



Photo Credit: Women for Women International.

“What of our unfulfilled promises?”

Situational Assessment and Policy Brief on Syrian women refugees’ experiences in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

June 2022

Introduction

2022 marks the twelfth year of the Syrian war – a conflict that has created one of the largest displacement crises in decades. Since 2011, over 6.7 million people – 3 million women - have been internally displaced within Syria, and over 6.8 million refugees – 1 million women - have fled the country entirely.^{1,2} Nearly 260,000 of these Syrian refugees reside in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), each carrying the trauma of their flight while struggling to find basic accommodation and food on dwindling resources or debt.³

On top of this already dire situation, the intersection of the ongoing spillover effects of COVID-19 and the financial consequences of the war in Ukraine are disproportionately impacting Syrian women refugees around the world, including those currently living in Iraq. Yet their experiences and calls for both immediate and

long-term solutions to their unique challenges continue to be under-represented and unheard in global media and decision-making spaces.

While global media attention and conflict-response priorities have shifted to other emerging conflicts and crises (most recently to the war in Ukraine), the fragility of Federal Iraq and the KRI has risen. The long-term socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19 have compounded this fragility by adding financial strain on Syrian refugee communities in the KRI, contributing to rising unemployment levels and debt reliance on food supplies.⁴ Regional actors are taking the opportunity to undermine political stability as food and fuel prices soar. Rising tensions between Iran and Iraq have also negatively impacted security in recent months as Erbil has come under missile attacks from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.⁵

Syrian refugees living in the KRI face multiple, intersecting challenges negatively impacting their access to livelihoods, healthcare, education, legal support and food security. These factors disproportionately impact women who are more economically vulnerable and often lack access to decision-making at the household and community levels to access services or to advocate for economic independence, reunification, support for their families and stability.

In May 2022, Women for Women International surveyed 112 women, conducted four focus

group discussions (FGDs) and carried out supplemental key informant and validation interviews across three different Syrian refugee camps in the KRI: Kawargosk, Darashakran and Basirma. The objective of this research was to better understand the current experiences of and primary challenges facing Syrian women refugees in the KRI, identify any promising support mechanisms and to listen to their hopes for the future. Our commitment to amplify the often-overlooked voices of women affected by conflict is central to our research methodology and is similarly the foundation of the recommendations for action.

Syrian refugee women in the KRI overwhelmingly call upon the international community to support peace and to not forget them. In this report, we urge decisionmakers, institutions, and stakeholders at the global, national, and community levels to listen to Syrian refugees - especially women - who ask not to be forgotten amidst the war that displaced them over a decade ago and the aftershocks of the recent war in Ukraine creating so many more refugees like them.

Context

Since the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011, over 6.8 million people have fled the country and it has been neighboring countries that have taken in the majority of Syrian refugees: 3.7 million Syrian refugees live in Turkey which is the largest refugee population worldwide, over 850,000 Syrian refugees live in Lebanon, over 660,000 reside in Jordan, and as of 2022, approximately 260,000 Syrian refugees live in Iraq.^{6,7}

The Syrian refugee response has predominantly focused on countries like Turkey and Lebanon which have absorbed a greater proportion of Syrian refugees. But less is known about the Syrian refugees living in Iraq amidst one of the worst displacement crises in the country's history.⁸

The KRI, Federal Iraq and Syria have experienced related and cyclical displacement crises brought on by multiple conflicts including the Iran-Iraq War in 1980-88, the Gulf War in 1990-91, the Iraqi Ba'ath regime's attacks on the Kurds and Shia, lingering intra-state violence and insecurity since 2003 and the rise of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) since 2014.⁹ The liberation of

Mosul between 2016-7 and the Iraqi army's takeover of Kirkuk in October 2017 also caused further internal displacement within Iraq and Iraqis continue to brace for the next acute conflict or crisis that may destabilize the current 'post-conflict' period.¹⁰

Compounding the challenges of displacement crises within Iraq are the lingering ripple effects of the broad sanctions levied by the United Nations between 1990-2003 under UN Resolution 661 and the US-led occupation of the country from 2003-2011.

Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the UN Security Council enacted broad sanctions which prohibited all imports and exports from Iraq, with narrow exceptions for some medicines. Subsequently, the Persian Gulf War and bombing campaign in 1991 destroyed most of Iraq's infrastructure and led to malnutrition and the bankruptcy of the state. Despite this, the UN Sanctions against Iraq persisted until 2003 and are widely recognized as having a devastating humanitarian impact on the country's population.¹¹

The sanctions 'ended' with the US led invasion of Iraq in March 2003 which overthrew the Ba'ath Party government of Saddam Hussein. In 2011, US troops left Iraq and left behind a mixed legacy of violence and political turmoil including interim and transition governments, an Iraqi insurgency, and a period of reconstruction which laid groundwork for contemporary corruption in Iraq's political economy and not enough jobs for its citizens.¹² The economic, political and humanitarian effects of the sanctions, occupation, and ongoing regional armed conflict and displacement crises likely pose unique challenges for Iraq in absorbing and sustaining the approximately 260,000 Syrian refugees currently residing in KRI.

