Syrian girls flee war only to become mothers in Jordan camp

ZAATARI REFUGEE CAMP, Jordan (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - In a crowded maternity clinic at a refugee camp in Jordan near the Syrian border, Elhem cradled her crying 11-month-old son, bounced him on her knee and then handed him to her mother to help calm him down.

“When I had the baby I felt a sense of motherhood and was happy,” the Syrian refugee said through a translator, adjusting her floral niqab. “I’m a housewife now.”

She’s 17, and her experience is common, Elhem, who asked to be identified by her first name, says many Syrian girls in the camp are also mothers, including a friend who gave birth at the age of 15.

Despite efforts to reduce early marriage in Zaatar camp since its opening in 2012, maternal health workers from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) say the number of babies born to adolescent girls remains stubbornly high.

More than 15 million girls worldwide are married before they turn 18, according to campaign group Girls Not Brides.

Child marriage deprives girls of education and opportunities, and puts them at risk of serious injury or death if they have children before their bodies are ready.

In Jordan, Zaatar sprouted in an area that had been an empty desert, transforming in just a few short years into a sprawling slum city currently housing nearly 80,000 Syrians.

Since UNFPA began its operations in Zaatar in mid-2013, doctors have delivered more than 6,500 babies in the camp - 5 percent of them born to mothers younger than 18.

Girls Not Brides estimates about 13 percent of girls in Syria are married before their 18th birthday, and 3 percent become brides before they turn 15.

But the child marriage rate among Syrian refugees in neighbouring Jordan is far higher - more than doubling to 25 percent in 2013, from 12 percent in 2011 when the war began, said the U.N. children’s agency UNICEF.

The charity Save the Children says many Syrian refugee families marry off their daughters to provide them financial security or protect them from sexual violence perpetrated by other men in refugee camps.

When Elhem fled her hometown of Daraa in Syria, she did not imagine that two years later in 2014, she would get married at age 13 to her older cousin in Zaatar camp.

She said it was not a decision borne out of love or romance, but did not elaborate further.

Elhem said she has never been to school, which UNFPA says is a key risk factor for child marriage.

With no schooling or sexual education, generations of girls and women are not aware of the physical, mental and sexual health risks associated with early marriage.

“It’s very challenging, it’s very hard to convince them not to marry young,” said Samah Al-Quaran, a UNFPA health worker in Zaatar camp.

Girls who marry young are more vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence, said Al-Quaran.

“The risk of gender-based violence is higher in early marriage because the girl doesn’t understand what her husband is allowed or not allowed to do,” the Jordanian health worker said, adding that the maternity clinic also provides round-the-clock assistance for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Al-Quaran said she has seen many cases of husbands determining the use of birth control. She said many men opt for short-term solutions, such as condoms or contraceptive pills, so he can control exactly when his young wife becomes pregnant.

“The decision for family planning within this culture is with the man. The man decides if he wants children or not. It’s not up to the mother,” she said.

“This control is a sort of violence.”

In June, the U.N. Human Rights Council adopted a resolution calling for an end to child, early and forced marriage, and recognising child marriage as a violation of human rights.

Ending child marriage by 2030 is one of the targets within the new Sustainable Development Goals adopted by world leaders at a U.N. summit last year.

At Zaatar, Elhem says her only hopes and dreams are for the sleeping baby she is holding.

“The most important thing for me now is to raise my child and to give him a decent life with a good education. All I care about is the future of my son.”

Travel for this story was provided by the European Commission and European Journalism Centre.

Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation

(Reporting by Lin Taylor @linnytayls, editing by Alisa Tang and Astrid Zweynert. Thomson Reuters Foundation, news.trust.org)
## Humanitarian Response

### Syrian Arab Republic: From All Channels

#### Reproductive Health and Safe Motherhood

**223,007** reproductive health services
- 9,582 normal deliveries
- 6,932 C-section deliveries
- 12,215 ante-natal care services
- 41,209 family planning services
- 1,413 pregnancies under 18

