



**WOMEN, WORK & WAR:** Syrian women and the struggle to survive five years of conflict

# RESEARCH STUDY



**Written by Beatrix Buecher and James Rwampigi Aniyamuzaala**

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the CARE teams in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey as well as CARE partners Women Now, Fountain of Life, al-Asalah, Shift and the Princess Basmah Center for Human Development for going out of their way to accommodate primary data collection within their tight schedules and in difficult working environments, and for sharing their incredibly useful insights into the subject matter. They provided the material that enabled us to paint a vivid picture of the changing livelihoods of Syrian women.

Special thanks go to CARE's Regional Communications Coordinator for the Syria Response, Mary Kate MacIsaac, who has been the tireless, driving and managing force behind this project – in addition to producing touching photos and stories that illustrate the research findings. Charmaine Seitz, as always, was an accurate, accommodating, and reliable editor and designer.

Finally, our thanks go to the CARE management, as well as technical and advocacy teams, for their support to the project, and constant guidance and input.



The names of individuals mentioned in this report have been changed so as to protect their identities.

*Cover: In order to support her family, Samia, 37, a single mother from Aleppo, offers tutoring in both English and Arabic as a second language, but with work limited she is also studying computer repair in a CARE-supported vocational training program in Amman, Jordan. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

## Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
Recommendations summary	6
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
Methodology	9
<b>WOMEN &amp; WORK IN PRE-CRISIS SYRIA</b>	<b>10</b>
Legal framework	10
Access to education	11
Labor force participation	11
Poverty among women, and barriers to women's independent livelihoods	12
<b>WOMEN, WAR &amp; CHANGING GENDER ROLES</b>	<b>14</b>
Women's changing roles and responsibilities	14
Adolescent girls' changing roles and responsibilities	17
Men's changing roles and responsibilities	17
Adolescent boys' changing roles and responsibilities	19
<b>BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>PROTECTION RISKS AS WOMEN ACCESS LIVELIHOODS</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>A FUTURE THAT WORKS FOR HER</b>	<b>30</b>
Opportunities for women's livelihoods, support needs, and visions	30
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS &amp; ADVOCACY</b>	<b>38</b>





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian women learn together during a pastry-making course at a CARE-supported vocational training center in Tripoli, Lebanon. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

**Five years of war and displacement have triggered fundamental shifts in gender roles and responsibilities, both in Syria and in neighboring countries.** In Syria before the crisis, women's economic participation was relatively low at 22 percent in 2010,<sup>1</sup> with some legal barriers but mainly sociocultural norms and practice limiting women's roles and responsibilities inside and outside the house. As a result of the upheaval, however, Syrian women and men feel that their roles and responsibilities have been reversed: while women increasingly participate in decision-making on income and expenses and assume responsibilities outside the home, men have lost their traditional role as (sole) breadwinner and decision-maker.

**Across the region, Syrian women have taken on new roles and responsibilities related to livelihoods.** In Syria, where public services have been drastically cut, women have been forced to take up the slack in their families and communities, and are adopting a leading role in the informal humanitarian community. Remarkably, 12-17% of households in Syria<sup>2</sup> and up to one-third of households in refugee-hosting countries<sup>3</sup> are now female-headed. In other households, men are wanted (in Syria) or lack residency or work permits (in neighboring countries), and thus limit their movement outside the house, or they suffer from an acute injury or have acquired a disability (up to 25% of Syrians now live with or have<sup>4</sup>), and thus lost their previous livelihoods. In these circumstances, women increasingly assume responsibility for generating an income and ensuring that the family's basic needs are met, while they continue to care for children, and other persons in need of special care. In refugee contexts, women and children are less likely than men to be asked for proof of residency or work permits, and thus sometimes find it easier to move and find work. Nevertheless, CARE data shows that employment opportunities in Syria are scarce, in

1 *Global Gender Gap Report 2010*, World Economic Forum, p. 284.

2 *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates*. Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, IMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 24; *Livelihoods assessment in Eastern Ghouta*. CARE. 2016 (forthcoming), p. 8; *Livelihoods and Agriculture Needs Assessment in Idleb and Aleppo*. CARE International. 2015 (not published), p. 9.

3 One quarter according to the UNHCR data for the region: *Women alone*. UNHCR, 2014; 28 percent according to CARE data for Jordan: *Five Years into Exile*. CARE International in Jordan. June 2015; and 34.6 percent for Jordan according to UNHCR: *Living in the Shadow*. 2014 Home visit report. UNHCR, January 2015.

4 *World Health Organization Syrian Arab Republic Annual Report 2014*, World Health Organization, 2015. p. 35.

particular for women, and the income of female-headed households tends to be below that of male-headed households.<sup>5</sup>

**Syrian women both in Syria and in refugee contexts encounter substantial barriers as they try to establish new livelihoods.** In particular, they have difficulty finding “suitable” livelihood options that are safe from physical violence like shelling, aerial bombing, and do not expose them to (sexual) harassment, put at risk the “honor” of the woman or her husband, are compatible with childcare and other household and care responsibilities, and, preferably, in sectors considered “feminine.” Some women also lack the vision, skills and self-confidence required to explore new livelihoods, and feel overwhelmed and exhausted. In rural areas, women have limited to no assets and income, little involvement in marketing products and decision-making over household expenses, and hardly any access to credit and extension services. In refugee hosting countries, women are subject to both legal restrictions on formal employment and cultural norms and practice that limit women’s public interactions. Many women thus have to resort to very informal, small-scale income-generating opportunities they can do from home. Other women lost their livelihoods when they suffered physical or psychological trauma during violence or displacement.

**As Syrian women develop new livelihoods, they are increasingly exposed to protection risks, both inside and outside the house.** In Syria, in areas of active conflict, the main threat to women’s livelihoods outside the house is widespread and indiscriminate violence such as aerial bombing and shelling. Women are also at risk of being arrested, exposed to harassment and sexual violence at checkpoints, targeted by snipers or accused of collaborating with the enemy when crossing checkpoints and front lines to obtain essential supplies or to participate in humanitarian activities. Among refugees, the difficulties of accessing legal residency (in particular, in Lebanon) and work permits, and the resulting lack of access to legal recourse, coupled with prejudice from host communities, create an environment conducive to (sexual) harassment and sometimes also sexual exploitation in the workplace. In addition, women also experience and fear harassment on the way to work.

**Adolescent girls have had their education interrupted both inside Syria, and as refugees, and been forced as a result of dire economic conditions to assume livelihoods-related responsibilities early,** including care for older persons or medical cases, or **to get married early** to reduce economic burdens on the family.

Both inside Syria and among refugees, **there is a serious risk that domestic violence may increase as a result of household conflict** over the roles of women, the changing economic balance of power between the sexes, and the related feeling of emasculation that men may experience.

**The conflict in Syria, while devastating, has also opened up a window of opportunity for Syrian women seeking to expand their role in their families and communities.** In Syria, women sometimes find work with community-based organizations, as teachers, volunteering as nurses, and doing home-based work. There is also a high demand for first aid practitioners, search and rescue teams, and (para-) medical staff, and women have begun to enter these fields. In agricultural production, Syrian women in 2015 constituted 65 percent of the economically active population, an increase of six percent compared to 2009.<sup>6</sup>

In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, refugee women have also started to engage in small-scale income-generating activities to compensate for the absence of the traditional (male) breadwinner or his inability to work. Those with teaching qualifications can provide private lessons from home. Some women also work on farms.

**While research participants confirmed that better access to work permits, and work opportunities would reduce their desire for third country resettlement,** they also emphasized that Syrian refugees need educational opportunities, access to medical treatment, a sense of safety and acceptance, and more respect for their rights to be able to remain in host countries in the region.

---

5 *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar’a and Quneitra governorates.* Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, IMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 26.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

## Recommendations summary

To support Syrian women in their struggle to provide for their families today and to have a stronger role in Syria's economic, social and political reconstruction, we call on

### 1. All parties to the conflict,

- To immediately end indiscriminate violence against civilians, and to lift all restrictions on the movements of goods and services which in effect result in siege conditions.

### 2. The Syrian government,

- To ensure that the legal framework is further developed to guarantee that Syrian women can enjoy their full rights, including their economic and political rights, as defined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Local authorities in Syria,

- To protect and strengthen women's participation at the local level in discussions on political and economic development, in preparation for their increased participation in post-conflict Syria.

### 4. Syrian and international civil society,

- To ensure diverse voices of Syrian women are heard from the grassroots to the national and international level.

### 5. Refugee hosting countries,

- **To provide an enabling legal and administrative environment** that allows Syrian refugees to live without fear of harassment, arrest, forced encampment or *refoulement*, and to take-up legal work opportunities.
- To ensure that all measures to promote economic participation provide equal access to women and men as well as to people with disabilities and other groups that face specific access barriers.
- **To ensure that all economic compacts made by Syria's neighboring countries provide equitable access to Syrian women seeking economic opportunity.**

### 6. Donor countries,

- **To deliver on the pledges of over USD 11 billion made in 2016 at the London Supporting Syria & the Region Conference<sup>8</sup> to help local labor markets better absorb Syrian refugees.**
- To ensure that gender sensitivity and women's economic empowerment are factored into implementation plans for the Jordan compact, as well as the Statements on Lebanon and Turkey launched at the London Conference.

### 7. The private sector, government and non-government organizations supporting neighboring countries,

- **To ensure that women and other marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, have equal access to livelihood support**, including, vocational training, cash-for-work-opportunities, credits and grants, input, and agricultural extension services.
- **To engage with livelihood programming even when it may challenge traditional concepts around "suitable" tasks for women.**

---

7 Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Syria. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. July 18, 2014. CEDAW/C/SYR/CO/2.

8 Refer to the London Conference's website for details on the pledges made according to donor country / institution: Co-host statement's annex: fundraising. <https://www.supportingsyria2016.com/news/co-hosts-statement-annex-fundraising/>, February 2016. Accessed on March 4, 2016.



- **To ensure robust assessments** on both supply and demand sides to increase the knowledge of actors and implement based on evidence.
- **To use livelihood as a strategic entry point for more gender responsive/transformational programming** to influence cultural and structural barriers towards women's participation.
- **To consider early recovery and rehabilitation of infrastructure and productive assets early on**, so that women do not carry a disproportionate burden over the medium and long-term.
- **Encourage gender-sensitive private sector investment in refugee livelihood interventions.** Private sector actors should engage in national dialogues taking place in the aftermath of the London Donor Conference.