Since 2003, Women for Women International has served over 21,000 women across Iraq in Baghdad, Karbala, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Shekhan, and Dohuk.¹³ Our year-long Stronger Women, Stronger Nations social and economic empowerment program supports women affected by conflict to change their lives by bringing a holistic and contextualized approach to addressing their unique needs. The program has reached populations of Syrian women, Iraqi women, displaced Yezidi women and Kurdish women. Following a pause in direct program implementation in 2014 due to security risks, Women for Women International resumed programming in 2017 with a focus on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which hosts 98% of Iraq's Syrian refugees.¹⁴

While governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have focused mainly on providing lifesaving but short-term emergency assistance, refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) have received minimal longer-term support to build stable livelihoods, improve wellbeing and resilience, and fully participate in their communities. Further, women and female-headed households – who have fewer resources and safety nets to start with – struggle to access the emergency assistance and services that are available and, as a result, fall deeper into poverty.

This has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 on women and girls have led to additional burdens on sexual and reproductive health

services, reductions in mental health provisions and a rise in gender-based violence (GBV).¹⁵ In Iraq, the pandemic aggravated the already struggling economy caused by the political instability, ongoing violent protests and increasing tensions between the US and Iran. As Iraq adopted national lockdown measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, Women for Women International provided training sessions to women program participants on COVID-19 prevention measures. As a safety precaution, Women for Women International suspended all in-person training but continued communications with program participants through mobile phones to collect information on their needs and offer referrals to online psychological support or supplemental food services.¹⁶

Even as Iraq continues its COVID-19 recovery, the economic consequences of the war in Ukraine have mitigated stabilization measures for Syrian refugees living in the KRI. The conflict in Ukraine has caused living costs to double in Iraq, with program participants in April 2022 reporting that the cost of wheat flour had increased by 40%, cooking oil by 30% and kerosine by 80%. These price increases are largely corroborated by global estimates and tracking. In practical terms, the cost of bread has increased by a third. Where previously 1,000 Iraqi Dinar (IQD) would buy eight pieces of bread, today's shoppers can only purchase six for the same price. In a population where about one in three people earn less than approximately 2,000 IQD per day (approximately US \$2.15, the international poverty line), the cost of bread is roughly equal to half a day's income and these price increases significantly impact household financial and food security.

The length of the conflict in Syria has created an extended humanitarian crisis for Syrian refugees around the world that shows no signs of abatement nor resolution. This report's situational assessment illustrates women's perspectives and experiences of displacement and how global crises, regional insecurity and patriarchal norms compound their daily challenges.

Methodology

KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ



In May 2022, Women for Women International conducted outreach to Syrian women refugees living in three camps in the KRI: Kawargosk, Darashakran and Basirma. The outreach consisted of a mixed multiple-choice and open-ended question survey to 112 Syrian women refugees who participate in our Stronger Women, Stronger Nations program. The survey was conducted in-person and responses were recorded and analyzed using Kobotoolbox. In addition to the survey, we conducted four focus group discussions - one in each of the three camps where we work. The fourth FGD was conducted in a host community with Kurdish women where we also operate, allowing us to compare the key challenges for Syrian women against a relative reference point of Iraqi women in the region.

Who Did We Ask?



42%

Darashakran
Camp



27%

Kawargosk
Camp



31%

Basirma
Camp



20%
single



79%
married



1%
widow



5
average
household size



8.2
average years
in displacement



7.7
average years
in current location

Since the women responding to this survey were Women for Women International program participants, these women meet our programmatic eligibility criteria, which specifically target women facing multiple vulnerabilities including:



Situational Assessment Findings

Overarching Findings:



Stop the wars and create an environment where children can be innovative and live in peace for brighter future. Every refugee everywhere lives in need of some kind of support, especially economical support, and less discrimination with the host communities.

– Syrian woman in Darashakran refugee camp ””

Peace:

Syrian women refugees want an end to the war in Syria. Over half of all survey respondents indicated that they want the international community to hear their calls for peace and an end to war - in Syria and everywhere. This call for peace should instruct a global priority of peace over aggression in negotiating and promoting conflict resolution. Even when a crisis or conflict becomes a ‘forever war’ in the minds of experts and the general public, those displaced from their home are never far from the war that forced them to leave. While many hope to reunite with their families, others shared with us in FGDs that their hope for a return to a peaceful Syria is waning despite their attempts at optimism. It is incumbent on diplomatic and security actors to keep this hope for peace alive.