**Other RH Services** 44,744 clients

#### Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

**4,372** women and girls

**8,990** women and girls

**15,166** clients

**1,500** dignity kits distributed

**157** participants

---

### UNFPA Response in Syria

#### Reproductive Health and Safe Motherhood

**29,103** clients received services in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Turkey:
- 1,420 normal deliveries
- 415 C-section deliveries
- 354 pregnancies under 18
- 8,169 ante-natal care services
- 474 post-natal care services
- 5,225 family planning services

**11,241** clients received services in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Jordan:
- 976 normal deliveries
- 553 C-sections
- 124 pregnancies under 18
- 3,258 ante-natal care services
- 549 post-natal care services
- 851 family planning services

#### Outreach Activities

**1,956** women reached through outreach activities in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Turkey

**884** women reached through outreach activities in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Jordan

#### Training

**94** persons trained in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Jordan

---

### UNFPA-Supported Facilities in Syria

**Number of women’s spaces:** 14

**Number of field reproductive health clinics or mobile teams:** 53

**Number of health facilities:** 912

---

### Fast Figures

**Syrians Affected by the Crisis:** 13.5 Million

**Women and Girls of Reproductive Age:** 4.1 Million

**Youth:** 2.5 Million

**Pregnant Women:** 360,000

Sources: UNHCR, OCHA and UNFPA May 2016

---

### UNFPA-Supported Facilities in Syria

**Number of women’s spaces:** 14

**Number of field reproductive health clinics or mobile teams:** 53

**Number of health facilities:** 912

---

### Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

#### Response Services

**1,667** clients received gender-based violence services in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Turkey

**1,363** clients received gender-based violence services in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Jordan

#### GBV Awareness & Outreach Activities

**513** Syrians reached through outreach and awareness activities in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Turkey

**1,363** Syrians reached through outreach and awareness activities in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Jordan

#### Supplies

**4,500** dignity kits distributed in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Jordan

#### Training

**19** persons trained in areas accessed through cross-border operations from Turkey
## Humanitarian Response
### Neighbouring Countries Affected by the Crisis

#### Turkey
- **Services:**
  - 15,400 services for Syrians
  - 848 antenatal care services
  - 3,132 family planning services
  - 63 pregnancies of women under 18
- **Awareness Sessions & Outreach Activities:** 10,220 clients
- **Training:** 37 participants
- **Supplies:**
  - 1,483 family hygiene kits distributed
  - 800 brochures distributed

#### Jordan
- **Services:**
  - 814 reproductive health services
  - 240 family planning services
  - 186 antenatal care services
- **Outreach Activities:** 371 clients
- **Training:** 121 participants

#### Lebanon
- **Services:**
  - 814 reproductive health services
  - 240 family planning services
  - 186 antenatal care services
- **Outreach Activities:** 371 clients
- **Training:** 121 participants

#### Iraq
- **Services:**
  - 11,035 reproductive health services
  - 181 normal deliveries
  - 21 C-section deliveries
  - 60 pregnancies under 18
  - 1,460 family planning services
  - 3,580 antenatal care services
  - 747 post-natal care services
- **Awareness Sessions:** 2,748 clients

### Reproductive Health and Safe Motherhood

#### Turkey
- **Supplies:**
  - 1,483 family hygiene kits distributed
  - 800 brochures distributed

### Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

#### Jordan
- **Services:**
  - 1,447 services
  - 6,545 women and girls
- **Outreach Activities:** 2,045 clients

#### Egypt
- **Services:**
  - 714 services
  - 7,148 Syrian women and girls
- **Outreach Activities:** 4,014 clients

#### Lebanon
- **Supplies:**
  - 1,527 dignity kits distributed
  - 500 brochures on GBV distributed

#### Iraq
- **Supplies:**
  - 31 dignity kits distributed

### Fast Figures

**Neighbouring Countries Affected by the Crisis (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt):**

- **Syrian Refugees Affected by the Crisis:** 4,813,131
- **Syrian Refugee Women and Girls of Reproductive Age:** 1,203,000
- **Syrian Refugee Youth:** 800,000
- **Syrian Refugee Pregnant Women:** 80,200

**Syrian Refugee Women and Girls of Reproductive Age:**

- **4,813,131**

**Syrian Refugee Youth:**

- **1,203,000**

**Syrian Refugee Pregnant Women:**

- **800,000**

**Syrian Refugee Pregnant Women:**

- **80,200**

### UNFPA Mission:

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

UNFPA: Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.
GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