## 8. Policymakers and implementing agencies,

- To collect gender, age and diversity disaggregated data, in line with the Minimum standards on Age, Gender, and Diversity.<sup>9</sup>

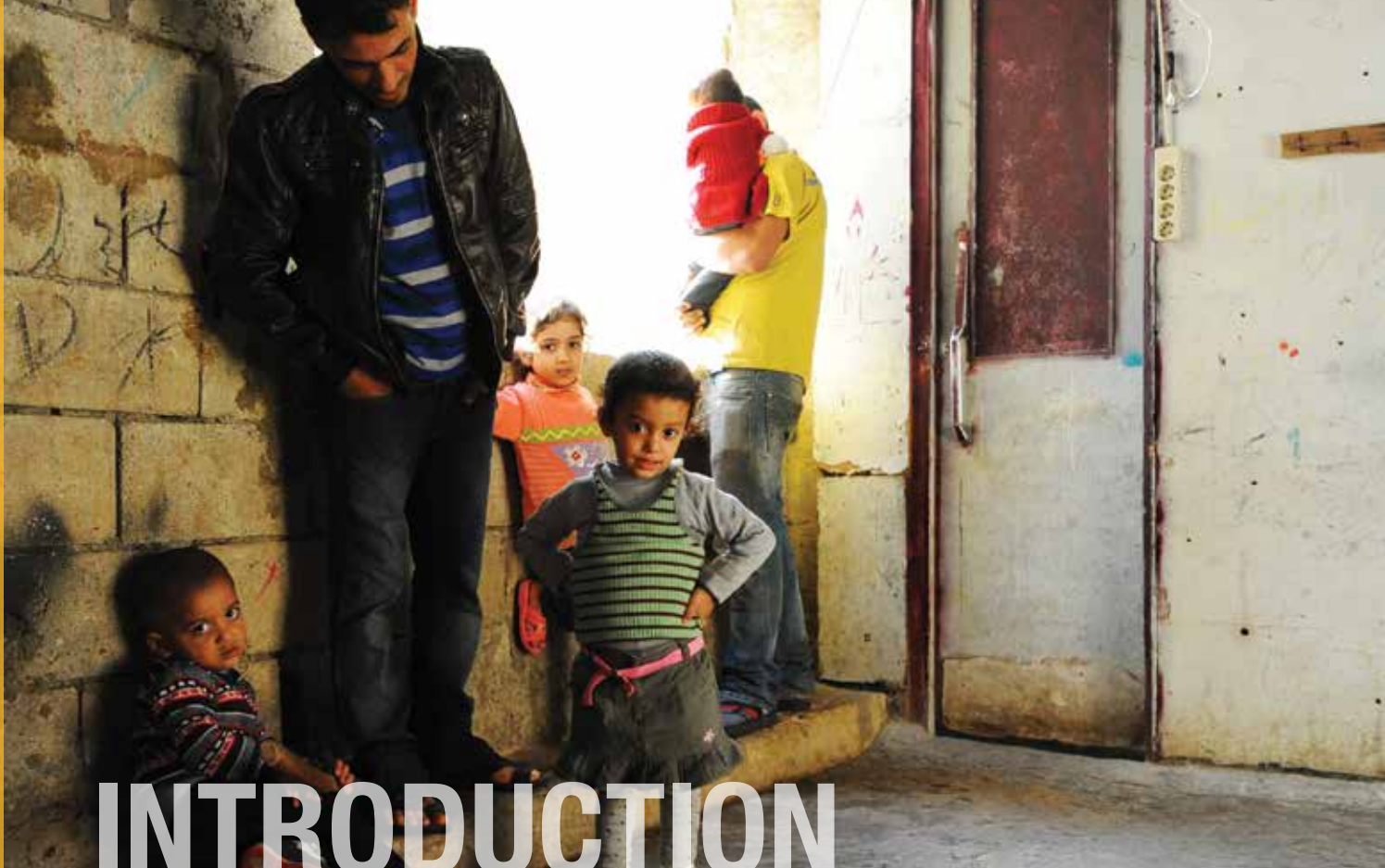
## 9. Livelihood program implementing agencies,

- **To consider more transitional programming beyond the traditional either-emergency-or-development philosophy** and implement based on the needs of impact groups, responding to women's short and long term needs, with integration of resilience and protection aspects.
- **To build sustainable partnerships with organizations for and of vulnerable groups** to combine the comparative advantages they have to enhance the access of all Syrian women to livelihood options.

Halima's husband was kidnapped in the war. She now lives with her two children and mother in Chouf, Lebanon where CARE has supported the family through cash assistance. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)



9 Minimum standard commitments to gender and diversity in emergency programming (Pilot version). International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IFRC-%20Gender%20Diversity%20MSCs%20Emergency%20Programming-EN.pdf>, December 15, 2015.



The experience of five years of war and displacement has changed every aspect of the lives of millions of Syrian women and men, girls and boys. Both in Syria and in neighboring countries, Syrian women and adolescent girls are particularly affected as ever-changing circumstances force them to take on additional roles and responsibilities. Not only do Syrian women continue to shoulder the main responsibility for household chores (with men being absent or unable to fulfill their traditional roles as breadwinners), but women are now often also responsible for providing the resources to cover basic needs. In these circumstances, women are exhausted to their limits, and exposed to considerable protection risks both inside and outside the house. Women face sniper fire as they cross front lines to smuggle essential medical supplies into besieged areas. Women walk long distances to fetch water they used to get from the tap. Women wash their dishes with ashes.

However, in the midst of destruction, Syrian women and adolescent girls have also discovered new strengths, skills, and capacities, and have conquered spaces in their families and communities previously closed to them. Forced by the circumstances, women are constantly exploring new opportunities to contribute to their family's survival, adapting previous livelihoods and creating new ones. In our discussions with Syrians in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and inside Syria, both women and men explained that it was challenging for everyone to adapt to women's new roles and responsibilities but these changes also made them proud – of themselves, and of their wives and daughters. Marcell Shehwaro, a prominent activist and director of Kesh Malek, a local organization supporting seven informal schools in Aleppo with 70 percent female teachers, recently criticized the tendency of some NGO programmes to make assumptions about the capacity and willingness of women in different parts of Syria to pursue different kinds of livelihoods or education opportunities: "Please do not come to Syria with your pre-determined models for livelihoods or education imported from Afghanistan or Somalia. The situation is varied across Syria and so we should talk with local women active in their communities to see what is possible."

At CARE, we are determined to highlight Syrian women's contribution to the survival and wellbeing of their families in the midst of conflict and displacement, and to work alongside Syrian women and men, girls and boys to smooth the transition to new roles and responsibilities and to mitigate the risks that women and girls are potentially exposed to as they claim their space in the economic and public sphere.



This report aims to achieve the following goals:

- Describe the economic participation of Syrian women before the war, and illustrate the changes in livelihoods-related roles and responsibilities of Syrian women and men, adolescent girls and adolescent boys since the beginning of the crisis;
- Highlight the barriers that women encounter as they attempt to develop new livelihood strategies, and identify associated protection risks;
- Identify opportunities for women to establish new livelihoods in Syria as well as in neighboring countries – taking into account the challenges and risks identified;
- Amplify the voices of Syrian women and adolescent girls while recognizing their diversity – as internally displaced, refugees or living under siege; single, married, divorced or widowed; from rural or urban areas, educated or illiterate; with experience working outside the house or not; or living with a disability or severe health conditions; and
- Provide recommendations for policy and program development to ensure that the window of opportunity that has opened – in the midst of devastation – for Syrian women and adolescent girls to participate more actively in the economy and other public spheres will remain open throughout the transition and post-conflict phase so that Syrian women and adolescent girls from all backgrounds will be able to contribute to shaping the economic as well as the social, cultural and political life in post-crisis Syria.



*Above: Women gather at a firewood distribution point in southern Syria. (Credit: CARE) Opposite Page: Men watching over children at a collective center for Syrian refugees in Saida, Lebanon, where CARE has provided families with cash assistance. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

## Methodology

In preparing this report, CARE, supported by its local partners, conducted 10 focus group discussions with 80 female and 11 male participants, and 15 individual interviews with Syrian women in Lebanon (Tripoli), Jordan (Irbid and Amman), Turkey (Birecek), and Syria. In addition, the research team interviewed five representatives of organizations working to promote Syrian women's economic empowerment as well as CARE team members. The information generated through these tools is complemented by data and analysis generated through CARE programs across the region, as well as the carrying out of specific assessments, notably the following:

- **Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates.** Joint report published by Norwegian Refugee Council, Regional Food Security Analysis Network, iMMAP, United Muslim Relief, Food and Agriculture Organization, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015.
- **Livelihoods Assessment in Eastern Ghouta.** CARE. 2016 (forthcoming).
- **Livelihoods and Agriculture Needs Assessment in Idleb and Aleppo.** CARE International. 2015 (not published).
- **Five Years Into Exile: The challenges faced by Syrian refugees outside camps in Jordan and how they and their host communities are coping.** CARE International. June 30, 2015.
- **Baseline Assessment of Skills & Market Opportunities for Youth in Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan.** CARE International. June 30, 2015.



# WOMEN & WORK IN PRE-CRISIS SYRIA

*Syrian girls help with household chores in an unfinished building turned collective center in Saida, Lebanon, where CARE has supported families with cash assistance. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

In Syria, women's economic participation has historically been low. As in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, access to education for girls has significantly improved over the past decades. However, this has not translated into a significant increase in women's labor force participation. While some legal barriers exist, the main barriers for women's increased economic participation are sociocultural norms and practice related to women's roles and responsibilities inside and outside the house, as will be detailed below.

## Legal framework

According to the 1973 Constitution, Syrian women enjoy equality with men before the law. The Syrian Constitution enshrines the principle of equality of all citizens, and calls for a removal of obstacles that limit women's advancement. Article 25 stipulates that "citizens are equal before the law in regard to their rights and obligation" and Article 45 further guarantees to women "all the opportunities that enable them to participate fully and effectively in political, social, economic and cultural life." However, an indefinite state of emergency declared in 1963 has limited the power of the constitution and the framework it provided for women to demand and defend their rights. Freedom of expression and association were also limited. Women were deprived of channels to challenge discriminatory and repressive laws. At the same time, legislation that prohibits gender-based discrimination was never developed; in particular, while so-called "honor-killings" have been acknowledged as a problem in society, the Penal Code allows for mitigated punishment for this crime and only requires a minimum sentence of two years.<sup>10</sup> Personal status law also includes provisions discriminating against women, and the personal status of non-Muslim communities can be governed by respective religious law, which also is often discriminatory in nature. Another important area where Syrian women face legal discrimination is in nationality law, as they are not able to pass their Syrian nationality to their children if the father is non-Syrian.<sup>11</sup> There are also no complaint mechanisms for

<sup>10</sup> *Syria: No Exceptions for 'Honor Killings'*. Human Rights Watch, 28 July 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/07/28/syria-no-exceptions-honor-killings>, accessed on March 4, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.

women who have been denied rights and opportunities.<sup>12</sup> In 2003, Syria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), albeit with several important reservations.<sup>13</sup>

Syrian women enjoy equality to men with regards to many economic rights, including the right to own property, manage businesses independently, control their own income and assets, and initiate legal proceedings. However, family pressure and a lack of confidence or expertise sometimes lead women to hand day-to-day control over these matters to male relatives. A husband may also legally prohibit his wife from working outside the home, unless she explicitly demands her right to work in the marriage contract. Women are also discriminated against, in law and in practice, with regards to inheritance.<sup>14</sup>

## Access to education

While cultural norms that emphasize women's roles as wives and mothers rather than in education, employment and business remain strong, especially in rural areas, government policies and programs have encouraged female participation in education and resulted in a considerable increase in girls' school attendance. While in 1980, only 48 percent of Syrian girls completed primary school, in 2010, 96 percent of Syrian girls finished the last year of primary education.<sup>15</sup> In 2006, the net school attendance rate of Syrian girls in secondary school reached 80 percent,<sup>16</sup> and in 2010, gross enrolment in tertiary education stood at 24 percent.<sup>17</sup>

