RESPONDING TO CRISIS
BUILDING PEACE AND RESILIENCE

Madina Moussa lost everything fleeing conflict in Syria. But she has found new purpose as a protection specialist who assists and empowers other women and girls in refugee camps in Iraq.
THROUGH A SERIES OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NOW HAS A WELL-DEFINED GLOBAL AGENDA FOR WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY. Towards deepening its implementation, UN Women opens doors for women to participate in peace processes, define peace on their terms and claim justice, including for sexual violence during war. Where crisis strikes, whether sparked by conflict or natural disasters, UN Women is transforming the United Nations humanitarian system so that response and recovery efforts move from being gender-blind to gender-focused. New services act on women’s distinct needs, such as for health care and skills training. Partnerships with women’s organizations and national authorities also factor gender perspectives into plans to anticipate and manage disaster risks and recovery.

CUTTING THE ROOTS OF CONFLICT

Working closely with other UN organizations engaged in the peace process in SOUTH SUDAN, UN Women convened women from across the country to prepare for a national dialogue to strengthen post-conflict reconstruction. The process spotlighted women’s concerns about insecurity and economic hardship, and developed their capacities as advocates. Other support helped women engage in mediation and provide gender analysis to peace talks. One significant result was an agreement to raise the quota for women in political leadership and public sector decision-making positions from 25 per cent to 35 per cent. In neighbouring SUDAN, UN Women equipped 3,000 women in five states of Darfur with the additional skills they needed to participate effectively as leaders and peacemakers in regional peace negotiations. Outreach to widely respected women religious figures has influenced communities to accept women’s new roles in local and state administrations. UN Women and UNDP have collaborated in bringing more women into reconciliation and justice commissions; by 2018, their share of seats had risen from near zero to a third.

Across ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, UN Women has advocated for empowering women to prevent violent extremism as a regional priority. Programmes in a number of countries have provided evidence for how effective women can be in pushing back against radicalism and leading the call for more peaceful societies. In 2018, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations adopted its first Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, with a call for empowering women as leaders in urging moderation and tolerance.

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UPHOLDING RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

UN Women has deployed experts on investigating sexual and gender-based violence to the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on SYRIA, which operates under the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In 2018, the commission issued its first report documenting widespread rape, forced marriages, sexual slavery and beatings for violating religious law, including cases that qualify as international crimes. The findings lay the foundation for prosecuting perpetrators and providing justice to survivors.

Working with national authorities, women’s organizations and OHCHR in COLOMBIA, UN Women helped pioneer new protections for women leaders and human rights defenders, including tighter security protocols, that are part of upholding Colombia’s Peace Agreement.

EMBEDDING GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Rohingya women fleeing insecurity in Myanmar have sought safety in refugee camps in BANGLADESH. Towards ensuring that they are fully protected there, UN Women has trained more than 100 police on reporting cases of gender-based violence, collecting forensic evidence, and applying interview techniques that respect the rights and dignity of survivors. In one camp, a Women and Children’s Desk in the police station provides a separate place for women to securely report violations. New space for women police officers allows them to stay overnight to provide 24-hour services. Women’s centres, set up by UN Women, provide essential services as well as training on life and vocational skills and community leadership.

In responding to the crisis in SYRIA, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for 2019-2020 brings together humanitarian and development actions for Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It addresses immediate vulnerabilities as well as the longer-term resilience of both refugee and host communities. UN Women has led efforts to incorporate women’s rights and needs in all elements.
of developing and implementing the plan, including through a strong emphasis on essential services, protection mechanisms and economic empowerment. The process has drawn heavily on assessments of the status of Syrian women and girls across the region. Through interviews with nearly 1,300 Syrian women in seven cities, an assessment in Turkey, for example, revealed often dire struggles to secure housing, overcome language barriers and find employment.

In Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, an ongoing partnership with the European Union has emphasized building women’s resilience through addressing both violence and economic vulnerability. Since its start in February 2018, the programme has reached over 16,000 Syrian refugees and host community nationals, mostly women, through a range of services including cash-for-work programmes, job and livelihood training, protection referrals, psychosocial counselling, legal aid and social cohesion activities.