EGYPT
RESPONSE SERVICES 19 services
WOMEN AND GIRLS ACCESSING SAFE SPACES 720 women and girls
OUTREACH ACTIVITIES 440 clients
TRAINING 32 participants

SUPPORTING ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

JORDAN
YOUTH PROGRAMMING 1,576 Syrian and Jordanian young people

LEBANON
YOUTH PROGRAMMING 1,548 Syrian young people

TURKEY
YOUTH PROGRAMMING 1,316 Syrian young people

EGYPT
YOUTH PROGRAMMING 316 Syrian young people

STORIES FROM SYRIA

A new WGSS inaugurated in Sahnaya, Damascus

A new women and girls safe space (WGSS) was inaugurated in Sahnaya, Damascus Countryside, in cooperation with Nour foundation. This center aims to support women and provide all needed services to women and girls.

The centre provides legal consultations and vocational training and other fields to women and girls. It also includes a special and equipped location for physical exercise. The center also provides language courses and computer training, in addition to literacy courses.

UNFPA-SUPPORTED FACILITIES

Number of women’s spaces 59
- Lebanon 11
- Jordan 15
- Iraq 5
- Egypt 5
- Turkey 23

Number of field reproductive health clinics or mobile teams 68
- Jordan 18
- (10 in host communities, 10 in camps)
- Iraq 19
- (12 in camps, 13 in host communities)
- Egypt 12
- Turkey 17
- Lebanon 2

Number of youth centres and safe spaces 18
- Lebanon 6
- Jordan 1
- Iraq 5
- Egypt 4
- Turkey 2
Pregnant women suffer the most in displacement

Rabie'aa, a 35-year old mother from Aleppo said she will name her baby to be delivered soon Khaled.

“I am a mother of a four-year old girl and pregnant with a baby boy,” thus, I will call him Khaled, after the name of his late father.

Rabie'aa, who came from Eastern Aleppo said, she and her family were evacuated to Mahalej before moving again to a shelter in Jibrin, when the situation worsened in the first shelter.

Unfortunately, there isn’t enough space for each family to have a special or a private room. “So, I have to live here with four other families. When we left, they did not let me hold anything.”

“We were told to leave in a hurry and I cannot have any of my valuable belongings. I couldn’t carry anything with me, not even the documents that prove who am I and where I come from.”

“My husband passed away during the evacuation. At one moment, we were running together to cross the Marje square. He made sure to hold my hand and our daughter’s firmly, yet at a moment, he was shot. I stopped feeling his firm hand because he passed away immediately.”

At Jibrin shelter, “I visited the mobile clinic which is supported by the Syrian Family Planning Association, and UNFPA, where I had a medical checkup. Then, they did the ECHO scanning for my baby. I was so happy, the doctor told me that I am pregnant with a boy. I am going to call him Khaled, as his passed away father was called.”

In spite of being crowded, safe delivery is a priority at Al Noor Maternity Hospital

A 28-year-old woman, who had three previous still births and/or neonatal deaths, went to Al Noor hospital in her ninth month of pregnancy complaining of severe pain. After examination, doctors said she was not yet in labor but requested that she return to the hospital after two days. When the woman returned, she was in labor and had a normal delivery. A pediatrician immediately examined the baby and determined that he needed to be sent to the NICU where he stayed in an incubator for five days under intensive care. During that time, the mother visited her baby every day for breastfeeding under doctors’ supervision. The baby was discharged from the hospital six days after birth with the mother promising to return for follow up post natal care. The parents expressed their deep gratitude to Al Noor hospital and medics there for helping them to successfully have their first baby after six years of waiting.

Skills development is possible even in a refugee camp

Khaled is one of the Syrian youth who attends calligraphy classes at the UNFPA/QS youth center in Zaatari camp. His trainers noticed that he became talented very quickly with Arabic calligraphy. Thus, he was enrolled in a high level of training and learned two of the most difficult types of Arabic calligraphy that are Kofi Zohur and Kofi Andalusi.

After seeing and hearing of his success, the administration of the Bahraini school asked Khalid, along with a group of youth from the center to teach some other students the art of calligraphy, starting with the simplest types.