Correspondingly, women's literacy increased from 37 percent in 1981 to 76 percent in 2007<sup>18</sup> and 77 percent in 2010 (compared to 90 percent of men).<sup>19</sup> The literacy rate of female youth (aged 15-24) increased from 59 percent in 1982 to 93 percent in 2002 and 95 percent in 2013.<sup>20</sup> This only indicates that in the new millennium, illiteracy had become a situation primarily affecting older women: in 2004, 23 percent of Syrian women aged 65 and older were able to read and write.<sup>21</sup>

## Labor force participation

Syria's economy before the crisis was based on agriculture, industry, oil, trade and tourism. The state provided substantial subsidies, especially to the agricultural sector.<sup>22</sup> The majority of the Syrian workforce was employed in the services sector, including the public sector, tourism, financial services and transport.<sup>23</sup> Eight million Syrians earned their living from farming (80 percent of the rural population).<sup>24</sup>

---

12 Ibid.

13 Reservations were expressed with regards to article 2; article 9, paragraph 2, concerning the granting of a woman's nationality to her children; article 15, paragraph 4, concerning freedom of movement and of residence and domicile; article 16, paragraph 1 (c), (d), (f) and (g), concerning equal rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution with regard to guardianship, the right to choose a family name, maintenance and adoption; article 16, paragraph 2, concerning the legal effect of the betrothal and the marriage of a child; and article 29, paragraph 1, concerning arbitration between States in the event of a dispute. See: *Syria. Coalition Equality without Reservation*. <https://cedaw.wordpress.com/2007/04/10/syria/>, accessed on February 29, 2016.

14 *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.

15 *Survival rate to the last grade of primary education, female (%)*. World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.PRSL.FE.ZS/countries/SY-XQ-XN?display=default>, accessed on February 29, 2016.

16 *Participation in education*. Unesco Institute for Statistics. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=166>, accessed on 27 February 2016.

17 *Gross enrolment ratio, tertiary, female (%)*. World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE?display=default>, accessed on 29 February 2016.

18 *Global Gender Gap Report 2010*, World Economic Forum, p. 284.

19 Ibid.

20 *Youth literacy rate, population 15-24 years, female (%)*. World Bank. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.1524.LT.FE.ZS/countries/SY-XQ-XN?display=default>, accessed on February 29, 2016.

21 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Literacy rate." <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=166>, accessed on February 27, 2016.

22 *Impact of the conflict on Syrian economy and livelihoods*. SNAP. July 2013, p. 1.

23 *Impact of the conflict on Syrian economy and livelihoods*, p. 5.

24 *Understanding livelihoods in northern Syria: how people are coping with repeated shocks, constant change and an uncertain future*. Save the Children. Jan. 2015, p. 6.



In 2010, just before the start of the crisis, only 22 percent of Syrian women participated in the labor force.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that the economic participation of women in Syria followed the age-pattern characteristic for the MENA region, with a peak at age 25-29, and a subsequent gradual but steady decrease.<sup>26</sup> Another specific characteristic of women's employment in the MENA region is a relatively high participation of women in "professional and technical occupations": in Syria, 40 percent of these "white collar" jobs were performed by women.<sup>27</sup> There are also pronounced differences in women's labor market participation in different geographic areas (in particular between rural and urban areas), due to cultural and educational differences.<sup>28</sup>

Women also play an important role in rural economies where before the crisis they constituted 59 percent of the agricultural labor force, according to FAO estimates.<sup>29</sup> Women produced more than 50 percent of the food grown nationwide.<sup>30</sup> Women are major contributors to four agricultural sub-sectors: crop production, livestock production, food processing and household and family maintenance.<sup>31</sup> In particular, women are typically responsible for the more time-consuming and labor-intensive tasks of crop and livestock production: sowing, application of fertilizers, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, cleaning, sorting, grading and bagging. It can, however, be assumed that women's contributions to agricultural production have also been underestimated due to the fact that their labor is often unpaid in subsistence food production and therefore usually "invisible" in big data, and to analysts and policymakers.<sup>32</sup>

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports a significant loss of jobs in agriculture, mostly for women, during the years preceding the crisis. At the same time, job creation in urban areas, in particular in industry, services and tourism was insufficient to absorb the wave of young people entering the labor market. There was also an increase in the urban labor force due to rural-urban migration. In this process, women were largely excluded from the urban (mainly informal) labor market due to strong competition from (Syrian and foreign) men. Overall, during the period of 2001-2007, 36,000 jobs were created on average annually in Syria. However, this data covers important gender differences in labor force participation – while men gained 65,000 jobs per year, women lost 29,000 jobs annually. This loss of employment opportunities for women in agriculture was only partially compensated by new employment created in the public sector.<sup>33</sup> In 2008, 55 percent of all jobs in the public sector were occupied by women, mostly those with secondary or university education, while women with primary education or less usually only found work in the informal sector.<sup>34</sup>

## Poverty among women, & barriers to women's independent livelihoods

Despite their important contribution to agricultural production, rural women were reported to be among the most economically disadvantaged groups in Syria before the crisis, and they constituted 65 percent of development beneficiaries. Other economically disadvantaged groups included: landless women and adolescent girls who had no permanent skilled employment and supported family income on casual/temporary labor, woman and adolescent girls living in households with a high dependency ratio (a score of five or higher), adolescent girls (14-17 years) with restricted access to education, and women living in a household that regularly depends on non-family mem-

---

25 *Global Gender Gap Report 2010*, World Economic Forum, p. 284.

26 *Women in Business 2014*. "Accelerating Entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North African Region," OECD, 2014. [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/development/women-in-business-2014\\_9789264213944-en#page44](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/development/women-in-business-2014_9789264213944-en#page44), accessed on 27 February 2016, p.42.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

28 *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.

29 *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates*. Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, iMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 22.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Labour Markets Policies and Institutions, with a Focus on Inclusion, equal Opportunity and the Informal Economy*. National Background Paper. The case of Syria. Aita, Samir on behalf of ILO and the European Union. 2009, p. 3.

34 *Gender, Employment and the Informal Economy in Syria*. Policy brief 8. ILO. June 2010.

bers for cash or in-kind assistance.<sup>35</sup> In 2007, 3.5 million Syrians were classified as rural poor, and rural women and children suffered most from poverty and its physical and social deprivation.<sup>36</sup>

Syrian women also had limited access to independent livelihoods. This is due to a number of factors which include gender-blind development policies and research, discriminatory legislation, traditions and attitudes, and lack of access to decision-making. Rural women had insufficient access to land, membership in rural organizations, credit, agricultural inputs and technology, training and extension, and marketing services. Title to land was generally given to the male head of household. In pre-crisis Syria, rural organizations such as cooperatives, agricultural producers' organizations and farmers' associations had only very limited influence on policymakers and planners, and women's participation was weak. This further limited women's access to productive resources, credit, information, training and other support services.<sup>37</sup>



*Ahmed cares for his daughter, Rama, in the collective center where they now live in Saida, Lebanon. CARE is supporting families there through cash assistance. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

35 "Women's contributions to agricultural production and food security: Current status and perspectives in Syria." Kaisi A., Al Zoughbi S, 2007.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.



# WOMEN, WAR & CHANGING GENDER ROLES

*Jordanian and Syrian men and women work alongside one another in a mobile phone repair course at a CARE-supported vocational training in Amman, Jordan. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

Five years of war and displacement have triggered fundamental shifts in gender roles and responsibilities, both in Syria and in neighboring countries. Syrian women and men feel that their roles and responsibilities have been essentially reversed: while she starts to increasingly participate in decision-making on income and expenditure and assumes responsibilities outside the house, he loses his role as the (sole) breadwinner and decision-maker. However, the exchange of roles is often incomplete, as women continue to shoulder the majority of household chores. Men are reluctant to embrace new responsibilities within the home and overall, feel emasculated. Syrian research participants across the region thus indicated that the shift in gender roles triggers one sentiment above all: confusion.

With both men and women suffering enormous stress, often related to the scarcity of financial resources in the family, it is difficult for all family members to accept the new roles and responsibilities of women and men, girls and boys, and the risk of family conflict and even violence increases.

The lives of many adolescent girls and boys are also affected as education is interrupted, both inside Syria and in the refugee diaspora. Dire economic decisions require adolescents to assume livelihoods-related responsibilities early, either taking on the role of the head of household and breadwinner (mainly for adolescent boys) or taking on key household chores, including care for older persons or medical cases, or marrying early to reduce the economic burden on the family (mainly for adolescent girls).

**“Women feel strong, they see that they ‘can do it.’ Even men say ‘Now the men are women, and the women are men.’**

**—Nuha, female head of household from Dar’a, now living in Irbid, Jordan**



## Women's changing roles and responsibilities

CARE data indicates that, due to war and displacement, the responsibilities of – and thus the work burden on – Syrian women both inside Syria and in neighboring countries have increased significantly.

**In Syria**, where public services have been cut, women have started to compensate in their families and communities by taking on additional tasks. Women have taken a leading role in the informal humanitarian community that has emerged alongside the uprising and the conflict it triggered after 2011. For instance, where health and rehabilitation services are no longer available, women take care of older persons, the injured, people with disabilities in need of special care, and other medical cases at home or as volunteers in improvised (and clandestine) health centers. Where schools are closed or destroyed or parents fear that the way to school is not safe, it is often the mother who compensates for the loss of education by teaching her children at home.

Syrian women activists have played important roles in supporting informal education as the violence has deteriorated. When water and electricity are cut, women have to walk long distances to fetch water or diesel to operate generators, exposing them to possible harm from aerial bombing and shelling. Inside the house, due to the lack of basic food and non-food items, women's workload has also increased and all tasks have become more labor-intensive. For instance, where no dishwashing soap is available, women use ashes for cleaning and they wash the clothes by hand. Where bakeries are no longer functioning, women turn to baking bread at home. Overall, women are constantly thinking about new ways to cover the family's basic needs with extremely limited resources. These tasks add up to long working days for women.

In many families, men are absent, either because they died or went missing, because they left Syria, or because they joined armed groups. CARE assessments and programming data from Syria indicate that 12-17% of households in Syria are now female-headed, depending on the location.<sup>38</sup> In other households, men are wanted and thus limit their movement outside the house, or they suffer from an acute injury or have acquired a disability and thus lost their previous livelihoods. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that up to 25 percent of Syrians now live with a disability, with 10-15 percent acquiring a new disability due to injury – many of them adult men.<sup>39</sup> In these circumstances, women increasingly assume the responsibilities of generating an income and ensuring that basic goods are available for the family, while they continue to care for children, older persons, the injured, people with disabilities, and other people in need of specific care.

