

Follow-up assessment on gendered realities in displacement:

Iraq



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Summary

Now in its eleventh year, the Syrian refugee crisis remains the largest in the world, with deteriorating conditions for the more than 5.5 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. In Lebanon, severe economic crisis and COVID-19 have caused hardships for both the host population and the 840,000 Syrian refugees in the country.

Women and girls (who make up 52% or 430,000 of Syrians in Lebanon), are disproportionately and differently impacted by humanitarian crisis, but the drivers and consequences of this is not always well understood. This report presents the findings and recommendations from a quantitative survey of 564 Syrian refugee women in Lebanon about the gendered realities of displacement. The survey covered Syrian refugee women's role, responsibilities and experiences in displacement, particularly in the past two years dominated by COVID-19 and economic crises. The questions covered Syrian refugee women's employment and economic situation, gendered impacts of coping strategies, changes in refugee women's household roles and responsibilities, access to services, relationship with host communities, gender-based violence, and the impact of COVID-19.

ECONOMIC SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

Only a small minority of Syrian women in KR-I have income-earning employment.

While there are pressures on women who previously stayed at home to seek paid employment outside the house to help the family make ends meet, there are fewer job opportunities available in Iraq's crisis-hit economy. Some focus group participants found that living in displacement had led to women having more freedoms to go outside their houses and work, while others felt little had changed.

Focus group participants differed on whether attitudes to women as earners had changed among the Syrian refugee community, but most focused on the criticisms and negative comments working women received. Criticisms revolved around women taking 'shameful jobs,' such as working in shops or restaurants or working at night, and neglecting children and housework. Some noted that people found it wrong that women work if male household members are jobless.

The outlook of husbands and other male household members is central to whether a women's role as earner is accepted. Across the focus groups, women expressed a wish for quality affordable childcare and saw this issue as a major obstacle for women to enter the workforce.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

All focus group participants stated that their economic situation had worsened and that they and their households had made sacrifices, ranging from buying cheaper food (no meat and fruit) to taking children out of school, due to the pandemic.

Some focus group participants stated that women and girls had to make heavier sacrifices, since that was expected from the traditional role of women in the family. Others felt that men and women were making similar levels of sacrifices.

The pandemic's impact on schooling for Syrian refugee children has been severe, as confirmed both by the 2021 MSNA and in focus groups.

All focus groups agreed that COVID-19 restrictions and economic pressures had led to increased household tensions. Many noted that having husbands and male household members locked down at home without work led to increased violence.

While only 8% of the mainly male respondents to the 2021 MSNA described "domestic problems such as fights with spouse" as an important manifestation of stress due to COVID-19, this was a core concern among the women in the focus groups. This may point to a possible gender bias in how struggles and stress is perceived within households, with the wellbeing of women less noticed.

Focus group participants were generally aware of the existence of psycho-social support services, but many found them hard to access. It was highlighted that women's protection hotlines were always busy or calls not answered.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Focus group participants stated that some women may contribute towards decisions made by male household members, especially on issues related to children or housekeeping, but most did not have responsibility for making household decisions.

Widows and working women have more decision-making power than homemakers, at times being the leading decision maker in the household. However, two focus-group participants who were the sole earners in their households stated that they only contributed to decisions and that their views came second to those of male household members.

Focus group participants differed in their views on whether women's status had changed. Many stated that culture and gender norms ensured that change was minimal. Others found that women's roles changed when they became earners, and they sometimes received more respect and authority, but that this came with many challenges. Foremost among these were the double workload falling on women in paid employment and a sense of guilt felt over not being sufficiently present for their children.

A conclusion across the focus groups was that while women's roles were changing, those of male household members were not, and this was leading to enormous pressures and stresses on women.

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread, but the focus group responses show that women can differ in their understanding of what GBV entails. Some participants mentioned husbands routinely beating their wives in response to direct questions about

tensions in households, but would then later on say that GBV is not a problem. This may be an example of normalisation of domestic violence, rendering it less visible in research and statistics.

Participants in focus groups within camps showed a greater awareness of all kinds of GBV, and were aware of and using support services for women that existed in the camps.