Commitment to resettlement:

When realism about their current situation overtakes their long-term optimism regarding a peaceful future in Syria, Syrian women share that they want a permanent home, stability and a clear pathway to permanent resettlement that allows them to fully engage in society. Syrian women emphasize a desire for uninterrupted support and clear, documented status in their host country that allows them to build their lives and strive for a future outside of the camps where many have lived for over ten years.



[I hope for] God to solve our problems, my only hope is to at least have an actual house to live in with my husband whether in Erbil or somewhere in civilization.

– Syrian woman in Basirma refugee camp

Participation:

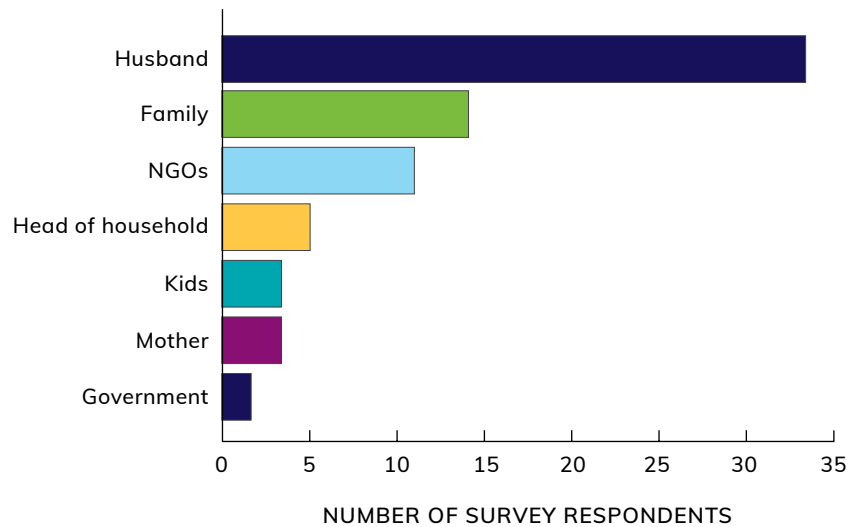
The realities of refugee women are unlikely to be represented in official national and global level data, particularly while existing data collection efforts struggle to capture accurate or sufficiently aggregable data. This is a particular problem in situations of high displacement and means that refugee women will continue to be underserved and their needs under-resourced. To ensure that the most marginalized women are not being intentionally or unintentionally left behind in global and national development, peacebuilding and security agendas, we must meet women where they are and apply a gender lens to policy development, programming, research and data collection. Syrian women refugees need more resources and more representation in decision-making spaces; and the international community of decisionmakers, institutions and advocates need a better understanding of Syrian women's daily realities to better assess progress in our collective efforts to support refugees – especially women.

In addition to inclusion and visibility, women should be actively and meaningfully participating in the design of humanitarian response. Syrian women report that their primary sphere of influence tends to be within the home. Women should certainly be supported in understanding their rights and shifting norms around decision-making within their home. However, to address the gaps in services and safety for women refugees living in camps, Syrian women must also have platforms for public engagement and access or channels to decision-making spaces at the camp, community, national and international levels.

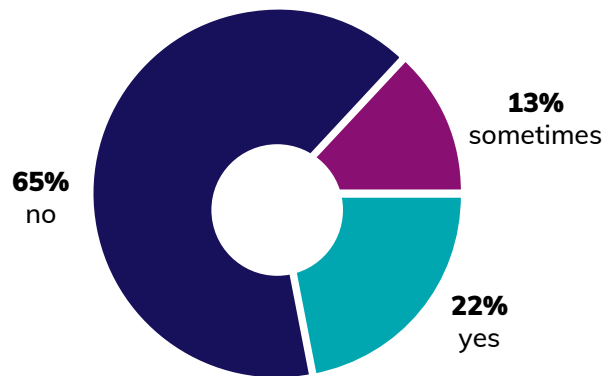
DO YOU FEEL THAT THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU TO BE HEARD IN DECISION MAKING?



IF YES – WITH WHOM DO YOU MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD?