This new role of women is not necessarily reflected in national-level labor force data. According to the Global Gender Gap report, the percentage of Syrian women participating in the labor force dropped from 22 percent in 2010<sup>40</sup> to 14 percent in 2015.<sup>41</sup> CARE data from northern Syria (Idlib, Aleppo governorates) indicates that in the areas surveyed only five percent of women were working.<sup>42</sup> According to FAO estimates, women currently represent 22 percent of the economically active population in Syria, a slight increase from 21 percent in 2009.<sup>43</sup> Overall, this data indicates that formal economic opportunities have decreased for both women and men, and it underscores the fact that income-generating activities for women are mainly informal and small-scale. It is worth noting that in agriculture Syrian women play an important and increasing role: according to FAO estimates, women comprise 65

**“Some women wear men's outfits  
and go to fight on the front lines.”  
—Female research participant, Syria**

38 *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates*. Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, IMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 24; *Livelihoods and Agriculture Needs Assessment in Idlib and Aleppo*. CARE International. 2015 (not published), p. 9.

39 *World Health Organization Syrian Arab Republic Annual Report 2014*, World Health Organisation, 2015. p. 35.

40 *Global Gender Gap Report 2010*, World Economic Forum, p. 284.

41 *Global Gender Gap Report 2015*, World Economic Forum, Economies: Syria, accessed on-line at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/#economy=SYR>, on February 25, 2016.

42 *Livelihoods and Agriculture Needs Assessment in Idlib and Aleppo*. CARE International. 2015 (not published), p. 9.

43 *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates*. Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, IMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 22.

Sawsan is 45 years old. She worked as a housekeeper in Syria before coming to Lebanon in 2014. After having spent more than one year in detention in Syria for the political activities of her brothers, she was released in an amnesty deal and fled to Lebanon using her sister's ID. Most of her family came with her, and they settled in the informal tented settlements of the Beqaa valley. Since none of her male family members had legal residency, she assumed the risk of travelling weekly through the checkpoints to do domestic cleaning jobs in homes of well-off families in Beirut.

percent of the economically active population, an increase of six percent compared to 2009. In some areas, women constitute up to 90 percent of the agricultural labor force.<sup>44</sup>

Some women, in particular those living in besieged areas, also resort to degrading, harmful or dangerous livelihood coping strategies. Key informants report that women, and sometimes boys, can be involved in smuggling essential goods, for instance, medical supplies and tools, into besieged areas – an activity that puts them at high risk of being accused of treason/collaboration with opposing conflict parties as well as at risk of immediate violence, such as sniper fire, shelling or aerial bombing. Female research participants also said that women are sometimes forced to beg or ask relief organizations for aid or even “wear men's outfits and go to fight on the front lines.”

Overall, CARE data shows that employment opportunities in Syria are scarce, in particular for women, and the income of female-headed households tends to be below that of male-headed households. For instance, CARE research in southern Syria found that the monthly income of female-headed households is 15 to 32 percent below the income of male-headed households (depending on the rainfall zone). The same report also found that in the assessed areas, 38 percent of female-headed households depend on remittances or support from inside Syria – putting them at risk of falling into further destitution should remittances or money transfers be stopped.

***In refugee contexts in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey***, the percentage of female-headed households is even higher than it is in Syria as husbands have stayed behind or returned to Syria to look after property or family members, to join armed groups, or are dead or missing. In host countries in the region, between one quarter and one third of refugee households are female-headed.<sup>45</sup> In addition, in refugee contexts, men often lack the necessary residency or work permits and are thus afraid to leave the house to go to work or even to run daily errands (See text box on “Syrian refugees and the right to work in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey”).

Where men are absent or cannot leave the house, women have to contribute to the family's income, often together with adolescent boys. Women and children are less likely to be asked for proof of residency at checkpoints or random controls by the local authorities, while men (and sometimes, adolescent boys) fear being detained, forcefully encamped or even returned to Syria when moving in public without the necessary permits. In refugee contexts in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, women have started to engage in small-scale income-generating activities, usually home-based. This work, however, is usually not recognized, as women do not charge fixed prices but rather depend on the goodwill of their customers. Men interviewed seemed to be torn in their reaction to women's role in income-generation. While many men recognized women's efforts, there was also a tendency among men to highlight that female income-generation was conditioned by the circumstances, and therefore only temporary. None of the female refugee participants in our research were engaged in their own agricultural production, as they lived in cities and lacked access to land, soil, tools and agricultural input, and change their residency often. However, some worked on farms as daily labor.

Both in Syria and in refugee contexts, the pressure on women and associated psychosocial stress is high. Female heads of household sometimes have difficulty coping with the situation on their own without the support of their

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> One quarter according to the UNHCR data for the region: *Women alone*. UNHCR, 2014; 28 percent according to CARE data for Jordan: *Five Years into Exile*. CARE International in Jordan. June 2015; and 34.6 percent for Jordan according to UNHCR: *Living in the Shadow*. 2014 Home visit report. UNHCR, January 2015.

## **“I WAS VERY SAD DEEP DOWN BECAUSE I COULDN’T HELP MY PARENTS IN ANY WAY.”**

**– Rajaa, 22, single woman in Syria**

I dropped out of school because of the situation. After I left school, I stayed at home and kept myself occupied with a few tasks, such as knitting and household chores.

We had to leave our house and never came back to it, and I never got married. We had to rely on financial support from my siblings living abroad. When they returned to Syria, I lost all the hope I had. We started being dependent on aid and meals offered to us. I was very sad deep down because I couldn’t help my parents in any way. After we were displaced, we felt scared of everything. We stayed in a cold house, without furniture to sit on. We cried every day. We were scared, lost, and confused. Why had this happened, and how? We managed to survive day by day until my brother died. It was a heart-breaking experience. We lived in misery, striving only to survive, eating sometimes and starving other times. I hope that no one ever experiences what I have experienced in my life. I don’t wish on anyone to lose someone close to the heart.

I started to teach knitting from home, and when I heard about the women’s centre, I went to check it out, and now I’m teaching women there wool knitting. This experience boosted my self-confidence greatly, a feeling that I never had before.

In the future, I would like to teach women and girls, and to learn how to do hairdressing and make-up. I would like to provide a better life for our family and to my siblings. I wouldn’t be able to do what I am doing now without the support of my parents. Since I came to the centre, everything changed inside me: the way I dress, the way I think, and the way I deal with issues. I have become more focused on my family.

If the situation got worse, I wouldn’t move again. I will stay, because if I leave, I will have a hard time building my life over again from scratch. I invite all women to work hard on improving their lives and supporting their societies. I hope I will eventually become a teacher and I will teach generations. And I will improve my status and my living standards.

partner. On the other hand, women who live with their spouse sometimes feel that he seeks to control their movement and activities, even though household needs demand that the woman find new ways to generate an income.

## **Adolescent girls’ changing roles and responsibilities**

When the mother needs to leave the house to gain income, to look for support, or to follow up with education and medical treatment, it is often adolescent girls who step in to support with household chores (laundry, cleaning, and cooking), caring for (younger) siblings or family members in need of specific care, including the injured and elderly.

In addition, research participants mentioned that dire economic conditions (for instance, in besieged areas), some adolescent girls are forced to beg or have to resort to survival sex (i.e. trading sex for survival needs). One key informant mentioned cases where older and/or injured men in Syria marry adolescent girls to take care of them. Not able to continue their schooling, acquire essential life skills, or develop fully emotionally and physically, these girls are likely to be disadvantaged throughout their lives.



## Men's changing roles and responsibilities

Both in Syria and in refugee countries, men have largely lost their traditional role as (sole) breadwinner and decision-maker. Where markets and supply chains have collapsed, infrastructure is destroyed, and costs for inputs are soaring due to siege and widespread violence, men have lost their livelihoods as carpenters, smiths, electricians or construction workers. If displaced, their skills have often become irrelevant. As refugees, men usually lack the necessary residency and work permits. Both female and male research participants talked about a feeling of emasculation that affected many men, with negative repercussions on relationships within the family.

**In Syria**, often the only options left for men seeking to gain income are small/petty trade or joining armed groups. CARE's livelihoods assessment for southern Syria found that for 17 percent of households in the surveyed area, enrolment in armed groups was the primary source of income (23 percent among internally-displaced households), providing them not only with a monthly salary but also with food kits.<sup>46</sup> In addition, research participants in besieged areas reported that due to the particularly dire conditions, men sometimes have to resort to theft from relatives or neighbors to secure their family's survival.

**In refugee contexts** in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, men's economic participation has been constrained by the lack of legal access to the labor market. In addition, complicated and expensive registration processes that make it difficult for Syrian refugees to keep their registration up to date prevent men from moving outside the house at all. Where men do work without the necessary permits, they live in constant fear of being discovered by the authorities, arrested, transferred to the camps (where relevant) or even returned to Syria. At the same time, working without any legal protection, men are exposed to harassment and labor exploitation. Research participants indicate that the stress that men accumulate in these situations negatively affects relations within the family.

Both inside Syria and in neighboring countries, research participants reported that some men have increased their support for women in carrying out household chores. For instance, in Syria, men sometimes fetch water, collect and cut wood, and help in ensuring at least one meal a day is available for the family. In Jordan and Lebanon, both female and male focus group discussion participants indicated that, if the wife has to leave the house to generate an income, to look for support or to participate in training sessions, men support by carrying out various household and child-rearing tasks including preparing meals, washing and dressing children, teaching children, etc. However, women discussants indicated that it is the woman who continues to perform most household chores, even if she is working outside the house, and some men highlighted that the household was still considered the woman's responsibility, and that men had a choice whether to support her in this or not.

“ [Men] stay at home without barely achieving any tasks; they spend their time smoking and thinking.”

—Female research participant, besieged area, Syria

“ Because of the crisis, men started to be afraid of going out. Some were wanted by the authorities and had to hide. So women started to take the children to school, to the doctor and so on. It was easier for women to go out, because they were not involved in the protests.”

—Nuha, from Dar'a, now living in Irbid, Jordan

<sup>46</sup> *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates*. Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, iMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 26.

Despite considerable changes in women's and men's roles and responsibilities, men continue to hold decision-making power over many aspects of family life, including women's participation in work outside of the house. During the study, men agreed that women should seek their permission before working outside of the home.

## Adolescent boys' changing roles and responsibilities

Traditionally, boys were expected to obtain an education and to follow in their fathers' footsteps, supporting the father in his profession and learning his trade or craft through work after school or after finishing (compulsory) education. They could also support their mothers in running small errands (e.g. shopping), but overall, they were expected to concentrate on education and to enjoy leisure time.

Due to the experience of war and displacement, and in particular, in the absence of the male head of the household, adolescent boys have started to assume responsibilities traditionally ascribed to the father: in Syria, they support their mothers by cutting wood, filling the water tank, or contributing to the family's scant income as street vendors. In refugee contexts, they often assume the role as breadwinners, in particular in female-headed households.

*Mohammad, 13, originally from Homs, Syria, sells snacks from a street cart to help earn income for his family now living in Jordan. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*



## SYRIAN REFUGEES AND THE RIGHT TO WORK IN JORDAN, LEBANON, AND TURKEY

Neither Jordan nor Lebanon are state parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Turkey ratified the Refugee Convention in 1963, albeit with the geographic limitation in article 1 B (1) that restricts the convention's applicability to refugees from Europe. Irrespective of this, as state parties to international conventions that explicitly prohibit refoulement, notably the Convention against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), all three countries are bound by the principle of non-refoulement, i.e. the prohibition of returning anyone to territories where there is a risk that their life or freedom was threatened.