Most focus group participants stated that incidents of GBV would not usually be reported, unless it was very serious. If the perpetrator was a person in a role of authority, reporting was particularly unlikely and punishment of the perpetrator even less so. The risk of reporting sexual violence is higher than for other forms of violence, with obstacles to reporting ranging from blaming the victim to killing survivors of sexual violence for 'shaming' the family.

When asked specifically about sexual violence, focus group participants agreed that it existed and that the risk existed at home, on the street and in the workplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report supports several recommendations listed here and described in more detail in the report's conclusion:

- Increase women's economic empowerment interventions that engage both individuals and households: Interventions should particularly engage men in the household to build their support for women's economic activities and address the gender-normative barriers within households that hinder women's ability to be economically active. Efforts to influence wider perceptions and gendered social norms that confine women and prevent them from seeking employment are also central. Engaging households could reduce the risk that programmes aimed at expanding female economic and decision-making roles contributes to double work and increased mental strain for women, increased tension within households and increasing risks of physical harm to women and girls.
- Ensure that programmes are well targeted to avert harmful coping strategies, particularly taking children out of school. Economic factors are the most-cited reason for removing children from school, so targeted support to improve affordability of transport and learning materials could help address this directly.
- Ensure that the question of quality and affordable child-care support is considered for

all livelihoods and economic empowerment interventions for Syrian refugee women.

- **Provide interventions that provide opportunities for home-based businesses**, to support women would find it difficult to commit to work outside of their homes.
- Develop enhanced referral and reporting assistance for Syrian GBV survivors, as these women are often reluctant to report incidents to authorities, and there are significant risks to those who report.
- Support the establishment of more women-only safe spaces where women in physical danger can seek help, even in times of COVID lockdown. Multi-sector women-only centres would not only provide safe spaces, but also the opportunity to combine protection and empowerment interventions.
- Increase the GBV hotline capacities and access with sufficient funding. The awareness of such services among focus group participants suggests that hotlines can be an important aspect of GBV protection services, but if callers frequently do not get through to a person at the other end of the hotline this undermines the immediate efficiency and long-term trust in this type of service.

Introduction

Now in its eleventh year, the Syrian refugee crisis remains one of the largest in the world. In Syria's neighbouring states, the number of refugees in need of some form of assistance is staggering, with more than 5.5 million Syrian refugees across the region, of whom over 250,000 live in Iraq. Of these, around 120,000, or 47.6%, are women and girls. COVID-19 and economic crisis have worsened economic hardships at a time when many refugee families had already depleted their own resources and savings after years of displacement.

Women and girls are disproportionately and differentially impacted by humanitarian crises. Gender roles and the positionality of women within the structures of the family, community and society keep women and girls from participating equitably in the public sphere. While awareness of this has become commonplace, there is nevertheless a dearth of empirical research focused specifically on the refugee experiences of women and girls. This report, focused on selected challenges affecting Syrian refugee women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), is part of a broader project on the gendered realities of displacement for Syrian refugees conducted in Iraq (KR-I), Jordan and Lebanon. The objective is to better understand the changing nature of gender dynamics, women and girls' roles, responsibilities and experiences in displacement, including their experience of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

The findings in this country report are based entirely on qualitative research through key informant interviews, focus groups, and a review of existing literature and data sets.

The project follows on from research conducted in 2018. The objective is to contribute to evidence-based programming, advocacy and coordination based on a deep commitment to gender ethics and human rights across countries impacted by the Syrian refugee crisis. Putting gender mainstreaming at the forefront of humanitarian and resilience programming can contribute to furthering both women and girls' access to services and women's empowerment.

The report finds that conditions for Syrian refugees in KR-I have deteriorated significantly in the past two years, and COVID-19 restrictions and economic crisis have had an impact across most aspects of Syrian refugee women's lives, from economic pressure and having to resort to negative coping mechanisms (such as taking children out of school and reducing essential food and non-food spending), to increased household tensions and violence, strains on well-being and mental health; and on children's schooling and welfare. While there are signs that women's roles are changing as they take on more responsibilities to contribute to household incomes, the roles and attitudes of other household members are not changing at the same pace, nor are the gender perceptions and norms of the Syrian and Iraqi host communities. This situation adds enormous strain to Syrian refugee women's lives, as focus group respondents in this study make clear.