The school administration is now in the process of preparing the needed materials, so Khalid and his colleagues can begin training fellow pupils. The training will take place for a limited time period only.

After the bombing of Jasim Hospital in July 2016, the maternity and NICU wards at Al Noor Maternity Hospital have become overcrowded. UNFPA’s partner Relief International has undertaken renovations to the second floor of the building to increase its capacity to serve mothers and infants. Renovations are expected to be completed by the end of December.
After receiving the medical care she needs, a Syrian woman’s dream of having a third baby realised

Nour, a 22 year-old Syrian woman, arrived in Turkey last year fleeing the ongoing conflict in Aleppo. The mother of two now, Nour got married when she was 16 years old. Nour and her family suffered so much during the armed conflict and suffered even more in their attempts to flee the war and cross border to Turkey.

After two months of their arrival to Turkey, Nour heard from her relatives about IMPR women center in Hayatiharran and the services provided there, especially the reproductive health room. So, she went to the women center to undergo a medical checkup and get advice about menstrual disorders. She previously had C-sections.

After her health condition had improved, Nour returned to the women center and said that she was eager to have a third baby. After two months of follow up, Nour became pregnant. She was so happy because she managed to overcome her fear of not being able to get pregnant again. Nour thanked the women center staff for the care she received.

The reproductive health team also visited her at home to check on her living conditions.

Dignity kits distribution in Izmir, Turkey Photo credit: BUHASDER

Standard operating procedures (SOPs) on sexual and gender-based violence and WGSS are finalised and ready to be distributed among refugees in January, 2017. Training and workshopson both SOPs will be provided throughout the first quarter of 2017- UNFPA Turkey.

UNFPA took part in the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) working group meeting in Ankara, Turkey, where participants discussed future cooperation on data management and sharing, in addition to the group’s membership.

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

UNFPA participated in sessions about gender-based violence and reproductive rights in a workshop organised by the American Bar Association about “Women, Migration and War” in Ankara.

UNFPA chaired in the SGBV working group meetings

UNFPA in coordination with the reproductive health working group organised a workshop to finalise the midwifery skills enhancement strategy.

UNFPA attended the Jordan health donors’ coordination group meeting.

UNFPA chaired the reproductive health sub-working group meeting and discussed the 2017 work plan.

UNFPA participated in the community task force and nutrition sub-working group meetings as part of inter-sector coordination mechanism.

UNFPA chaired the reproductive health coordination meeting in Zaatri refugee camp and shared the final revised reproductive health card with all members to be used for women and girls attending the reproductive health clinics.

UNFPA Jordan has received 3 million Euros from the European Commission (ECHO) for continuation of life-saving comprehensive reproductive health services for Syrian refugees in camps and host communities in Jordan.

UNFPA Jordan has also received $2.1 million from the Government of Sweden to respond to Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the Syrian crises for a period of two years. In addition the Government of Canada will contribute $ 4.6 million for UNFPA’s humanitarian response programme in Jordan for a period of three years.

UNFPA attended the cross border task force (CBTF) and Syrian concerned staff is expected to be allowed to enter Jordan for capacity-building purposes.

UNFPA took part in a meeting with health sector actors to carry out a full mapping of partners and support packages at all health facilities in Daraa, Quneitra and parts of Rural Damascus in Syria.
**COORDINATION & CAPACITY BUILDING**

**LEBANON**

As part of the 16 days of activism campaign, women, men and youth marched throughout the city of Jezzine in Lebanon calling for an end of GBV and early marriage. Photo credit: RET Liban

UNFPA co-chaired the monthly national SGBV task force meeting where findings of the inter-agency first legal SGBV roundtable were discussed.

UNFPA led the national GBV information management system steering committee meeting, where the 2016 trends were discussed and analyzed and a fact sheet on domestic and intimate partner violence were issued.

UNFPA and UNHCR chaired the national case management working group meeting, where modalities to track some indicators related to case management at inter-agency level were discussed and agreed-upon.

**CHALLENGES**

**EGYPT**

Egyptian and Syrian youth take part in one of Y-PEER activity in Cairo. Egypt. Photo credit: UNFPA Egypt

Number of women and girls attending activities dropped due to the weather condition that made it difficult on them to visit the women and girls safe spaces.