IN JORDAN, a Memorandum of Understanding between the government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gives refugees with legal residence the right to work "for [their] own account, whenever the laws and regulations permit" (Article 8) and to those with relevant, recognized degrees, the practice of liberal professions (Article 9). However, Article 5 of the agreement, which refers to "durable solutions," does not mention "local integration," but only "resettlement" and "voluntary return," curtailing the right of refugees to work.

At the administrative level, there are many barriers that limit Syrian refugees' participation in the Jordanian labor market. In absence of domestic asylum legislation, Syrian refugees are treated on par with other aliens and are required to apply for a work permit. Obtaining such a permit remains difficult for Syrians, partly because of high associated costs, and partly because of long administrative procedures. A recent report by the International Labor Organization characterizes the legal framework that governs Syrians' access to the labor market in Jordan as "at best, [...] convoluted." During this study, a few isolated cases where Jordanian companies employed Syrians came to light – including CARE vocational training graduates – under a quota established for foreign employees. However, even if formally employed, foreigners in Jordan are still subject to legal discrimination as the minimum wage is not applicable to their employment.

*See: International Labour Organization (ILO): Access to work for Syrian refugees in Jordan: A discussion paper on labour and refugee law and policies. May 2015.*

IN LEBANON, national laws govern the legal status of Syrian refugees. Before the crisis, Lebanon and Syria had a bilateral agreement allowing nationals of both countries freedom of stay, work/employment and practice of economic activity in certain non-competing sectors to the Lebanese labor such as agriculture, construction (excluding engineering), and portering. In these sectors, the participation of Syrian nationals has traditionally been strong. Therefore, Syrian nationals had limited right to work in Lebanon until January 2015, when work permits became a prerequisite to engage in any sort of work as is the case for other non-citizens. Syrians generally pay 25 percent of the standard work permit fee (which, again, depends on the type of job they are pursuing) and in "non-competing sectors" this fee is waived. Syrians applying for a work permit also need a work contract or a sponsor. The vast majority of Syrian laborers, however, work without work permits, mainly in the informal sector – especially when they try to get a sponsor and fail to find one.



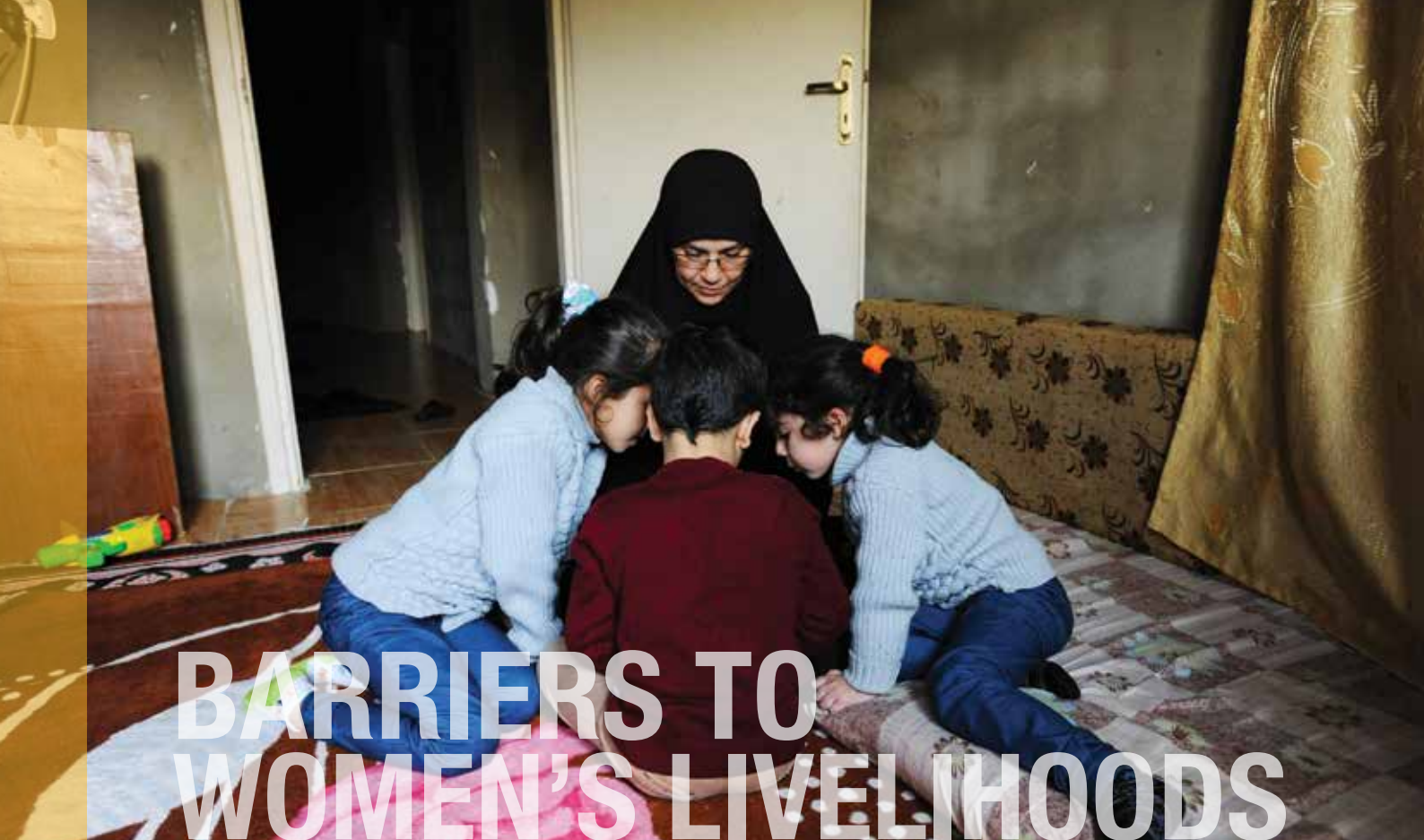
Since January 2015, the situation has deteriorated dramatically for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon: Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR are now required to pay a fee of USD 200, and, in addition, to provide several documents to renew their residency every year including: a housing commitment, certified attestation from a mukhtar (village leader) that the landlord owns the property, a notarized pledge not to work, and proof of financial means or of regularly received support. Some refugees are also asked to sign a notarized pledge that they will return to Syria when their permit expires or when requested to by the government. Syrians who are not able to extend their residency permit are at risk of being detained and consequently receiving a departure order. This has severe consequences for Syrian refugees' ability to move freely in public and seek work (even informal work), with men (and sometimes adult boys) at greater risk of being detained and receiving a return order.

*See: Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Quarterly snapshot. UNHCR, January-March 2015.*

IN TURKEY, a new regulation on work permits for "foreigners under temporary protection" issued in January 2016, has the potential to considerably enhance Syrian refugees' access to the labor market. Under this new regulation, registered Syrian refugees who have stayed in Turkey for at least six months are allowed to apply for a work permit in the province where they first registered. Syrians with permits have to be paid at least the minimum wage. Work permit applications have to be made through the e-Government Gateway by the employer or by refugees themselves, if they plan to be self-employed. Seasonal agricultural or husbandry work can be exempted. Members of the health and teaching profession require preliminary permission from the relevant line ministry.

The Turkish authorities can implement an employment quota for foreigners under temporary protection; as a general rule, the share of foreigners under temporary protection may not be more than 10 percent of Turkish citizens employed in the same workplace. Civil society organizations are also allowed to employ Syrian refugees, albeit additional procedures may be applied. Those who undergo vocational and in-service training at a workplace facilitated by the Turkish Employment Agency are also eligible to apply for work permits.

*See: <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/01/20160115-23.pdf>, Turkish Government Gazete, accessed on 26 February 2016 (CARE translation).*



# BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS

*Rawda, 46, lost her husband in the war in Syria, and now shares a small apartment with her youngest sons and her daughter's family, seven in total, in an unfinished building in Tripoli, Lebanon. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

As they struggle to develop new livelihood strategies, Syrian women both in Syria and in refugee contexts encounter substantial barriers.

During the research for this report, participants often highlighted the fact that women's livelihood opportunities need to be "suitable" for females. On the one hand, this refers to the type of work considered appropriate for women – tasks traditionally considered as "feminine" such as sewing, hairdressing, knitting, cooking, dairy production, etc. while "physical" work is generally not considered appropriate for women. On the other hand, the concept refers to the space and time where women's livelihood activities should be performed. Most research participants agreed that women should primarily seek income-generating activities that they can do from home or where they do not spend long hours outside the house, in particular not in the morning or evening hours. For instance, cleaning another family's home was considered appropriate if it was for a couple of hours only.

The reasons for this narrow concept of "appropriate" workspaces and working hours were various. In Syria, the precarious security situation largely limits women's movements. It is not considered feasible for women and girls to spend long hours outside the house due to the risk of harassment, persecution, shelling, aerial bombing and sniping. In Eastern Ghouta, for example, women's role in agriculture has decreased for that reason; most of the lands are located on a front line and it is considered dangerous for women to reach them.

Women's interaction in the public sphere also continues to be strongly conditioned by cultural norms around women's "honor" that limit her interaction outside of the house. Men generally retain their power to make decisions in the household, including over women's economic participation and interaction with strangers outside the house. In addition, even if the husband agrees to the wife looking for livelihood opportunities outside the house, pressure from the community may prevent her from seeking work outside the house, in particular in those areas in Syria where conservative armed groups are now in control. Men might also feel that their "honor" is violated when they are deprived of the role of sole breadwinner; if women work outside the house, the community would become aware of this and he would lose face.

For women themselves, an important barrier to accessing livelihoods outside the house are their responsibilities within the household, in particular, in terms of childcare and care for older persons or medical cases. As detailed

above, in Syria, women's responsibilities have grown exponentially with the unavailability of public services and basic goods, making it difficult to keep up with household chores, let alone look for additional income-generating activities. When women do find work outside the home, household chores accumulate and they often feel guilty for leaving their children alone, especially as the experience of war and displacement increases children's emotional needs and attachments. Women also fear for their children's safety and wellbeing if they need to leave the house for work.

With low levels of women's labor force participation before the crisis and despite high educational attainment, it is not surprising that some women lack the vision, skills and self-confidence to explore new livelihoods. They are accustomed to depending entirely on their fathers, husbands and other male relatives to provide for them and their families' needs. Many women thus struggle to cope with these new challenges and constantly worry about the survival of their families, feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, which also negatively affects their relationship with their children.

In rural areas, where women's work in agriculture has played an important role in securing family's food security, women's independent continuation of agricultural livelihoods is also difficult. Women traditionally have limited or no assets and income, their involvement in marketing of products and decision-making over household expenses is weak, and they have very little access to credit and extension services. These specific barriers to women's continued access to agricultural activities exacerbate the impact of war on agricultural markets and livelihoods, which, overall, have reduced agricultural production in many areas in Syria.