IF YES - DO YOU FACE BACKLASH WHEN YOU PARTICIPATE OR SPEAK UP IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



Thematic Findings

The following specific thematic challenges emerged from the data collected as the priority concerns for women that were surveyed across the three camps:

- Financial insecurity and lack of economic opportunity
- Poor quality and access to education
- Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and limited physical mobility and security in camps
- Limited access to quality healthcare and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services

Financial insecurity and lack of economic opportunity:

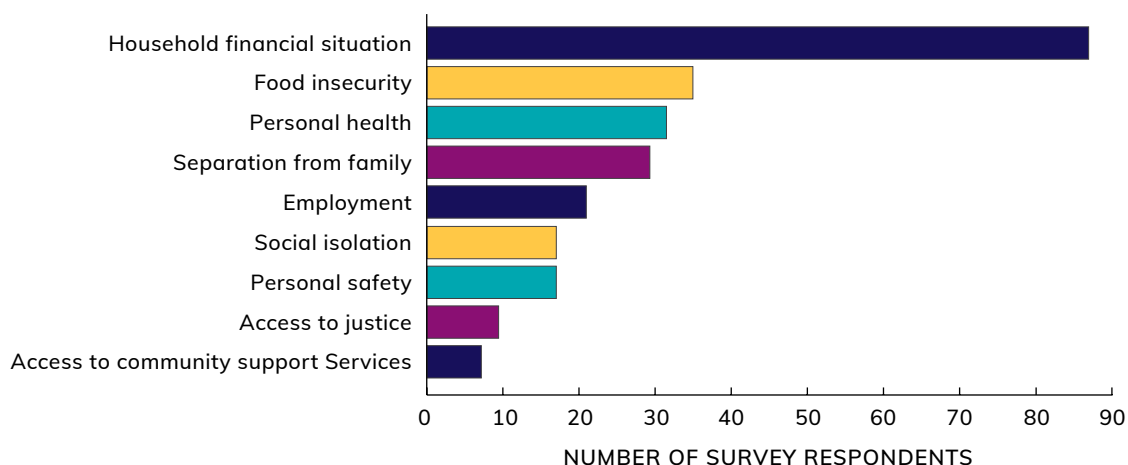


Everything depends on income in the family, it solves most problems and creates most problems...

– Syrian woman in Darashakran refugee camp



HAS YOUR SITUATION IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS GOTTEN WORSE FOLLOWING YOUR DISPLACEMENT?



Women reported that there are insufficient job or employment opportunities for men or women in the camps. Syrian women refugees emphasized that a lack of job opportunities was the primary concern, and also commented that refugees are uniquely affected by this challenge due to the identification and documentation requirements necessary to apply for and obtain certain jobs – such as an identification card for residency, or Syrian National ID or a UNHCR refugee identification. Analysis by the Norwegian Refugee Council provides context that while the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has granted Syrian refugees residency and the de facto right to work, the existing legal frameworks may pose barriers to Syrians accessing decent work opportunities and limits them to private sector work, primarily in the informal economy, with lower salaries and no social protections or benefits.¹⁷

In the FGD conducted in the Shekhan host community, Iraqi Kurdish women also described a lack of job opportunities as a primary concern. This feedback and supplemental data on the impacts of Iraq’s waning economy, particularly during and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, suggests that employment and job opportunities may be a widespread challenge across host and refugee communities within KRI. Interestingly, Iraqi Kurdish women noted that rather than seeing the barriers facing refugees in obtaining work, they instead emphasize their feeling that Syrian refugees are creating challenges for host communities because they are willing to accept jobs for lower salaries which reduces opportunities for Iraqi workers in KRI.

Of the 112 women we surveyed, reasons cited for a worsening household financial situation include:



54%

lack of work opportunities



20%

low income



11%

high prices on goods



The reason we are pessimistic is that because the organizations and governorate provided from the basic to big necessities and requirements back then, but now it is much different because there is no such support and services here anymore.

– Syrian woman in Darashakran refugee camp



Syrian women refugees described their feeling that upon their initial arrival in the KRI up to ten years ago, there was more economic support available but that this support has diminished over the years. Women in FGDs describe feeling “neglected” by the government, by the international community, and by INGOs as services and support has been rolled back in the ten years that they have been in the camps. For example, some women referenced a cash distribution that used to be available, but which has since been suspended. The cash assistance was suspended along with much of the refugee response programming in Iraq following the ISIS crisis in 2014 with the exception of ongoing aid from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and through small-scale projects in KRI refugee camps.