THEMES AND APPROACH

This country study covers four themes relevant to the gendered realities of displacement:

- Employment, economic security and livelihoods
- Women's role in the household and the community
- Effects of COVID-19 on livelihoods and well-being
- Sexual and gender-based violence.

For each theme, primary qualitative research took place in the form of key informant interviews with UN and NGO stakeholders in Iraq and focus group discussions with Syrian refugee women, combined with a review of relevant literature and the use of existing quantitative datasets, particularly the Multi-Sector Needs Assessments of 2018 and 2021, the 2018 Joint Vulnerability Assessment, and the 2021 Participatory Assessment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers. For each source, the focus whenever the data allowed was on the experiences of women and girl refugees. The report covers the period since 2018, with focus groups and interviews conducted in February and March 2022.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Syrian refugee women

Nine FGDs were conducted with a total of 63 Syrian refugee women. The focus groups covered two themes:

- **Women's employment, coping mechanisms, and decision-making role in the household:** 4 FGDs, 2 in camp and 2 in urban locations, 7 participants in each
- **Well-being and gender-based violence:** 5 FGDs, 3 in camp and 2 in urban locations, 7 participants in each.

The focus groups were facilitated by UNHCR Iraq and its partners in KR-I. The latter recruited participants among their service users and reported the results of the discussions to the research team. The research team is deeply appreciative of the support provided by UNHCR and its partners and grateful to the Syrian women who set aside time and contributed their views to this study.

The focus group participants are not a representative cross-section of the female Syrian refugee population in KR-I. The participants include, for instance, considerably more women heads of household and women in employment than the general refugee population. The number of participants may not enable the study to provide generalisable conclusions. Instead, the findings from the FGDs are used to highlight refugee women's experiences and illustrate – and sometimes challenge – evidence provided from other sources.

Background: The Syrian refugee situation in the Kurdistan region of Iraq

Coming on top of challenging economic conditions and political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a strong adverse impact on Iraq, leading the economy to contract, jobs to disappear and poverty rates to rise. This has impacted on the lives and livelihoods of host communities and refugees alike.

Approximately 250,000 Syrian refugees live in Iraq, almost all of them within three governorates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I). In this setting of economic crisis and decline, the prolonged Syrian refugee crisis has put pressure on Iraqi public services and strained community relations as competition for jobs and scarce resources intensify. Most Syrian refugee households are no longer able to meet their basic needs through income-generating activity. In this situation, traditional gender roles are under strain, as some women have become earners to support the family income. In a setting of household economic worries, rising mental strain and stress, and increased joblessness among refugee men, the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) has increased.

Table 1: Overview of Iraq refugee situation

Syrian refugees living in Iraq, according to gender and camp/non-camp setting ¹			
Total persons of concern / Registered Syrian refugees in Iraq	Total		254,561
	Female		121,753
	Male		132,808
Syrian refugees living in camp versus non-camp settings	In camps	Female	47.439
		Male	48,695
	Urban, semi-urban	Female	74.314
		Male	84.833

Employment and economic security and livelihoods

Summary

Economic security has decreased dramatically for Syrian refugees over the past three years, with most households unable to meet their monthly basic needs.

Only a small minority of Syrian women in KR-I have income-earning employment. The focus groups, which included more women from female-headed households, had a higher rate of women either in employment or having previously been employed.

While there are pressures on women who previously stayed at home to seek paid employment outside the house to help the family make ends meet, there are fewer job opportunities available in Iraq's crisis-hit economy.

Some focus group participants found that living in displacement had led to women having more freedoms to go outside their houses and work, while others felt little had changed.

Focus group participants differed on whether attitudes to women as earners had changed among the Syrian refugee community, but most focused on the criticisms and negative comments working women received. Criticisms revolved around women taking 'shameful jobs' such as working in shops or restaurants or working at night, and neglecting children and housework. Some noted that people found it wrong that women work if male household members are jobless.