**In refugee hosting countries**, women (and men) have very limited access to formal employment opportunities due to the legal frameworks and convoluted administrative procedures that govern their status, registration, and access to work permits (see text box). With the exception of Turkey, where the legal framework was changed in January 2016 to ease the access of persons under temporary protection, primarily Syrian refugees, to work permits, opportunities to work legally remain closed to the vast majority of refugees in the region – both men and women. As men are often more at risk of being punished for working without the necessary permits, there is an increasing pressure on women to contribute to household income. In Turkey, while the legal framework is being expanded, there are

**“ We didn't allow women to go outside the house in Lebanon, because they would face sexual harassment/abuse.”**

**“ If my wife did not have cancer, she would work. In Syria, she used to tailor at home. We were free with each other, and I was proud of her work.”**

**“ My daughters, they are married, but I still do not allow them to work. Their husbands should work, not them.”**

**“ I was in prison for four months. During this time, my wife showed that she was strong: she went to the lawyer, the court. She demonstrated that she was strong. I will never forget what she did for me. She really acted like a man.”**

**—Male research participants, Tripoli, Lebanon**



## "I AM A MAN NOW"

—*Nuha, mother of four, from Dar'a countryside, now living in Irbid*

I left school after grade nine and got married. I was 16 then. During this time, my husband had several jobs at a time; his main work was in construction, but he also worked in agriculture on the farm, growing oranges and olives. We women worked around the house, growing vegetables and herbs. We could cover all food needs from the land we had around the house.

As we obtained a larger area around the house, we could grow more vegetables. We had space to raise cows, chickens - we also had a dog - and cows to give us milk. We only bought a few items from the store: diapers, sweets, rice, vegetable oil, butter, for instance. I made yogurt, cheese and other kinds of dairy products myself, and I sold them around the village.

All our family members worked in agriculture. Men tended the seedlings, watering them, and boys helped in the physically straining tasks. Women harvested fruits and vegetables, and put them into boxes. When the boxes were ready, the men would take them to markets, and the women would return to the house to cook, look after the children and so on.

When the war started, everything became harder. The farmers could not reach their farms anymore because of the front lines. Because diesel was becoming so expensive, we could not run the machines for farming. Because there was no electricity, we could not run the water pumps for irrigation any longer. As a consequence, the amount of vegetables that we could produce was reduced. As farmers, we depended very much on this production. We did our best to keep the plants alive. We bought diesel and water even if the costs tripled. At that time, we still hoped that the crisis would end soon.

I came to Jordan with my children. My husband returned to Syria to take care of his father, and now he cannot make it back to Jordan again. So, here I am, alone with my children. I am a man now.

At the beginning, we were living in a village in Ramtha. The rent was cheap there and I could grow some vegetables around the house. However, my younger son had problems at school. He did not feel accepted and wanted to leave the school, so we decided to move to Irbid.

Here it is impossible for us to grow any vegetables. We don't have land and the neighbors and the landlord are suspicious when I want to use the rooftop. I also don't have money to buy the needed soil, seeds or tools. Some women make yogurt or cheese, but it is difficult to sell it to restaurants because of the regulations of the Jordanian Food and Drug Administration.

My older son had to take on responsibilities very early. He has been working in a restaurant since we arrived to Jordan. Now he is 19.

I hope that in the future we can return to Syria so my daughters have a good life, can finish school and, hopefully, become teachers. Education is very important. If I was educated, our situation would be different now.



*Nuha, a mother of four, from Dar'a countryside, now living in Irbid, Jordan, with her daughter, Samah, 7. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

important language barriers for women seeking to access work opportunities, as well as legal procedures that must be overcome in order to access work permits.

Circumscribed by both legal restrictions on formal employment and cultural norms and practice that limit women's interaction with (male) strangers (described above), women thus have to resort to very informal, small-scale income-generating opportunities they can do from home, and which are often not recognized by their clients (who pay only a donation) or even their husbands as actual labor.

Women who do find work opportunities outside the house struggle to balance work with their responsibilities of caring for the household, children, older persons, the injured, persons with disabilities etc., and are subject to or fear harassment at the workplace or on the way there (see next chapter). Female heads of households are particularly affected because they cannot share childcare responsibilities with their husbands and lack the "protection" of a male family member against gender-based violence from the community or their employers.

Families displaced from rural areas have lost their access to agricultural land and subsistence production: for instance, research participants from Dar'a now living in Jordan explained that while agriculture was often only one livelihood strategy in pre-crisis Syria, families could cover most of their food needs from their own production growing olives, vegetables, fruit, and keeping livestock for milk and meat. Small surpluses were also sold or exchanged for other agricultural products. Agricultural livelihoods were interrupted as families were displaced and now are without access to agricultural land, inputs, tools or services.

Other women lost their livelihoods as they suffered physical or psychological traumas during the experience of violence and displacement.



*A mother of two, and her husband deceased, Siham lives with her aging mother in Irbid, Jordan. Living with multiple sclerosis, she is unable to work. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*



**“WHEN THE ARMY ENTERED OUR HOUSE, I FROZE. LITERALLY.”**

**—Siham, 45, from Dar’a, living with Multiple Sclerosis**

I studied in Damascus, then worked with the Ministry of Health in their Data Collection Department in Dar’a. My husband died in a car accident when I was pregnant with our second son. I named him Hassan, after his father. About eight years ago, I developed a light tremor in my hands and was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. However, it did not prevent me from working. After all, I was responsible for my family. It was at the beginning of the war, when Dar’a was in the centre of the crisis, that the army entered my house, searching for my deceased husband and threatening my son. I froze. Literally. Since then, my state has deteriorated, and I have not been able to go back to work. I am sad because I feel I am a burden to my mother. I just need someone to talk to, and my only wish is to be able to walk again.

**“SINCE I DIDN'T NEED ANYTHING, I DIDN'T WORK”**

**—Eman, 24, widow and mother of three, Syria**

I went to school until grade 11, then I got married and had three children. I never needed anything. I had everything before and after marriage. And since I didn't need anything, I didn't work. When my husband died in battle, I became helpless. My only helper was God.

I started to attend training sessions to get a certificate and find a decent job that would enable me to provide for my children. I don't want them to need anyone.

Ever since I was a child, I hoped to become a doctor. I was unable to realize my dream until now. Thank God, I recently obtained a nursing certificate, achieving part of my dream. I would like to broaden my knowledge regarding every situation that I may face in life, so I can find a solution without consulting anyone.

If God wills it, I will find a job here, and I will stay. Even if I don't find a job, I would never dream of leaving Syria or moving to another area in Syria because the situation is the same everywhere. It is difficult to be alienated, and I believe that my destiny will follow me, wherever I go.

I hope that I will see my children as I imagine them: educated, well-mannered, decent, just as we raised them to be. I wish all regions of Syria will know again security and stability. And I also hope to find a job that will help my children and me in the future.



# PROTECTION RISKS AS WOMEN ACCESS LIVELIHOODS

*Women and children collect water and do laundry at a public water point in Azraq refugee camp in Jordan. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

**In Syria**, in areas of active conflict, the main risks to women’s livelihoods outside the house – and any activity in the public sphere – is widespread and indiscriminate violence such as aerial bombing and shelling. Women living in hard-to-reach or besieged areas or close to the front lines are also at risk of being arrested, exposed to harassment and sexual violence at checkpoints, targeted by snipers or accused of collaborating with the enemy when they cross checkpoints and front lines to obtain essential supplies or to participate in humanitarian activities.

Female research participants in Syria also reported an increase in conflict with their partners. Women’s work can lead to conflicts between a woman and her husband, who has been accustomed to being the sole family income provider. Other women mentioned that some husbands disengage completely, casting all responsibility on their shoulders. Key informants working with women in Syria also noted an increase in domestic violence, sometimes related to the new roles of wives in income-generation, the changing balance of power between the sexes, and the related feeling of emasculation in men.

## RISKS RELATED TO WAR AND WOMEN'S RESILIENCE

**Q: Which personal strengths or talents help you deal with the current situation?**

“The increase of the shelling. We reached a point where we got accustomed to this new reality, which is not likely to change any time soon. We are still scared of the planes, but we are trying to convince ourselves that we are able to overcome the danger.”

“We are experienced now when it comes to dealing with emergencies. We know what room to choose to stay in so as not to be affected by the shelling, and we try as much as possible not to live in upper floors.”

—Female research participants, Syria

**In the refugee context**, the difficulties of accessing legal residency (in particular, in Lebanon) and work permits, and thus the lack of access to legal recourse, coupled with prejudice from host communities, create an environment conducive to (sexual) harassment and sometimes also sexual exploitation at the workplace. In addition, women also experience and fear harassment on the way to work.

Just like in Syria, the scarcity of financial resources and women's new livelihood role and responsibilities are important stressors on intra-household relations and a potential trigger for increased domestic violence. For instance in Turkey, more than half of CARE project participants reported that conflict over household resources was a trigger for domestic violence, and one in five respondents thought that disagreement over women's roles and responsibilities could result in domestic violence.

In situations of economic distress and fear for the "protection" of women's "honor," adolescent girls are at risk of being subjected to early marriage, either to reduce the expenses of her family of origin or, as one key informant reported, to marry and take care of injured or older man. In situations of extreme economic distress, for instance, in besieged areas in Syria isolated cases of adolescent girls having to beg or engage in survival sex have also been reported.

*Women in Syria are being trained as first responders. (Credit: CARE)*



**“We live in constant fear of being hungry and of dying.”**

**—Female research participant, besieged area, Syria**

**“Some women engage in smuggling. They bring in essential items, like medical supplies, under their clothes.**

**It is dangerous for them to cross the front lines; there is sniper fire and they can be accuse of collaborating with the enemy.”**

**—Key informant**

**“Girls are sometimes forced to beg or to resort to selling their ‘honor’ in order to earn their living and help their families.”**

**—Female research participant, besieged area, Syria**

**“Some women face sexual harassment at work or in the street.**

**Even when I came to this session, I asked my mother to accompany me because I don't feel safe in the street.”**

**—Female research participant, Tripoli, Lebanon**





# A FUTURE THAT WORKS FOR HER

*Fadia, 37, a Syrian refugee and widow with four children to support, used to work from home as a seamstress when she lived in Syria. Now in Turkey, she can only find work as a seasonal laborer on local farms. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*

## Opportunities for women's livelihoods, support needs, and visions

Despite its devastating effect on Syrian women, men, girls, and boys' lives, the turmoil that Syrian society has been experiencing for five years is also opening up a window – one previously closed – for Syrian women to expand the opportunities available to them in their families and their communities. Women are discovering strengths and capacities within themselves, acquiring new degrees of self-consciousness and skills, gaining decision-making power within the household and achieving visibility in their communities. As one key informant explained: “Women [in Syria] now know they can do anything – but they learned this lesson the hardest way possible.”