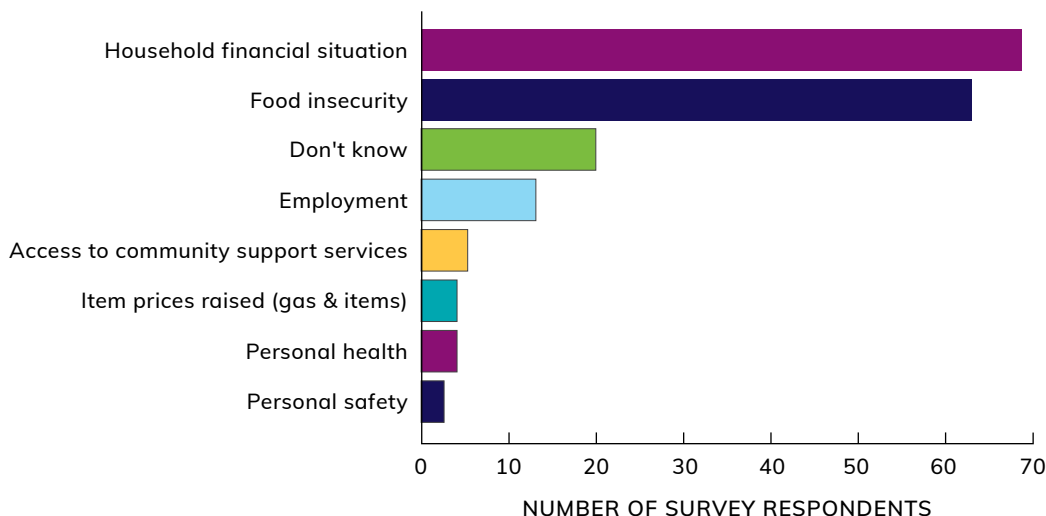
Syrian women also note that the challenges facing women who want to work are exacerbated by social norms that discourage women from working or establishing a business outside of the home.



We want them to let us work, because we believe women are not less than men.

– Syrian woman in Basirma refugee camp

HAVE ANY FINANCIAL CHALLENGES BECOME WORSE FOLLOWING THE ONSET OF THE UKRAINE CONFLICT IN FEBRUARY 2022?



These challenges have been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and its spillover effects. Primarily, women note the rising cost of food and fuel due to the devaluation of the Iraqi Dinar against the US Dollar, exacerbated by global inflation and fuel shortages following the war in Ukraine. These rising costs have a significant effect on low-income families who spend a majority of their income on food and fuel. Women also describe a reduction in the UNHCR’s food package distribution in camps following the onset of the war in Ukraine.

Of the 112 women we surveyed, reasons cited for a worsening household financial situation following the onset of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 include:



7%

less food available



68%

rising price of goods, especially food items

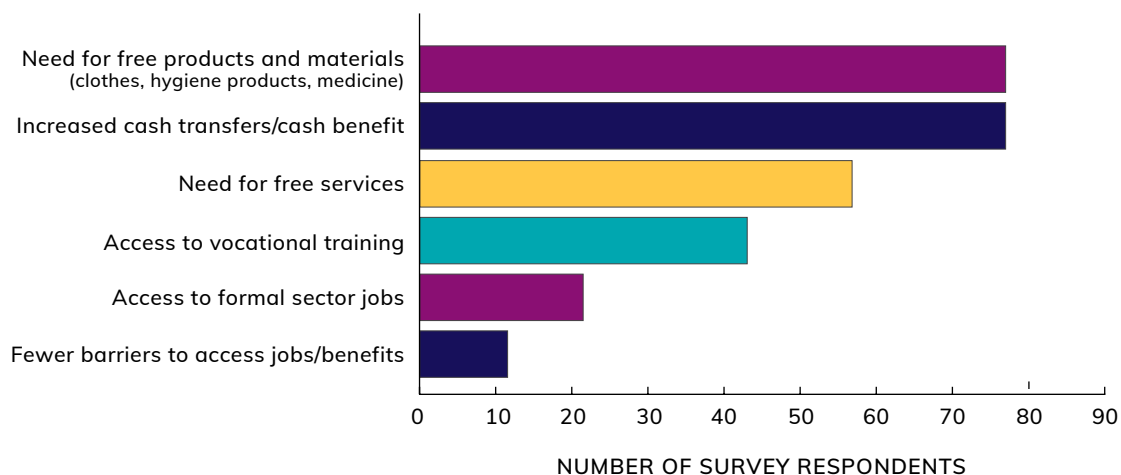


17%

less work opportunities

Since their displacement from Syria and following the exacerbation of existing financial challenges by COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, women identified two primary negative coping strategies: selling their assets and reducing necessities purchased. However, a smaller subset of women also identified child labor and early marriage for girls as negative coping mechanisms. Supplemental data from our Stronger Women, Stronger Nations and Change Agent programs also corroborate a rise in early and child marriage in the camps, a trend that has been more broadly observed in more economically vulnerable families.¹⁸

WHAT KINDS OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT ARE MOST NEEDED?



Women identified free products and supplies and cash transfers or benefits as their preferred form of financial support, with free services and vocational training as their second and third priorities. This speaks to the urgency of rising costs and a fear that the government may suspend certain free services or begin to charge for utilities that are currently free. The urgent need for aid is still high, but many women also seek training and self-sufficiency as longer-term, durable solutions to their financial challenges.

Poor quality and access to education:

Women identified two types of educational challenges: first that they want better education for their children and second that there should be more adult learning and training opportunities for women who may have suspended or discontinued their education while fleeing Syria.

