



March 2015 marked four years of civil war in Syria. While many in the world have moved on, Syrians find themselves trapped in conflict, and forced to flee for their lives. The fighting has killed at least 220,000 people; and 840,000 have been injured in violence. Life expectancy has fallen by approximately 20 years. Within the country, 7.6 million Syrians have been displaced and more than 650,000 are living in besieged communities, their majority surviving in dire conditions exacerbated by poverty. Nearly 4 million Syrians have fled their country and become refugees in neighbouring countries. Life is not easy for them either. Host countries strain to provide assistance to their own citizens in need, while also supporting new arrivals from Syria. Many women refugees have no option but to become heads of households, leaving their homes to make ends meet.

Four million women and girls of reproductive age have been affected by the crisis, including 3 million inside Syria and 1 million in countries where they have sought refuge. Nearly half a million Syrian women are currently pregnant and of those women an estimated 75,000 will require emergency obstetric care to manage a complication. Women and girls have become front row witnesses and survivors of violence, including gender-based violence and forced marriages. Syria has become home to an unprecedented tragedy.

UNFPA is urging longer-term investments to meet the needs of women and girls of reproductive age, to equip them with the skills and motivation to build a more stable future for themselves and their families, and to provide them with the minimum health and protection services they may need to continue their lives, and enhance their resilience.

Refugee women from Syria participating in a crochet course in Nergiz women's centre in Kawargosk camp in Erbil, Iraq. UNFPA through its partners aims to invest in and empower refugee women, including through recreational activities.



Credit: Veronica Njikho | UNFPA, 2014.

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

UNFPA provided 89,300 reproductive health and gender-based violence services to women and girls of reproductive age in Damascus, Rural Damascus, Homs, Tartous, Lattakia, Aleppo and Hama. It also delivered reproductive health equipment and pharmaceutical supplies to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Higher Education health facilities nationwide to respond to reproductive health needs, including emergency obstetric care and 562,000 safe deliveries. As part of the United Nations joint convoy from Jordan to Syria, UNFPA distributed 13 reproductive health kits in Dar'a, targeting 2,525 beneficiaries. Furthermore, 100,000 hygiene kits and 18,250 female dignity kits were also sent to Syria from Turkey.

LEBANON

UNFPA conducted 117 awareness sessions on child marriages and domestic violence in the region of Akkar and North Lebanon, benefitting around 1,805 women from both Syrian and Lebanese communities. It provided services to 77 gender-based violence survivors, and reached 476 Syrian gender-based violence survivors and individuals at risk. It also organized 97 basic life skills awareness sessions for 1,575 women, and built the capacity of 20 Syrian and Lebanese women leaders to deliver awareness sessions on hygiene to other beneficiaries. As many as 2,100 pamphlets on reproductive health-related issues were also distributed.

JORDAN

UNFPA provided 11,898 reproductive health services. A total of 8,753 women, girls, men, and boys received gender-based violence (GBV) services; these included 526 GBV survivors who benefited from safe and confidential specialized multi-sectoral services. It also conducted a five-day training session on clinical management of rape, targeting 23 health service providers, a 6-week vocational skills training course for 62 women and adolescent girls in the UNFPA safe space in Azraq camp, and a health campaign targeting 30 youth in the Salt Youth Centre.

IRAQ

UNFPA provided 5,000 reproductive health services and trained 228 staff in health facilities. It also distributed 60 reproductive health kits to support 48 primary health care facilities and 12 referral health facilities in the Kurdistan region, and distributed 900 copies of reproductive health materials in the camps. Additionally, UNFPA established two

women spaces and one youth space in Gawilan and Domiz camps, and a basketball and volleyball playground in the Kawergosk camp. A total of 3,067 women and girls participated in the UNFPA-supported recreational activities. UNFPA also provided 919 dignity kits and 500 women dresses to Syrian women and girls.

TURKEY

UNFPA provided reproductive health and family planning services to 2,089 Syrian refugees, and gender-based violence services to 400 Syrian women. It also distributed 2,844 hygiene kits and 2,000 copies of 'Protection of Family in Turkey' pamphlet. Moreover, a Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) for reproductive health training was conducted in Gaziantep for 24 participants. UNFPA also signed a grant agreement with Hacettepe Public Health Foundation in Ankara for the establishment of a women health counseling unit serving a population of 20,000 Syrians residing in Ulubey of Altindag District, Ankara. It also organized a Turkish language training course for 283 Syrian refugees.