The outlook of husbands and other male household members is central to whether a women's role as earner is accepted.

Across the focus groups, women expressed a wish for quality affordable childcare and saw this issue as a major obstacle for women to enter the workforce.

INTRODUCTION

Most surveys and assessments of the employment situation, livelihood opportunities and economic security for Syrian refugees in KR-I are focused on the household level. Data is not always gender disaggregated and respondents who provide answers on behalf of their households are often men. For instance, the 2018 Joint Vulnerability Assessment report² conducted by UNHCR and WFP, which offers insights into employment challenges and opportunities for Syrian refugees in KR-I, does not disaggregate its findings according to gender. In the case of the 2021 Multi Sector Needs Assessment,

ECONOMIC SECURITY HAS DETERIORATED SIGNIFICANTLY FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN KRI SINCE 2018

Livelihoods, employment and economic security have worsened considerably for Syrian refugees in KR-I since 2018. The trend was visible before COVID-19, but accelerated as restrictive measures to contain the pandemic slowed down economic activity and curtailed jobs. The negative trend is clear across published reports and in recent data sets, and confirmed by key informants and focus group participants contributing to this study.

In 2019, before the economic impact of COVID-19, the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) for Syrian refugee households in KR-I noted that Syrians' reliance on non-sustainable, non-employment income to make ends meet left them with little ability to cope with future shocks. The report concluded that "to meet basic household needs and expenditures, households are relying on non-sustainable income sources and negative livelihoods coping strategies, leaving them more vulnerable to economic shocks."

Data from the 2021 MSNA confirms the concerns over vulnerability expressed in the 2019 report. Table 2 below presents a comparison between the two most recent MSNAs, looking at the employment and livelihoods situation in 2018 and 2021 for Syrian refugee households in out-of-camp settings in KR-I.4 The picture is one of clear deterioration in economic security and a rise in poverty.

there are questions specifically about the experience of women refugees, but answers are not necessarily representative of women's perspective, since the vast majority of respondents interviewed are male.³

This section first looks at economic conditions for Syrian refugees in KR-I in general (3.1), before turning to the specific experiences of refugee women, making use of gender-disaggregated data where available, as well as information from focus groups and KIIs.

While in 2018 Syrian refugee households were able to combine employment income with other sources of income to meet their monthly basic expenses, this was no longer the case in 2021 (see Table 2 below). Two key differences in income were notable from the two MSNAs. First, employment income was lower in 2021 than in 2018. Second, and more dramatically, non-employment income slumped – whether it was from loans/debts, support from family, friends and community, NGO or charity assistance, remittances or savings. As a result, despite households significantly lowering their expenditure in 2021 to try to make ends meet, households went from a small monthly surplus between income and expenditure (of IQD 5,000) in 2018 to a large deficit (of IQD 196,000) in 2021.

Table 2 shows a dramatic change in the role of borrowing to supplement employment income. Average household debt was somewhat lower and played a much smaller role in contributing to household income in 2021 compared to 2018. The main source of borrowing in both 2018 and 2021 was family and friends, and the steep drop may suggest that new debt from this source was no longer as available as it had been in 2018. Thus, in 2021, without the ability to borrow, a large gap was left between income and expenditure for Syrian refugee households.

² UNHCR and WFP (2018), Joint Vulnerability Assessment (JVA), link

³ For the data used in this report, 88% of the 2021 MSNA respondents from out-of-camp Syrian refugee households in KR-I were male and only 12% female

⁴ For 2018 data, see UNHCR and IMPACT (2019). Multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) IV of refugees living out of formal camps in the KRI, link. A report of the 2021 data is not yet published, but the data can be accessed here, link.