Although the Iraqi National Government commits to providing free public education and supplies to Syrian refugees, in practice this can be inconsistent or under-resourced. Syrian women noted that schools are located outside of the refugee camps and that this can create accessibility challenges for children’s consistent attendance. Further, women complained about the quality of the schools which are often under-resourced and without enough teachers, translation support, or specialized teachers to accommodate all students. The free supplies and books may also be delayed or insufficient, making it difficult for students to keep up with the curriculum or fully participate.

Women expressed a desire to continue their own education where they previously may have been unable to continue their formal learning or discontinued their schooling while in transit from Syria. Some women also desire education, literacy and vocational programs in order to boost their earning potential and job opportunities in the challenging economic climate they face.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and limited physical mobility and security in camps:

Many women acknowledged that they experience greater safety in the KRI refugee camps compared to the homes they fled in Syria because they are not under constant threat from bombing. However, this is not an acceptable threshold or baseline of ‘safety’ and ‘security’ for refugees, especially for women.

Women noted certain mobility challenges in the refugee camps. Due to a lack of public transportation or affordable alternatives to taxis – particularly amidst the recent spike in fuel prices – it can be difficult for women to travel to access basic services outside of camp. In Basirma, which is particularly remotely located in the KRI, refugees also need to provide four days' advance notice in their request to leave camps, which was cited as a challenge to freedom, mobility and wellness.

One of the unique risks and insecurities to women refugees is harassment and GBV, especially domestic violence. Women described men following and taunting them at markets. One woman described men writing down their mobile numbers and throwing the papers at women walking by in a market or on the street. These threats, along with the conservative patriarchal views held by heads of families, have restricted women's freedom of movement in their community. Rather than addressing and ending perpetration of harassment, women are often simply told to remain indoors to avoid being harassed.

In addition to harassment outside the home, women report violence within the home. Though this emerged in the survey to a lesser extent, our program trainers highlighted that this is often something that may not emerge in baseline surveys of women who enter our programs. This is because women are uncomfortable openly acknowledging or formally documenting GBV or intimate partner violence (IPV) out of fear, stigma or the perception that there is no support for those experiencing GBV. This is consistent with general trends of under-reported GBV and IPV across most contexts.¹⁹

The fourth module in Women for Women International's *Stronger Women, Stronger Nations* program is about women's rights and different forms of GBV such as domestic, emotional, economic and psychological violence. Our program trainers note that although women may not self-report experiencing GBV at the start of the program, they often share accounts of GBV with their classmates during and after Module 4.

Women who have participated in our Iraq advocacy programming program within the three refugee camps also prioritize domestic violence as one of the main issues they advocate and create awareness around. Specifically, they highlight the lack of support or services for survivors and raise awareness of GBV as an issue affecting women through campaigns, activism and sharing stories of GBV experiences in the camps.



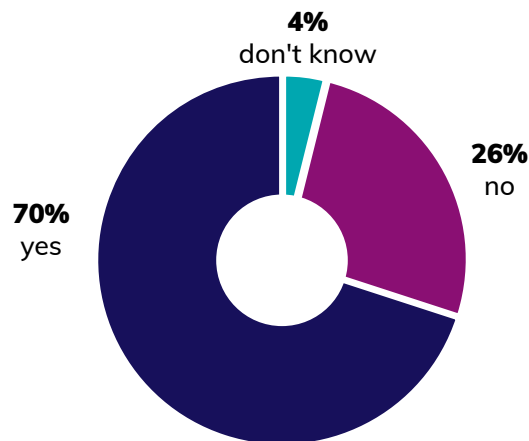
Photo Credit: Women for Women International.

Limited access to quality healthcare and Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services:

When describing healthcare challenges, women shared two key concerns: unavailability and unaffordability. Syrian women refugees in the in the three refugee camps where we conducted this research noted that there were not enough hospitals, supplies or doctors within the camps. Although Syrian refugees have the right to 'free access to health services on an equal footing as Iraqi nationals', these health services are often under-resourced. This results in some services being unavailable within camps, especially for pregnant women who may need ultrasounds or other specialized supplies, medicine or regular treatment.

