UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment
Case Study Collection

Case Study Overview

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<th>Building Resilience and Dignity in Refugee Settings</th>
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<td>Funded by</td>
<td>Governments of Finland, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands Korea and Japan.</td>
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Abstract

Deemed “the great tragedy of this century” by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Syria crisis is now extending into its sixth year. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, Syrian refugees living in Jordan have experienced continuous shocks, pushing them into destitution. The majority of these refugees are now living in poverty, and are likely to stay poor in the future, with added psychological and financial stresses that compound what they are already facing.\(^1\) World Food Programme data highlights that at least 85% per cent of refugees are extremely or very vulnerable, with needs being highest in northern and central governorates\(^2\). Syrian refugee female-headed households are the group most vulnerable to food insecurity, with 43% of female-headed households living independently from male-headed households suffering from extreme food insecurity. Refugee families report increased debt and dependency on humanitarian assistance or reliance upon negative coping strategies. In Zaatari camp 50 per cent of the camp population is female, and 80 per cent are women and children. Further, one in five households are headed by women.

The main source of income for refugees in camp settings in Jordan is cash for work (C4W) programmes. Men fill approximately 76 per cent of the total C4W opportunities while women fill around 24 per cent. This lack of opportunities for women has a direct impact on household wealth and wellbeing.

UN Women launched its support for Syrian refugees in Jordan in November 2012 when it opened its first center in Za’atari. UN Women implements a multi-sectoral programme in the camp providing services, skills and protection through the management of three women- and girl-focused safe spaces. Known as ‘Oases for Women and Girls’, these facilitate Syrian women’s increased access to self-reliance opportunities and provide a space for educational, recreational and psychosocial

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activities. Currently, the three operational safe space centers provide a total of 200 C4W opportunities per day, with funds to scale this up to 400 per day in August 2016. The cash for work opportunities facilitate food insecure women in the camp to both strengthen their skills and contribute to the camp economy through the production of school uniforms, comprehensive maternal kits and healthy school meals for school aged children.

This livelihoods work is tagged with protection referral services, day care services, awareness raising on key issues such as gender based violence, child protection, and maternal and reproductive health, and basic education support. For adolescent boys and girls the spaces offer social space through drama, dance and theatre. The spaces are also rolling out a programme of engagement with men – the #HeforShe dialogues – to build a cadre of men to serve as gender and GBV champions in the camp. Supporting all of this is an on-going initiative to support women’s representation and leadership in the camp. This includes the formation and support to women’s committees who serve as women’s representatives in the camp, and a structured 2 year intervention to support women’s civic engagement in the camp.

This work is being directly implemented by UN Women and in close partnership with UNICEF, UNFPA, UNHCR and WFP. The programme costs roughly $1.3m per year and is being upgraded to Azraq camp.

Problems Being Addressed
Syrian crises now extending into its sixth year. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, more than 7.6 million Syrians have become displaced internally and over 4.1 million have fled to neighboring countries. Of the latter, around 1.4 million are estimated to reside in Jordan, where 628,887 are registered with UNHCR. Refugees have left their homes with very little, and they have since coped by liquidating their belongings, selling assets still in Syria (such as land), relying on humanitarian assistance and finding opportunities to earn an income, mostly through the informal economy. With their problems compounded by price inflation, scarce resources and dwindling international assistance, many refugees are increasingly turning to negative coping mechanisms – such as reducing food intake or relying on child labour – to deal with life’s demands. Further challenges include increasing social tensions between refugees and Jordan’s hosting communities, who perceive refugees as worsening existing social challenges such as unemployment and overcrowded social services.