**TURKEY**

Economic problems faced by Syrian refugees still hinder them from reaching or participating in activities.

The security threat outside the borders of Turkey has had an indirect negative impact on the on-going programme.

The language barrier is still limiting access to some of the services especially in the field of health (lack of Arabic speaking psychologists, social workers, doctors, etc.).

**TURKEY-cross border**

Insecurity remains the top challenge that hinders proper project implementation and beneficiary accessibility.

**LEBANON**

Difficulties are faced in identifying male youth to take part in planned activities as most of them have full time job.

**JORDAN- cross border**

Movie screening in Breiqa camp in Syria. Photo credit: UNFPA Jordan

"I've started to look forward to Mondays to come to the center and watch a movie," said one woman at a Al Nasiriyeh woman and girls safe space operated by Relief International.

Service providers inside of Syria continue to operate under extreme security risks.

Due to cold weather conditions, the number of women and girls attending activities at WGSS has dropped.

The shifting security situation and fluidity of the conflict require tremendous pre-positioning and preparedness. UNFPA is working with its partners to prepare for anticipated escalation in conflicts in southern Syria in the coming months by sending stock across the border in Daraa and Quneitra.

**SYRIA**

Cold weather coupled with severe shortage of water and interrupted electricity in Damascus affects the health of all people including women and youth.

Service providers and affected people including women are unable to access the services.
Statement attributable to UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

In the midst of the painstaking efforts to evacuate civilians and rebels from besieged eastern Aleppo, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is concerned about the women, girls and young people who are in urgent need of protection and assistance.

There are an estimated 40,000 internally displaced people, out of which an estimated 6,000 are women of reproductive age, including nearly 2,000 who are pregnant or lactating. A major concern is to make sure women and girls are shielded from violence, and have access to basic needs, including hygiene items that are often neglected in emergency settings.

The UN is urging all parties to take all necessary measures to allow the safe resumption of evacuations of the wounded and civilians because a large number of vulnerable people, including the wounded, women and children, are in desperate conditions.

UNFPA staff are on the ground in Syria, working with courageous colleagues of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the Syrian Family Planning Association, and a number of other local partners to ensure that women, particularly those of childbearing age, receive the medical and health services they need. UNFPA plays a lead role in ensuring that women who have survived violence receive the medical and psychosocial care that will help them overcome their trauma.

I would like to recognize the efforts of our colleagues and partners in extending support to women, girls and the vulnerable. Their commitment and courage have made it possible for UNFPA to fulfill its obligations and mandate on the ground in such a high-risk situation. My colleagues have stepped up their capacity to respond to the overwhelming scale of this emergency, using all possible means to reach people in Aleppo and in the Aleppo and Idleb countryside, where some of the evacuated people are being transported.

UNFPA firmly reiterates that under international humanitarian law, hospitals and medical structures, vehicles and personnel should not be targeted. We call on all parties to spare civilians and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and aid workers, from attacks and to allow immediate humanitarian access without restrictions.

Photo credit: UNFPA Syria

Statement attributable to UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

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

DONORS & PARTNERS

UNFPA IS GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING DONORS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE SYRIA CRISIS: Australia, Canada, Denmark, European Commission, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Norway, OCHA/CERF, Saudi Fund for Development, United States, United Kingdom, UNDP.

Private sector: MBC

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS IN SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC: Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSA), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Syrian Family Planning Association (SFPA), Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) IN LEBANON: Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Social Affairs, Lebanese Family Planning Association, Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Humedica, Makhzoumi Foundation, Amel Association, International Medical Corps and Caritas Lebanon, KAFA (“Enough Violence and Exploitation”), Akkarouna, INTERSOS, SHEILD, LOST, Heartland Alliance, Makassed Primary Health Care Centres, Mazloum Hospital and International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

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

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

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

IN TURKEY: The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) of the Prime Ministry of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), and Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Family and Social Polices (MoFSP), Harran University in Sanliurfa, NGOs including the International Middle East Peace Research Centre (IMPR), KAMER, TOG, RET International, HÜKSAM, ASAM, BUHASDER.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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

RELEVANT RESOURCES

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