must double current funding to meet the UN appeal targets for Syria and neighbouring countries, including Lebanon and Iraq. Without this Syrian women refugees, and indeed all refugees, will continue to live ever more precariously. This means they are likely to sink even further into poverty, and this is likely to create further social tensions in the region. In order to better support the improvement of livelihoods among Syrian women refugees in neighbouring countries, we recommend:

## Employment

- ▶ Local authorities need to ensure that refugees can reside in neighbouring countries legally without discrimination. Procedures to maintain valid documentation and registration must be clear, accessible and affordable.
- ▶ International funding for livelihoods programmes in Lebanon and Iraq must increase by US \$ 275 million in line with pledges made at the London Conference, to support job creation through business training, skills development and other employment services for women.
- ▶ Emergency livelihoods activities, including cash-for-work programmes and small business grants, must continue to be provided for the most vulnerable households including single-headed households and those with older people and/or family members with disabilities.
- ▶ Agriculture-based activities, such as small gardens to grow basic food, should be more heavily promoted to increase employment and support food security.
- ▶ Women's equality in the workplace should be promoted in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8 by supporting worker rights in relation to health, safety, childcare and remuneration.

## Violence against women

- ▶ Increased funding and policy support are needed to strengthen prevention and response programmes for gender-based violence (GBV), including the addition of specific budget lines for GBV in donor allocations and monitoring.

- ▶ Funders and international aid agencies should do more to tackle GBV across livelihoods, education and health programmes, making more effective use of available tools and guidelines, such as the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP).
- ▶ Safety in refugee camps needs to be improved by providing better lighting, establishing separate bathrooms for men and women, and increasing women's participation and leadership in helping to reduce danger zones in and around camps.
- ▶ Women must have access to legal aid and appropriate procedures for investigations, prosecutions, effective remedies and reparations in order to promote justice and end impunity for perpetrators of violence against women.
- ▶ Concrete support is needed for sensitisation and training for local police and security services, accompanied by strong monitoring to assess how protection and access to justice are progressing.
- ▶ Faith communities are key players in empowering and preventing gender-based violence, and this needs wider recognition. Religious and community leaders need to be equipped to help raise awareness, end stigma and challenge cultural norms that limit women's access to public places.

## Education

- ▶ Better access is needed to high-quality formal and vocational education through the creation of new and expanded schools. This will require an additional US \$ 228 million to fulfil pledges from the London Conference.
- ▶ Non-formal education should be fully recognised and standardised by Ministries of Education through accreditation and referral systems, to ensure pupils are better able to re-enter formal education when possible.
- ▶ Greater funding is also needed to ensure that indirect costs, such as books and transport, do not prevent children from accessing education, particularly for those attending evening classes.
- ▶ Barriers to education such as residency requirements and language barriers must be removed.

- ▶ Specific funding should be earmarked for teacher salaries and training, and for curriculum development, including measures to ensure access and participation of children and teachers with disabilities.

In addition, the international community must do much more to help resettle Syrian refugees, and ensure the provision of safe and legal routes for people seeking refuge and asylum, including increased support for family reunification. Even with adequate international financial support to the authorities in Lebanon and Iraq, it is unlikely that sufficient jobs and school places for children can be created. Thus it will be critical for significantly more refugees to find new homes in other countries.

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