While 85% of refugee live outside of camp settings, Jordan hosts a number of refugee camps with the largest being Za’atari camp (population of roughly 80,000 people), followed by Azraq camp (current population of around 40,000 people). Za’atari, which is managed by the Government of Jordan with the support of UNHCR, is the largest of the Syrian refugee camps. Located in the northern governorate of Mafrak, the camp currently hosts 79,333 Syrian refugees. August 2015 data shows that 50 per cent of the camp population is female, and 80 per cent are women and children. Further, one in five households are headed by women.
Within camp settings, there are very few livelihood opportunities and of those very few engage women. Indicative of this, in Za’atari camp roughly 6000 cash for work opportunities are provided per day – with women accessing only between 22-24% of them.3 This lack of livelihood opportunities has a knock on impact on food security, as can be seen in Azraq camp – where there are only on average 400 cash for work opportunities provided across the camp per day.4 The 2015 Comprehensive Food Security Monitoring Exercise (CFSME) undertaken by REACH and WFP showed that refugees living in Azraq refugee camp currently have similar levels of food insecurity to those living in host communities (85%) as well as much higher levels of food insecurity in comparison to Za’atari refugee camp. Overall, just 13% of households in Azraq camp are recorded as food secure, with households headed by single females, including widows, and those with high dependency ratios considered among the most vulnerable.

Compounding issues of food security, violence against women is widely accepted and prevalent. Partner data highlights that within the Syrian refugee population domestic violence is increasing and initial UN Women monitoring shows that transaction sex as a result of food insecurity and growing vulnerability between female refugees and interlocutors – including aid workers and landlords, is a serious concern.5 There are also trends of increased trafficking of young Syrian women into forced marriage with foreign nationals and evidence that young Syrian women are facing a heightened risk of early marriage within Jordan as households seek to lessen their economic burden. A 2014 UNICEF study shows an increased rate of early marriages out of those registered from 13 per cent in 2011 to 25 per cent in 2013.6

Within Za’atari – and to a much lesser extent Azraq camp, a number of organizations are providing self-reliance and resilience opportunities for Syrians through cash for work (C4W) programming. C4W offers skilled and unskilled volunteer opportunities, usually following a rotation system, in exchange for monetary stipends. These programmes are vital not only because they provide one of only two options for refugees to work within the camp but also because they enable refugees to identify their own needs and priorities and have a greater sense of dignity and purpose. C4W opportunities allow refugee households to have more control over how they rebuild their lives and, in the process, help restore self-esteem. Access to C4W opportunities is limited inside the camp, however, as less than 5 per cent of the population has access to the programmes. The opportunities are varied and include positions in education, training, outreach, protection referral, waste management and security. For women beneficiaries, fields of work include tailoring, handicrafts, education, childcare, cleaning, solid waste management, and community mobilization.

Approach and Implementation
UN Women launched its support for Syrian refugees in Jordan in November 2012 when it opened its first center in Za’atari. UN Women implements a multi-sectoral programme in the camp providing services, skills and protection through the management of three women- and girl-focused safe spaces. Known as ‘Oases for Women and Girls’, these facilitate Syrian women’s increased access to self-reliance opportunities and provide a space for educational, recreational and psychosocial activities. The components of UN Women’s programmes in Za’atari include:

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4 Data provided by Azraq camp authorities
5 UN Women report on this issue forthcoming.
1. Self-reliance opportunities through C4W that link Syrian refugees to the camp-based economy.

2. Life skills classes include literacy classes (Arabic, English, computer), art classes (drawing, mosaic, psychodrama, dance), as well as awareness-raising sessions on issues related to rights, hygiene, camp services, legal information, reproductive health, sexual and gender-based violence and other protection-related concerns. Day care services are also offered.

3. A micro medical fund was launched in March 2015 to help refugees working with UN Women in Zaatari to obtain medical support for cases that cannot be treated within the camp or through UNHCR support.

4. Hosting support to two Syrian women’s committee comprising of 22 women, who live in 10 districts in Zaatari, serves as an interlocutor between the community and service providers and decision makers within the camp. One committee focuses on youth engagement and both committees serve to bolster women’s representation and support women to serve as leaders in their communities.