Table 2: Comparison of average total household income, debt and expenditure for Syrian refugee households in out-of-camp settings in KR-I*

Multi-sector needs assessment	2018	2021
Average monthly income, debt and expenditure (in IQD)		
Average total household expenditure in the 30 days before the interview	700,000	667,525
Average household income from employment in the 30 days before interview	465,000	436,271
Average household income from non-employment sources in the 30 days before the interview	240,000	35,492
Average total household income in the 30 days before the interview	705,000	471,764
Average total household debt (in IQD) at the time of the interview	2,060,000	1,813,409
Percentage of Syrian refugee households in debt (Sulaymaniyah only)	79%	81%
Difference between monthly total income and expenditure (in IDQ)		
Average total household expenditure minus average monthly total income (employment and non-employment) in the 30 days before the interview	+ 5,000	- 195,761

* Data taken from MSNA interviews conducted in 2018 and 2021

The data from the two MSNAs is confirmed by other recently published reports, which emphasise how the vulnerability of refugee households left many unable to weather the economic shock of COVID-19. UNHCR’s 2021 Participatory Assessment of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers notes that “Prior to COVID, income vulnerability was already high, with associated pressures of debt, rent, and access to food and resources”. The assessment found a “continuing negative impact of COVID on financial and food security, access to services, and wellbeing. Lack of livelihood was a constant refrain and linked to critical protection risks”.

Across all recent reports surveying the views of Syrian refugees in KR-I, the number one concern listed by respondents is economic insecurity, and specifically the lack of employment and livelihoods

opportunities. Refugees were struggling to find sufficient employment also before the pandemic, but recent reports, key informants and focus group participants all note that the situation is now much worse. Key informants were careful to note that the situation has also deteriorated for the Iraqi host population. When asked what the effects of COVID have been on refugees’ livelihood, one key informant interviewed from an Iraqi NGO noted simply that “[i]t has affected everyone in host communities”.

A recent study of the impact of COVID-19 on daily wage work among Syrian refugees found that a lack of work and low wages affected refugees across the board and had worsened with the COVID-19 pandemic, with lockdown and movement restrictions resulting in reduced income.

SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

Only a small minority of Syrian refugee women in KR-I have income-earning employment. According to the 2021 MSNA, 4% of out-of-camp households reported having at least one adult female member working, while the equivalent number for men was 91%. The 2021 Iraq Country Chapter of the 3RP notes that women and youth face more difficulties than men to access livelihoods opportunities. The main reasons are qualifications and literacy levels, travel and transportation limitations and traditional gender expectations and responsibilities.

An assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on daily wage work for refugee households (not just Syrian) in Duhok, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah included a short section on gendered impacts. It found that most respondents believed that female and male wage-earners had been equally badly affected by the pandemic, with some of the (male) respondents stating that women were less affected since they are homemakers and do not work. Two

female respondents, on the other hand, stated that women had been worse affected, since the kinds of jobs women tend to have such as working in malls, shops and restaurants, were particularly badly hit by COVID-restrictions leading to the women losing their jobs.

There are also signs that the economic hardships caused by the pandemic have led some refugee women to seek employment for the first time. In four focus groups (two in camp settings and two out-of-camp) discussing women's roles as earners, participants displayed a range of views on, and experiences of, women in the workforce. Of the 28 focus group participants, 9 reported that they were working, 6 said that they used to work but do not work now, and 13 reported that they had never worked. While the sizeable number of women reporting to be working or having worked previously is not representative of the Syrian refugee population, the focus groups offered an opportunity to seek the perspectives of women earners.

Some focus group participants said that the experience of exile had changed attitudes to women working:

“[...] before the war women were more bounded to traditions and there were a lot of prohibitions, after we came to Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the refugee community adapted with some positive sides of the culture here that is giving some freedom to women, and being in need made the men overlook some traditions and extend their boundaries in allowing women to participate in generating income.”

“Back in Afrin women were not allowed to go outside their houses no matter what happens unless they are accompanied with an adult male, but now and here women are working for long hours and helping in generating income”.

But for others, not much had changed:

“[...] only some women started working and participating in generating income, but the culture is ruling the community – even if changes take place it will be very limited”.

Some felt that COVID-19 had forced through some small changes, making women more likely to seek income-generating activities:

“[S]ome of us [women] had to start thinking about more ways to generate income due to the hard conditions that the pandemic created.”

“A lot of kids dropped school to find work, especially girls who started working in factories to make ends meet. Women also worked at night to support their families.”

“Some women headed into hand crafting and making canned jams and pickles to sell from their home”.