**In Syria**, income-generating opportunities in general have now become extremely scarce, affecting also women. Working with community-based organizations, teaching, volunteering as nurses (with a small stipend), home-based work, and agriculture are among the few sectors where women can occasionally still make an income. Women are engaged in small income-generating activities in their houses or in small shops, making and selling clothes, hairdressing, and petty trade.<sup>47</sup> In some areas in Syria, the newly-established civil society sector also provides income generating opportunities for women. For instance, in Eastern Ghouta, “employment in an NGO/civil society organization” is reported as an important source of income, together with teaching, and enrollment in military/armed groups.<sup>48</sup>

Research participants in Syria confirmed that NGO work and teaching have become important livelihood opportunities for women, and that sometimes these opportunities open up to less-skilled community workers following outward migration of the previous, educated incumbents. A key informant interviewed for this report indicated that in some areas in Syria, civil society organizations are now recruiting primarily women, leaving men without this livelihood option. Due to the high impact of indiscriminate violence – such as shelling and aerial bombing – there is also a high demand for first aid providers, search and rescue teams, and (para-) medical staff, and women have started to become more visible in these fields. A key informant in Syria mentioned that first aid and search and rescue course were in high demand among local women.

<sup>47</sup> *Livelihoods and Agriculture Needs Assessment in Idleb and Aleppo*. CARE International. 2015 (not published), p. 32.

<sup>48</sup> *Livelihoods Assessment in Eastern Ghouta*. CARE. 2016 (forthcoming).

**“Women [in Syria] now know they can do anything – but they learned this lesson the hardest way possible.”**

**—Syrian woman, representative of a CARE partner**

**“Women have a mission: not just to earn money, to have an income. They also need to get power, to be stronger as women.”**

**—Female research participant, Tripoli, Lebanon**

**“Before, I used to depend on my family, my brothers, my father. Now I will not depend on anyone.”**

**—Female research participant, Tripoli, Lebanon**

It is worth noting that, although the agricultural production sector is severely constricted, Syrian women play an important and increasing role. According to 2015 FAO estimates, 65 percent of the economically active population in agriculture in 2015 are women, an increase of six percent since 2009. In some areas, women might constitute up to 90 percent of the agricultural labor force.<sup>49</sup> Data from CARE program areas in northern Syria highlights that women have a leading role in livestock production, and are further supporting male heads of household in tending to cultivated land.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Livelihoods Assessment in Southern Syria: Dar'a and Quneitra governorates*. Joint report published by NRC, RFSAN, iMMAP, United Muslim Relief, FAO, Humanitarian Monitoring Group, and CARE. November 2015, p. 22.

<sup>50</sup> *Livelihoods and Agriculture Needs Assessment in Idleb and Aleppo*. CARE International. 2015 (not published), p. 32.

**“I AM ONE OF THOSE WOMEN WHO HAS NO LIMIT WHEN IT COMES TO EDUCATION.”**

**—Nadia, 46, married, Eastern Ghouta**

I grew up in a family of 10. In primary school, I received one of the highest ranks in my class. After secondary school, I was accepted as an assistant teacher in the town's schools. Then I got married and had four children, two boys and two girls. Meanwhile, I kept on teaching all classes, and during the last year there, I became the headmistress of a rural school – until the war started.

I am one of those women who has no limit when it comes to education. It's true that I couldn't go to university, which was my dream, because I got married and my husband refused at the time [to allow me] to pursue my studies at university. But I learned all I can - driving, calligraphy, computer, hairdressing, wool knitting, sewing – in addition to teaching. I'm really passionate about teaching, and this is the job I do right now in order to be able to meet all our family's needs, since my husband is not working anymore.

The war changed us a lot. It shattered our hopes and increased our pain. I have lost my dearest possessions, my house and its furniture, for which I worked all my life. And most importantly, I lost my eldest son, who died in battle.

We suffered a lot in the past five years, but it is my job that helps me cover our basic needs. We have also sometimes received aid from some of our acquaintances and relatives. I have been trying to find another job to meet the house's needs because my salary barely lasts until the end of the month.

“Women have asked us for first aid, and search and rescue training, so they can respond when airstrikes and shelling hit their area.”

—Key informant working in besieged area in Syria

*In refugee contexts in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey*, women have also started to engage in small-scale income-generating activities to compensate for the absence of the traditional (male) breadwinner or his inability to work. For instance, women have started home-based activities such as cooking for the neighbors, producing yogurt and other dairy products, or cleaning a neighbor's house. This work, however, is often not recognized as women do not charge a fixed price but rather depend on the goodwill of their customers to recompense them. Because of this, men in group discussions did not always seem to recognize the efforts of women to contribute to their family's income. Household food production and processing remains very small scale since it generally does not comply with local regulations on food hygiene. Some women have also started to supply clothing or furniture shops from home or work in beauty salons, small shops or factories. Those with teaching qualifications can provide private lessons from home. None of the women participating in our research was engaged in their own agricultural production, living as they did in cities and lacking access to land, soil, tools and agricultural inputs, as well as changing their residency often. However, some women interviewed were working on farms.

Further research is necessary to better understand labor market needs and dynamics, and how market demands can be met by training Syrian women in new skills or through other support mechanisms – as and when the legal framework allows. While research participants were still very much thinking in terms of women's livelihoods in sectors traditionally considered as “feminine,” a CARE pilot initiative that trains Syrian and Jordan women and men – in mixed classes – on mobile phone repair, and computer maintenance was very well received by all different groups of participants. The training was also successful in the sense that some Syrian graduates were directly hired into formal employment.

*Syrian and Jordanian women study hairstyling in a CARE-supported program in Irbid, Jordan. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*





## **"I SAY YES TO OPPORTUNITIES WHENEVER I CAN LEARN SOMETHING"**

**—Newroz, 26, CARE information volunteer, Birecek, Turkey**

I was born in Damascus, but was raised in a town near Aleppo. I studied French literature at Aleppo University. I was in my fourth year of French studies, with only five classes remaining for my degree [when the war began]. I'd like to return to Aleppo to complete my studies, but it was dangerous living there. The apartment building where I was living was destroyed by aerial bombing.

Our father has poor eyesight and a heart condition. He is unable to work. We had a construction materials factory in Syria. We lost everything in the war. We don't even know the condition of our home.

At university, I studied and worked at the same time. In the morning I took my classes and in the afternoon I tutored students in an office outside my home. Studying and working, I found a balance. I liked earning the money. I liked to be independent and not have to rely on others. In Syria, things were much cheaper, so I could pay for my university, and spend money on myself – for instance, on clothes.

My sister received her certificate in nursing but she preferred to work as a hairdresser. She had her own salon and managed staff there.

For the first six months in Turkey, we couldn't find work. We had to manage with our savings. Then I took a job in a textiles workshop, making t-shirts. I had to leave because I was not treated well.

Now, I no longer work as a French teacher, but I'm teaching primary school instead. I'd never done it before but I think I rock at it! I can work with the most undisciplined or lazy children and make learning fun. I love it. I can relate to them. They've been through so much. There used to be 51 children in my classroom, but now there are only 49. Two had to leave to collect garbage for their families. They needed the income.

I earn a salary of 900 Turkish Lira (approximately USD 300), but I give it to my family to pay for rent, food, and other household expenses. There are six of us I need to support.

I have always had a strong personality. I wanted to be a police officer when I was younger. [...] I also just finished a mine removal course. I always feel that I can do more. We must. I say 'yes' to opportunities whenever I can learn something. My father trusts me. We respect each other. He's proud of his daughter working.

When there were air raids over my town, I would go to the rooftop. If I was going to die, I decided it would not be while hiding in a basement. Even in Aleppo, there was a sniper's alley I often had to walk through. People would rush through it hoping to avoid being shot. I would walk slowly. Sometimes women would say, "You are a man." I would say, "No, I am a woman with a strong heart."



“We would prefer to stay in Lebanon to work to support ourselves over going abroad and depending on government subsidies.”

—Female focus group participant, Tripoli, Lebanon

“In Europe, my children would have better opportunities. For instance, my son wants to be a pilot; as much as he studies in Lebanon, he will not achieve this dream, Maybe in another country, he would.”

—Female focus group participant, Tripoli, Lebanon

“I have received many offers for resettlement, but refused them because my father has a disability and my mother is sick. This is why I want to stay.”

—Female focus group participant, Irbid, Jordan

“If I went to Europe, I would find security and dignity. European countries respect human rights, and there is more respect from the society.”

—Male focus group participant, Tripoli, Lebanon

“I’m against resettling abroad, just to sit and take charity. Wherever I am, I will work. People have an idea that if they change their location, their life will immediately improve. They don’t realize that we create our own life. They don’t know it’s who you are, not where you are. I just want to return to Kobane. We want to find work. We want to feel valued.”

—Newroz, 26 from Kobane, now living in Birecek





*Syrian women offer embroidered goods and jewelry that they made through CARE-supported vocational training programs, at a bazaar in Amman, Jordan. (Credit: Mary Kate MacIsaac/CARE)*



**“I WANT TO HELP MY CHILDREN BE THE PERSON I HOPED TO BE WHEN I WAS LITTLE.”**

**—Rania, 33, married in Syria**

Although I studied from grade 1 through grade 6, when I left school, my reading and writing level was mediocre. Both my parents were illiterate, so there was no one to support my education. At the age of 22, I got married, only to discover the many deficits I had – especially when I had my children. I found myself unable to teach them. There was a lot I did not know. Now I have four children, two boys and two girls. I have devoted my life to raising them, since I did not have a degree and couldn't work. I have always asked God to give me a chance to pursue my studies again. In particular, at the beginning of the war when I had plenty of time and I was unable to help my husband with the house expenses.

My only hope is to study, and I hope also that my children won't be deprived of education. This is why I seek education. I want to help my children be the person I hoped to be when I was little. Besides education, I have an interest in sewing. I would like to do some sewing from home or as an employee, so I can benefit from it in the future.

When the war started, my interests didn't change, rather life and circumstances changed for the worse. However, this change also helped strengthen my will to stand in the face of hardships. My husband stopped working, so we started selling the golden jewellery I owned. And then, when I had no more gold, I sold household items to cover our basic needs. Until now, I have mainly relied on my husband, then relief centres, and on God first and foremost.

My life changed completely when I was displaced. I couldn't bring along all the belongings we needed. I received aid from local families, but it was very difficult. We lived in a small house, and we did not have furniture or other household items; the only things we managed to obtain were pillows and blankets. We felt humiliated. Life was difficult; we had to live with strangers and share their lifestyle.

After graduating from the women's centre, I hope I will be able to read and write. I also hope to pursue my studies for the sake of my children. I want a better life for my family. I want us to find again the security that we lost at the beginning of the war. I would like also for my husband to return to his job, and for my children to return to their studies, and for me to keep on taking care of them. But what matters most is to have the sense of security every time they leave the house.

When asked what Syrian women would need to enhance their livelihood situation, research participants highlighted the role of male family members and the (Syrian and host) community in supporting their livelihood activities. Specifically, Syrian women need their husbands to agree to their quest for work outside the home, to encourage them in their new roles, and to support them by helping with household chores. Communities should also become more receptive to women's economic activities, and should provide space where women can market their products. Female research participants confirmed that vocational training courses were relevant (at least, to help them better manage household chores), but explained that vocational training courses need to be complemented with business administration, literacy and language classes (e.g. English), material support to start-up business (in-kind or cash), joint workshops and business, and support to market home-generated products through fairs. Vocational training courses and other livelihood support also needs to be better adapted to the specific needs and situation of different women, and, in particular, should take into account different educational and skills background, experience, and specific needs (for instance of women with disabilities).