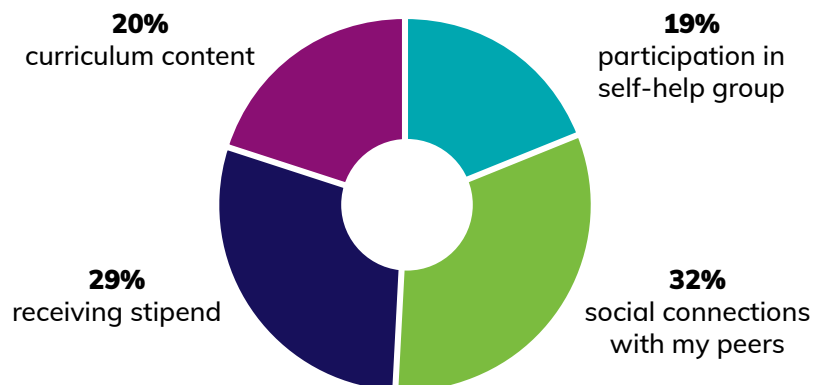
The under-resourcing of health services also results in long wait times which are not conducive to emergencies. Refugees with severe medical needs or who require specialized care or emergency services often must find their own private medical treatment, which is not free. If they have to travel outside of the camp, they must also factor in the cost of transportation to the cost of the health service itself. These costs are often untenable for low-income refugee families, meaning that people are unable to truly access services, even when they are 'free'.

DO YOU FEEL A GREATER NEED FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT?



Over 70% of women also indicated their need for more MHPSS. Women described a need for more psychological support, particularly amid the rising economic challenges which induce "family stress". Women identified the connection with their classmates in our Stronger Women, Stronger Nations program as the component they value most and described their desire for more safe outdoor spaces specifically for recreational use and for social gathering.

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WOMEN FOR WOMEN INTERNATIONAL'S PROGRAM DO YOU FIND MOST USEFUL?



It is important to note the compounding effect of the other challenges shared here on women's mental health and wellness. Many of the challenges set forth in this situational assessment are inter-related and intersecting, and this is particularly true of the high demand for more accessible MHPSS.

Recommendations

In addition to asking Syrian women refugees in KRI about their challenges and concerns, we asked them about their proposed solutions and their hopes for the future. In this report's calls to action, we use Syrian women's experiences and insights to inform both specific policy recommendations and standards that should guide benchmarks and program design across Syrian refugee response and support efforts.

Overarching Recommendations:

Peace

The international diplomatic community should seek peace and an end to war - in Syria and everywhere. This call for peace should instruct a global priority of peace over aggression in negotiating and preventing conflict resolution.

Commitment to resettlement:

The international community, advocates for refugees and IDPs, and host governments should resource and prioritize clear, documented status for Syrian women refugees in their host country that allows them to rebuild their lives and achieve stability.

Participation:

Global and national development, peacebuilding, and security organizations, advocates, and government agencies must meet women where they are and apply a gender lens to their policy development, programming, research, and data collection.

Global policymakers and donors must mobilize and enable more resources and more representation for Syrian women refugees in decision-making spaces.

In addition to inclusion and visibility, women should be actively and meaningfully participating in design of humanitarian response to address gaps in aid and services, and to ensure that marginalized women are able to fully access existing support mechanisms.



Photo Credit: Women for Women International.

Thematic Recommendations:

1) Recommendations to address financial challenges:

Recommendation 1.1: The national government and international financial institutions should support and implement macro-economic policies which benefit both host community and displaced populations, especially with regards to job creation and employment.

Recommendation 1.2: Social cohesion between host communities and refugee and displaced groups should be appropriately accounted for with all provisions and benefits, including through the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP).

Recommendation 1.3: The national and regional governments in Iraq should reduce barriers to economic integration including streamlining the transfer of education credentials from the Syrian education system and supporting refugees in bridging the gap between documentation requirements and their existing status or identification.

Recommendation 1.4: Increase access to employment services and financial resources specifically targeting Syrian women refugees for livelihood programming using tools such as program participation thresholds.

Recommendation 1.4.1: NGOs, international institutions and funders should prioritize Syrian women's livelihood programs and invest in women's leadership pathways to increase motivation and mentorship for other economically vulnerable women refugees.

Recommendation 1.4.2: NGOs, international institutions and funders should prioritize Syrian women's vocational training programs as a self-articulated, durable solution to financial challenges.

Recommendation 1.5: Governments and funders should maintain support for humanitarian and short-term aid, particularly food distribution, amidst the evolving and growing global crises that are impacting resourcing of support and aid to Syrians and Syrian refugees. This should include, at a minimum, not reducing funding to the Syrian response and to ensure full and flexible funding for food and that other food security mechanisms are fully utilized to prevent further erosion of food security in conflict settings.



Bring back cash transfer support for [Syrian refugees] till they can live a life with vision of the future instead of everyday struggle with life challenges.

– Syrian woman in Kawargosk refugee camp



2) Recommendations to address education challenges:

Recommendation 2.1: UNICEF, Iraq National Government and KRG should provide or fund language support, translators or multilingual teachers within and near refugee camps to ensure Syrian children do not face language barriers when attending the school nearest them if their native language instruction is not available.