The focus groups confirmed the existence of strong cultural and normative constraints on women entering the workforce, but gave some indications that more women have recently been seeking employment out of necessity as household income has dropped. This has not necessarily led to a larger number of Syrian refugee women in the workforce, however. While it

has become more necessary for refugee women to work, there is also reduced opportunity for them to find paid employment, and many have lost their jobs or have had to endure worse working conditions. As one key informant noted:

“There is no economic security. Businesses closed down or downsized and the women were the first to go. Prices have increased and incomes decreased. Employers also have heightened their requirements because of the increase of demands on jobs.” (Key Informant Interview, Iraq)

ARE ATTITUDES TO WOMEN AS EARNERS CHANGING AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEES IN IRAQ?

Participants in four focus groups were asked about the attitudes of household members and the broader refugee community towards women working, including whether they felt that such attitudes had changed in the past three years. Asked how the community reacts to a woman finding employment

and changing her role, and whether there were any negative aspects to the woman becoming an earner in the household, the responses were mixed. Some stated that society is mainly critical and that the household and children suffer when women enter the workforce:

“Society criticizes working women especially during night time. There is also criticism when the woman is working and the men are not”.

Others had a more positive perspective:

“No, there are not [any negative aspects of women working]. The aspects are positive because it enhances the economic situation of the household”.

“Working women are more respected, they created their existence and the society value them because they are independent. A lot of relatives and neighbours changed when they started working”.

Across the focus groups, there was agreement that acceptance of women working depended greatly on where and when they work (this was also reflected in several KIIs): shops, malls, cafeterias, restaurants, and any kind of work at night, were listed by respondents

as seen by the Syrian refugee community as unacceptable. Government jobs are more acceptable, as is working from inside the home:

“It depends on the job and the family, if the job is governmental it is accepted. If the job is in a mall or a supermarket it is a big shame.”

“It depends on where she is working, the place of the job is very sensitive.”

“It depends on the type of the job, there is a stigma around working in cafeterias or restaurants and malls.”

There was also strong agreement that the outlook of husbands and other male household members is central to whether women are accepted as earners,

thus highlighting the patriarchal basis of household decision making:

“Some families prefer to starve than letting a woman in their household participate in the income”

“If the husband is not working, he is less accepting of women in the household doing so”

“Some husbands won’t accept the work of a woman even if they are jobless themselves.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDCARE SERVICES TO SUPPORT WORKING REFUGEE WOMEN

There was uniform agreement among focus group participants that lack of quality and affordable childcare was an obstacle to women working, given the gendered expectations that women are responsible for childcare. This finding is in line with the 2021 **Participatory Assessment of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers** conducted by UNHCR, which listed the lack of reliable and safe

childcare as a top livelihood concern for women. However, in the current situation of huge economic strain on refugee households, childcare services would also need to be low cost, which suggests the need for this to be subsidised by humanitarian actors. In the focus groups, everybody expressed a wish for childcare services, there was a concern that even if they did exist they would be out of reach due to cost:

“There is no childcare services at all. We would like to have child-care services and more job opportunities for women”

“There are not any childcare services inside the camp, no kindergartens, no parks or any playgrounds. We would like to have child-care services”

“There isn’t any childcare services, the children are left home alone if they are old enough, or left with their grandparents or some other close relatives. It would be very helpful if there was but it would be expensive”

“If available it would be expensive, mostly keeping the children with relatives and grandparents to avoid spending more money.”

The availability of quality and affordable childcare services would address some of the key challenges to working refugee women’s well-being and could also contribute to reducing negative attitudes and tensions within households. In the focus groups, many of the negative connotations associated with a

woman becoming an earner in the household related to the gendered notion that a women cannot be a worker and a good mother at the same time, as her time spent at work would mean her children would be neglected:

“It affects negatively on their kids’ behaviour and education. Working women neglect the household and they are deprived from participating in their kids’ lives.”

“There are always negative aspects especially if the women is a mother, leaving children at home alone or at relatives and leaving home for long periods of time is always problematic.

Impact of COVID19-

Summary

Both Syrian refugees and their host communities in KR-I have been severely impacted by COVID-19 and economic crisis.