5. Protection referral services are provided within UN Women’s safe spaces. Program staff, beneficiaries and members from the voluntary protection network identify protection cases, which are then brought to the attention of site managers.

6. #HeforShe dialogues engaging men in long term dialogues to build a cadre of men serving as gender equality champions.

In addition to meeting their basic need this programme aims to support women to have a holistic skills set they are able to utilize for their return to Syria – in anticipation of the conflict ending.

UN Women directly implements the project, hiring social workers to run the range of interventions provided. Items produced through the cash for work are distributed in the camp free of charge through UNICEF and WFP. UN Women’s ‘Oasis 3’ is run in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), with WFP responsible for procuring the raw food materials and monitoring the quality of the healthy school meals made, and their distribution to Ministry of Education schools in the camp.

Given the context and the lack of opportunities, challenges are many. The people enrolled in the cash for work programme rotate on an annual basis, which can be a challenging personal experience for the refugees who have come to rely on the space and support. Moreover, the competition for the positions is very high. In addition, the intervention is based on continued donor funds to support the cash assistance provided, and therefore is unsustainable as it currently is implemented in the absence of donor funds. At its base cash for work is a very imperfect employment modality for reasons described above and because it does not meet ‘decent’ standards of work – particularly in terms of security and benefits. However in contexts where refugees can not legally work or form business – such has been the case in Jordan, it is a critical intervention to allow the continuation of work, skills building and sense of normalcy. The regulatory environment in Jordan is slowly changing and as this changes UN Women is working to transition cash for work opportunities into sustainable jobs and business through – for example – the formation of cooperatives and supporting these cooperatives to form direct procurement relationships with service providers including humanitarian aid agencies and the Government of Jordan.

Results

UN Women runs three spaces which serve on average 16,000 primarily women per year through its services. To date close to 600 women and men (roughly 87% are women) have benefited from cash for work opportunities – providing additional incomes to 3420 people, 3000 women, men, boys and girls have benefited from educational support per year, roughly 150 women benefit from protection referrals per month, 300 children are enrolled in day care services per month and each week 10,000 healthy school meals are being distributed, with 1500 comprehensive maternal kits and 4000 school uniforms
distributed per year. The comprehensive maternal kits are distributed after new families complete new born immunisations and breast feeding classes. To date 180 men are enrolled in the #HeforShe programming.

Isolation and boredom are key challenges facing women and girls in Za’atari. Their key stressors also include weak familial and social networks, difficult living conditions and inadequate services. The provision of economic empowerment, access to public spaces and engagement with their peers is instrumental in breaking this isolation. Programme participants and beneficiaries reported that they utilize the Oases to overcome potentially tense relations and to be among people they can relate to. They are able to share problems with each other, think through solutions and temporarily escape their worries. In this way, the Oases are means and markers of social connectedness and psychosocial support for the refugees. Women report an increased feeling of safety, due in part to the systematic changes that the camp has undergone and to strengthened social networks.

Quantitatively, 91% of women enrolled in the programme interviewed by an independent project monitor stated that the safe spaces help them recover self-esteem and their independent sense of identity, while monitoring demonstrates that engagement in the programme has led to a marked decrease in domestic violence – a reported 20% decrease – amongst the beneficiary population, with the opportunity to leave the home and financial income reported as the primary reason for this reduction. Respondents reported feeling increasingly safe though women and girls reported systemic and widespread sexual harassment, hindering their ability to access public space. Moreover, beneficiaries enrolled in the programme experienced an – on average, 1450% increase in their monthly salaries, with 70% of the spending used for food diversity and 20% on household hygiene. The findings validate the underlying programme rationale: that increasing women’s engagement in the economy not only results in economic empowerment, but also in social, cultural and political empowerment.

This initiative has expanded each year since 2012 and is continuing to expand. These types of holistic interventions targeting women are essential to meet their varied challenges of displacement.

Links for Further Information

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*Disclaimer: The case studies are written by implementing organizations. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Panel members.*