Recommendation 2.2: The international community including donors and international financial institutions should support the Iraqi National Government in increasing budget allocation to education and maintaining consistent funding for public schools, teachers and supplies in collaboration with UNICEF and UNHCR, for operation of schools targeting refugees and schools in host communities.

Recommendation 2.3: Camp management should maintain its regular camp management meetings as a platform for soliciting feedback on quality of schools and add an accountability mechanism compelling action by stakeholders on issues raised by Syrian refugees including a lack of teachers, teachers not being paid on time, lack of books and supplies for students, class sizes that are too big to manage and a lack of specialized teachers.

Recommendation 2.4: Donors and service providers in the KRI should expand the available vocational training programs to women in the KRI, including Syrian women refugees and Iraqi Kurdish women in host communities.

Recommendation 2.5: International NGOs, local CSOs and KRG programs operating within camps should grow social awareness of the importance of girls' education, especially for girls aged between 12-18, to encourage families to increase girls' literacy and education rates and reduce dropouts and early marriage.



This improvement (social awareness) really helped girls to develop mentally and their vision was changed, now they have hopes and goals for future especially going to study in school or training course with NGOs such as Women for Women International.

– Syrian woman in Basirma refugee camp



3) Recommendations to address GBV and limited physical mobility and security in camps:

Recommendation 3.1: Camp managers and immigration policymakers in Federal Iraq and the KRI should support policies and processes to expand general mobility within and outside of camps by reducing and/or streamlining processes for requesting travel outside camps and supporting transportation stipends or taxi alternatives.

Recommendation 3.2: Support and fund local civil society organizations and women's rights organizations to implement community-based, holistic programs that support women's rights and encourage transformative approaches to GBV redress and prevention.

Recommendation 3.3: The Ministry of Health in Iraq and the World Health Organization should use the rapid and full implementation of Iraq's first GBV Strategic Plan for 2022-2026²⁰ as an opportunity to expand survivor services, social awareness and reduce stigma for Syrian women refugees seeking support in preventing or addressing GBV.

Recommendation 3.4: All social service providers and healthcare providers as well as humanitarian, development, and women's rights organizations should improve community-based referral mechanisms for GBV services among social service actors and stakeholders in the refugee camps to ensure availability and awareness of survivor services and support.

4) Recommendations to address healthcare and MHPSS access, quality, and affordability

Recommendation 4.1: Increase government resourcing to healthcare sector and services in order to:

- Establish more hospitals and points of care that have capacity for emergency care within Syrian refugee camps.
- Integrate or coordinate services that are currently provided by CSOs.
- Reduce stockouts of supplies at healthcare facilities and points of care in KRI.
- Keep services free and available for Iraqi citizens and for refugees.



I have a sick family member living in our house who is in desperate need of medical procedure, but we can't perform it because of lack of money, which is heart-breaking to all of us in the family.

– Syrian woman in Kawargosk refugee camp

Recommendation 4.2: Expand provision of MHPSS through the following actions:

- NGOs currently providing psychosocial support (PSS) should enhance and increase accessible provision of community-level PSS in coordination with Iraq's Directorate of Labor and Social Affairs.
- Donors should fund and create safe spaces and recreation spaces. These spaces should be designed for and in partnership with Syrian women refugees to ensure that it addresses safety concerns and space for accompanying children.
- All actors involved in humanitarian, social service, development and security services and programs should understand how all challenges and concerns identified within this report's situational assessment are inextricably linked to MHPSS as a driver or symptom. By addressing challenges above, MHPSS will be indirectly affected, and stakeholders can also coordinate with MHPSS providers or integrate MHPSS into their own service provision to better support Syrian refugees, especially women.



Photo Credit: Women for Women International.

A Call to Action

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU WOULD TELL WORLD LEADERS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY THEY COULD DO ABOUT THE SITUATION IN SYRIA?

Where are promises **PEACE** Resettlement
What of our unfulfilled promises? **STOP WAR**
RESETTLEMENT Stop war in Syria to
STOP WAR IN SYRIA **unify with family**
SUPPORT WHERE ARE PROMISES
Peace in Syria
STOP WAR IN SYRIA **Stop all wars in the world**
TO UNIFY WITH FAMILY WHAT OF OUR
Support Syrian people not forget us UNFULFILLED PROMISES?

Syrian women refugees in the KRI have spent up to a decade in uncertainty and economic vulnerability. They remain hopeful for a better future even as global crises shift resources and attention away from their plight, with no end in sight for the war that tore them from their homes. But the international community now also has a decade of experience and lessons to learn from to ensure that no one falls through the gaps of the humanitarian response to this crisis. By asking, listening to, and acting upon Syrian women refugees' experiences and recommendations, we can support them in attaining the peaceful and stable future they still dream of.



Photo Credit: Women for Women International.

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