**“THIS IS NOT THE WORK WE CHOOSE, BUT WHAT WE ARE FORCED TO DO FOR OUR FAMILIES, FOR OUR CHILDREN.”**

**—Fadia, 37, widow, from near Aleppo, now in Birecek, Turkey**

I came to Turkey one year ago. I have four children under 15, and I am a widow. Four years ago, when we lived in Syria, my husband went to the bakery to buy us bread. He never returned. The bakery was bombed, and he was killed.

In Syria, my children were working in a carpet factory, even the six-year-old. Only the five-year-old stayed at home with me.

Before the conflict, I had a sewing machine and worked as a seamstress from my house but with the war, work decreased. I had been working for merchants from Iraq and for other workshops. Whenever they had extra work, they would come to me. I learned how to sew from my mother when I was 14 years old.

I also took care of the children and the cooking. But we were poor, so I had to work. In Syria, we rented a house when we married, while we worked and saved. Finally, four years before the war, we finished our house. And then we lost it – it was destroyed in the war. Our house was on the front lines and we had to flee when the army came.

For the first three days in Turkey, we lived in the streets before we found a place. We slept in a pistachio field; there were other families staying there, too. Then I found work on the farms. There's no work in the winter, though, so we wait now for summer. On the farms, I earn only 25 TL/day (less than USD 9), working two or three days a week. We are forced to borrow money.

Sometimes my son joins me, sometimes he goes to a different farm. In Turkey, it's harder for me to find work as a seamstress. Half of us working in the fields are women. It was difficult adjusting to this work. I had never worked on farms before. It was a challenge. There's some harassment of Syrian women, young or old, from men trying to have affairs. Some of the Turkish men make fun of us when they see us working. Where are your husbands, they ask. Are you a widow? You want to get married? This is not the work we choose, but what we are forced to do for our families, for our children.

**In the refugee context**, women emphasized that the legal framework should be more accommodating for them to establish sustainable livelihoods – which includes allowing their husbands to go back to work. For instance, in Lebanon, if the fee of USD 200 that refugees have to pay every year to renew their residency permit were to be waived, both women and men would feel more free to move in public and to seek employment.

It is thus not surprising that both women and men during the research for this report confirmed that better access to work permits and work opportunities would be an important factor in allowing Syrian refugees to live with dignity in host countries in the region. However, research participants also highlighted that, in addition to better livelihoods, Syrian refugees need educational opportunities for their children and for themselves, access to medical treatment, and the ability to feel safe, accepted and respect for rights for them to be able to stay in the region. Some women in Jordan, in particular those who still have family members in Syria and one woman who was illiterate, said they did not seek resettlement or even refused it because they wanted to stay close to Syria and their family members there, or feared language, cultural and economic difficulties if they moved to third countries.



# OUR CALL: RECOMMENDATIONS & ADVOCACY

*A Syrian woman displays the jewelry she is making for sale in bazaars, since attending a CARE-supported vocational training program in Amman, Jordan. (Credit: Lucy Beck/CARE)*

Syrian women have demonstrated unimaginable strength and energy to protect their families and provide for them during five years of conflict and displacement. Some of them have been pushed to the limits to what they can bear. For Syrian women, in their diversity, to be able to continue supporting their families and to contribute meaningfully and equally to peacebuilding and to the rebuilding of the economic, social, and political fabric in Syria, they need our support.

In particular, we call on:

## **1. All parties to the conflict:**

### **1.1 To immediately end indiscriminate and disproportionate violence against civilians, and lift all restrictions on the movement of goods and services which in effect result in siege conditions.**

Due to such violence and restrictions, local markets have collapsed, value chains have been interrupted, productive infrastructure has been destroyed, and inputs have become expensive or not available. As a result, millions of Syrians have lost their livelihoods. 4.5 million people live in areas classified as 'hard-to-reach' including nearly 400,000 people in 15 besieged locations, where the local population's livelihoods now center around bare subsistence and, often, dangerous and harmful survival strategies. Those displaced internally have lost access to their lands, and to their business and often, their skills have become irrelevant. Without the revival of the Syrian economy, and a re-establishment of Syrian women and men's livelihoods, this situation will continue to worsen.

## **2. Syrian government:**

### **2.1 To ensure that the legal framework is further developed to guarantee that Syrian women can enjoy their full rights, including their economic and political rights, as defined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).<sup>1</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Syria. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. July 18, 2014. CEDAW/C/SYR/CO/2.



### 3. Local authorities in Syria:

**3.1 To protect and strengthen women's engagement** in existing local structures (for instance, through quota systems) or, in more conservative communities, through separate advisory groups for women. This will prepare local communities – and local women themselves – for increased participation of women at different social and political levels in post-conflict Syria.

### 4. Syrian and international civil society:

**4.1 To ensure diverse voices of Syrian women are heard from the grassroots to the national and international level.** This will ensure that Syrian women can participate meaningfully in peace negotiations, peace-building processes and, eventually, in the shaping of the economic, social, and political life in Syria, and as an essential contribution to the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 and follow-up resolutions shaping the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

### 5. Refugee hosting countries:

**5.1 To provide an enabling legal and administrative environment that allows Syrian refugees to live without fear of harassment, arrest, forced encampment or *refoulement*, and to take-up legal work opportunities.** A good example is the legislation recently passed to enhance Syrian refugees' access to the Turkish labour market has the potential to help approximately one million working age Syrians to find jobs, according to the Turkish Authorities.<sup>2</sup>

**5.2 To ensure that all measures to promote economic participation must provide equal access to women** and men, as well as people with disabilities and other groups with specific barriers accessing livelihood opportunities.

**5.3 To ensure that all economic compacts made by Syria's neighboring countries** (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey) and the international community for economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and host communities address economic needs of Syrian women seeking economic opportunity.

### 6. Donor countries:

**6.1 To rapidly deliver on the pledges of over USD 11 billion made in London in early February 2016<sup>3</sup>** to help local economies expand and be better able to absorb Syrian refugees in their labour mar-

“If I had the ability, first, I would stop the death that is surrounding us. Then, I would think how to compensate all the affection that our children are missing.

If I had the freedom to choose, I would choose a job for my husband first, then a job for myself that can ensure our family's stability. I wish to participate in decision making in our society.

I wish to learn English, then go to Damascus and join the English language faculty.”

—Female research participant, Syria

<sup>2</sup> London Conference – Turkey Statement. February 2016. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/498038/Supporting\\_Syria\\_the\\_Region\\_London\\_2016\\_-\\_Turkey\\_Statement.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/498038/Supporting_Syria_the_Region_London_2016_-_Turkey_Statement.pdf), accessed on March 4, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the London Conference's website for details on the pledges made according to donor country / institution: Co-host statement's annex: fundraising. <https://www.supportingsyria2016.com/news/co-hosts-statement-annex-fundraising/>, February 2016. Accessed on March 4, 2016.

kets while also increasing economic opportunities for local host community members, thereby supporting both displaced populations and host communities.

**6.2** To ensure that gender sensitivity and women's economic empowerment are factored into the implementation plans for the Jordan Compact, as well as the Statements on Lebanon and Turkey launched at the London Supporting Syria and the Region Conference. Finally, they must also commit to amending counter-terror policies that negatively impact on flows of vital remittances that are a key element of livelihoods, in particular of female-headed households.

## **7. Private sector, government and non-government organizations supporting livelihoods in Syria and in neighboring countries:**

**7.1 To ensure that women and other marginalized groups such as people with disabilities have equitable access to livelihood support, including, vocational training, cash-for-work-opportunities, credits and grants, input, and agricultural extension services.** Given that pre-crisis only 22% of women were participating in the workforce, this will require targeted measures to support women's livelihoods, and access to related services (e.g. financial services, extension services,) and inputs (materials, agricultural inputs etc.).

**7.2 To engage with livelihood programming even where it may challenge traditional concepts around "suitable" tasks for women.** Such measures need to be carefully designed, in consultation with community members, and well-tested, to avoid negative impact on women.<sup>4</sup> They must also as far as possible address the concerns and priorities of men (including husbands, other male family members and other men in their community settings) to ensure a gender-sensitive approach to women's economic empowerment.

**7.3 To ensure robust assessments on both supply and demand sides in order to increase the knowledge of actors and implement based on evidence.** Understanding market systems and local capacities, especially those of the private sector, are critical to supporting the sustainability and growth of local value chains inside Syria. Emergency and development organizations must not replace, undermine, or compete with the local capacities but rather to strengthen them whenever possible.

**7.4 To use livelihoods as a strategic entry point for more gender responsive/transformational programming to influence long-standing cultural and structural barriers towards women's participation and role in the economic space.** This can be done through developing the agency of women as individuals and groups; supporting women's organizations; strengthening and consolidating women's voices, influencing the cultural discourse, perception, and behaviour about the role of women and its longstanding attributes (close to the house, low economic value, etc.). Integrating women's voices can also help expose and challenge legal barriers facing women. Livelihood can also serve as an entry point in pushing the boundaries from economic participation towards political participation and giving women a voice in rebuilding Syria. Livelihood programming can evolve to/be linked to women's full empowerment, including tackling major risks and issues affecting Syrian women and girls, including early marriage and gender-based violence in general.

**7.5 To consider early recovery and rehabilitation of infrastructure and productive assets early on, so that women do not carry a disproportionate burden over the medium and long-term.** The recovery stage needs to be gender sensitive and responsive – probably more than pre-crisis.

**7.6 To encourage private sector investment in refugee livelihood interventions.** Private sector actors should engage in national level dialogues taking place in the aftermath of the London Donor

---

<sup>4</sup> CARE pilot activities in Jordan, where Syrian and Jordanian women and men are jointly trained on mobile phone repair and computer maintenance have been well received by the participants. Further labor market research is necessary to determine the sectors that offer best opportunities for women.

Conference to facilitate greater investment in the region and business favourable conditions to support both refugees and vulnerable host communities.

## **8. Policymakers and implementing agencies must:**

**8.1 Collect gender, age and diversity disaggregated data, in line with the Minimum standards on Age, Gender, and Diversity, developed by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in 2015.**<sup>5</sup> Such disaggregated data is essential as it informs appropriate response and programme design that responds to the needs of different categories of affected populations. They should also work to with private sector actors to ensure they collect and understand the importance of disaggregated data.

## **9. Livelihood program implementing agencies must ensure delivery teams:**

**9.1 Consider more transitional programming beyond the traditional either-emergency-or-development philosophy** and organizations are appropriately gender-trained and are provided with the capacity to support program beneficiaries appropriately.

**9.2 Build sustainable partnerships with organizations for and of vulnerable groups at different levels to combine their comparative advantages** and maximize impact. Such partnerships will enable effective and efficient collaboration on mutual capacity building, disaggregated data collection, joint assessments, program implementation, advocacy and other activities

---

<sup>5</sup> Minimum standard commitments to gender and diversity in emergency programming (Pilot version). International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IFRC-%20Gender%20Diversity%20MSCs%20Emergency%20Programming-EN.pdf>, December 15, 2015.





[www.care.org](http://www.care.org)

**CARE International**  
**Regional Syria Response**  
P.O. Box 950793  
Amman, 11195  
Jordan