As migrant and refugee women and girls have flowed over the borders of Venezuela, UN Women has helped destination countries respond to their needs. In Brazil, with UNFPA and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Women convened a team providing life-saving psychosocial support, legal advice and paralegal services to migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. With the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR, UN Women set up a cash transfer system that mitigates desperate coping strategies that could expose women to sexual exploitation and trafficking. Five UN organizations have jointly created women’s empowerment hubs where women can learn about their rights safely, join safety networks, and define ways to prevent and act on risks that they face. In Ecuador, where migrants are concentrated on the northern border, gender-disaggregated data are being developed to better capture risks of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, safe houses operate for survivors of gender-based violence, and police and military personnel have been trained on gender-based violence, human rights and sexual exploitation.

Several Pacific Island States suffered devastating natural disasters in 2018. The tropical cyclone that struck Tonga affected 75 per cent of the population. In Vanuatu, high-risk volcanic activity prompted evacuation of the entire population of Ambae island. In both cases, UN Women mobilized experts on gender to deliver health packs and dignity kits meeting women’s needs, along with assistance for survivors of gender-based violence. In the highlands of Papua New Guinea, about 1,000 women in communities affected by an earthquake accessed essential support services through community centres run by UN Women. SMS blasts reached 58,000 individuals with messages related to protection from gender-based violence.

UN Women issued the updated Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action in 2018. Training based on the handbook has reached frontline humanitarian practitioners in over 40 different agencies in 43 countries.
BUILDING RESILIENCE, REDUCING RISKS

THE SOLOMON ISLANDS IS MOBILIZING WOMEN TO PREPARE FOR DISASTER RISKS LINKED TO CLIMATE CHANGE.

In UKRAINE, conflict has caused social support services in many areas to collapse, leaving women to care for the elderly, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable family members. This limits employment opportunities and involvement in community affairs, and erodes women’s resilience to the crisis. Through UN Women, women in 20 communities have learned skills to advocate with local authorities for services that respond to women’s needs. The process brings together women displaced by turmoil with those in host communities, helping to forge relationships and overcome discrimination in access to local decision-making and support.

At the 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction, Asian governments committed to giving women leading roles in reducing natural disaster risks. Successful advocacy by UN Women, civil society groups and other United Nations organizations also advanced agreement on improved collection of data broken down by sex, age and disability; steps to stem gender-based violence during crises; and measures to ensure the continuity of sexual and reproductive health services.

Conference outcomes will help the region implement the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, a major global agreement stipulating targets and priorities to prevent new, and reduce existing, disaster risks. Joint action by UN Women, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the SOLOMON ISLANDS is already tackling gender inequalities in climate risks through supporting new measures in disaster-related plans and budgets, and mobilizing women in communities around disaster preparedness.

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UGANDA TODAY HOSTS OVER A MILLION REFUGEES, including more than 800,000 who have fled over the border with South Sudan. In the Bidibidi refugee settlement in northwestern Uganda, 87 per cent of the residents are women and children. The trauma of what they have experienced is always present in their minds.

Many women don’t know if they can ever return home. And even as they have left conflict behind, they continue to face violations such as forced marriages and rape. Vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that women have little say in decisions about the settlement, since men dominate 90 per cent of leadership positions.

The situation could be one of perpetual crisis, where well-being steadily declines, rights are eroded and recovery remains impossible. But that’s where UN Women’s flagship Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) programme steps in. It couples immediate life-saving responses with measures to build self-reliance and resilience so that women can improve their prospects now and into the future.

In 2018, through LEAP, UN Women assisted nearly 29,000 South Sudanese refugees as well as the members of communities that host them. Worldwide, LEAP operated in 33 countries reaching 235,000 women and girls.

Coordinated activities by UN and other humanitarian actors, and the engagement and empowerment of local women’s groups allows the programme to operate on the multiple fronts required to assist women caught in complex, long-term crises. Women start on the road to recovery through psychosocial support. They learn skills to earn income, such as through vocational training, and access start-up funds to launch small businesses. In healing themselves and providing for their families, they gain confidence and hope, and start to play more visible public roles, including as leaders of their communities.

Important protections for women and girls come through community dialogues aimed at preventing domestic violence and child marriage. The programme also provides assistance to respond to gender-based violence, including through emergency legal assistance that acts as both a response and a deterrent. In Bidibidi and other refugee settlements, an increased presence of lawyers and paralegals is a constant reminder to potential perpetrators that there is no place to hide.