EGYPT

UNFPA supplied post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) kits for the prevention of HIV to four health care providers in Cairo, Alexandria, and the Delta, and supported two girls spaces in 6th October in Masr al-Jadida. It also trained 52 physicians on reproductive health care and clinical management of sexual violence, while 60 Syrian community health workers received gender-based violence training in Alexandria. As many as 300 Syrian youth participated in sport activities, along with reproductive health awareness sessions. UNFPA also organized health awareness sessions for 120 Syrian women, and supported an awareness session on early detection of breast cancer. Material on reproductive health was distributed to 400 households in Alexandria.

A sewing machine ends fear and brings hope to Syrian refugee women in Iraq



Asma during the recreational session with her friends at the women's safe space. "I am happy in the sewing session, my teacher is from the same place I came from, we speak the same language and share the same memories."

Credit: Shayda Hessami | UNFPA, 2015

Aged 39 years, Asma from Qamishli crossed the border into Iraq, grasping the hands of her four children. Her mind was crowded with thoughts of her elder son. She had no news from him; not even whether he was alive or dead. All she knew was that he had finally been released from jail in Syria. With the sound of gunfire piercing through her ears, she continuously walked for three days marked by sleepless nights, hoping to reach a safe space. She moved on, crossing the area that divides warring Syria from Iraq, and leaving behind, her completely destroyed home.

"It was the worst day of my life," Asma recollected. "[It was] worse than all the shooting and attacks in Syria. I was terrified. It was an indescribable feeling, but I managed because I had to move on for the sake of my children." It was not the fear of being raped or killed, but an overriding concern to protect her children, which acted as the final catalyst for her to leave Syria.

Asma's first few months as a refugee were truly challenging; she had

nothing to eat, drink, and live with. On top of that, her husband simply wouldn't allow her to move out of the tent in the Kawergosk camp located near Erbil, in Kurdistan, Iraq. "My husband would simply overrule the possibility of women going out of their tents. What could I do? Being a male, he had the final say," Asma narrated,

"A few months later, my other 19 year-old son decided to join the Peshmerga force to protect our land from 'Daesh,' fighting for peace and freedom. I was very happy to realize that my son had grown up, and was capable of being in the frontline, protecting his homeland. At the same time, however, I wept day and night. It is a heart-wrenching experience for a mother to send her two sons to the battle with no glimmer of hope, and no guarantee of their safe return," Asma recollected. "My other two sons, aged 15 and 16 years, were also working in the city. I used to feel lonely, very lonely."

One day, my friends told me that Al Messala, a UNFPA-supported women centre in Erbil, is organizing training sessions and courses aimed at empowering Syrian women to generate income in a bid to become self-reliant. I decided to join the sewing school. I sought permission from my husband, who initially opposed the idea. I even expected him to shout at me, but when I told him that other Syrian friends and social workers also visit the place, and that it is absolutely safe, he allowed me to go.

The course enabled Asma to develop friendships and acquire useful skills. She, along with the other 17 women participating in the three-month sewing training course, benefited immensely from the session. "The course was held twice a week. I really wanted to learn something productive for myself, and that course really helped."

While at Al Messala, Asma learnt about the consequences of child marriage. Since she herself had gotten married at the age of 14 years only, she started advocating against child marriages.

"My life was full of fear. I did not know what to do. Losing everything in your life is something nobody can even think of, and now I am fearing that this course will end soon, and such opportunities may never come back. I want to learn... I want to do something," Asma said.

With the support of social workers at the centre, Asma is now learning to cope with the realities of life with renewed hope, skills, and friends.

"The women refugees from Syria are now accustomed to the camp and visit the centers regularly, discuss their struggles and gain skills. Many of the women feel that the courses have positively impacted their mental and emotional health, but yet they hope that they would benefit financially as well to support their families. These women who have worked tirelessly to learn how to sew, are desperately in need of earning money. A factory to design and sell clothing would change their life", states Kwestan, a 31 year old social worker at the UNFPA supported Al Messala women safe space in Kawergosk camp.