All focus group participants stated that their economic situation had worsened and that they and their households had made sacrifices, ranging from buying cheaper food (no meat and fruit) to taking children out of school, due to the pandemic.

Some focus group participants stated that women and girls had to make heavier sacrifices, since that was expected from the traditional role of women in the family. Others felt that men and women were making similar levels of sacrifices.

The pandemic's impact on schooling for Syrian refugee children has been severe, as confirmed both by the 2021 MSNA and in focus groups.

All focus groups agreed that COVID-19 restrictions and economic pressures had led to increased household tensions. Many noted that having husbands and male household members locked down at home without work led to increased violence.

While only 8% of the mainly male respondents to the 2021 MSNA described "domestic problems such as fights with spouse" as an important manifestation of stress due to COVID-19, this was a core concern among the women in the focus groups. This may point to a possible gender bias in how struggles and stress is perceived within households, with the wellbeing of women less noticed.

Focus group participants were generally aware of the existence of psycho-social support services, but many mentioned they were hard to access. It was highlighted that women's protection hotlines were always busy or calls not answered.

INTRODUCTION

Iraq has been one of the worst affected countries by COVID-19 in the region, with job and income insecurity on the rise and risks of unemployment and exploitation increased for host populations

“Things were hard and COVID only made it harder”

COVID-19 has impacted on the lives of Syrian refugees in KR-I in almost every aspect of life. This section presents the findings on COVID impacts on employment and income; school enrolment; and girls.

IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT, INCOME AND COPING MECHANISMS

Almost all MSNA 2021 respondents (93%) reported lower household earnings after COVID-19, mainly due to fewer daily labour opportunities (88%). The situation was worse for households living in out-of-camp settings (96% and 93% respectively) than for households living in camps (86% and 79%). Because the MSNA asks questions at the household level, it is not possible to deduct if the earnings of men and women have been similarly impacted.

Turning to the focus groups, several participants said they used to work but no longer did, although it is not possible to say to what extent the changes in job circumstances were related to the pandemic. All respondents, however, agreed that their economic situation had worsened in the past two years. All focus group respondents reported that they and

and refugees alike. A 2020 assessment by the World Bank and UNICEF, found a steep rise in poverty from 20% in 2017 to 31.7% in 2019.

The World Bank and UNHCR found that poverty among Syrian refugees had risen at a similar rate to the host populatio

FGD PARTICIPANT, SULAYMANIYAH

household tensions, stress and well-being, drawing on the primary research done for this study backed up by secondary data sources. The focus is as far as possible on the experience of refugee women and

their household had made sacrifices due to COVID-19 crisis. This included borrowing money; selling jewelry and gold; selling property they own in Syria; cutting expenses through reducing or stopping fruit, meat, and sweets; not buying clothes or makeup; stopping internet connection; neglecting children's requests; and dropping school. The MSNA, as described in section 3 above, bears this out by showing a clear drop in monthly household expenditure between 2018 and 2021.

There were different views on whether there were any gender differences to the sacrifices expected to be made by male and female household members. Of the four focus groups discussing sacrifices, two groups concluded that sacrifices were the same for men and women, while in the other two respondents stated that women and girls were expected to make more sacrifices than men and boys, including girls leaving school:

“Yes, women and girls in the family are always expected to make more sacrifices than the men/boys due to the tradition of the society.”

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING

The effect of the pandemic on children's schooling was brought up by many focus group participants, sometimes in response to direct questions about sacrifices the household had to make due to COVID-19 and economic crises, other times when asked about the most important challenges to wellbeing for the Syrian refugee community in their neighbourhood. In two of the four focus groups that were asked about sacrifices, participants mentioned that children and

especially girls were having to drop out of school due to cost and the need to work. This is confirmed by the 2021 MSNA: Comparison between the 2018 and 2021 MSNA data suggests a significant drop in school enrolment during and after COVID-19, although the pandemic was not necessarily given as the reason for children no longer attending school. Taking Sulaymaniyah (out-of-camp) as an example:

- **In the 2018 MSNA, 77% of children aged 6-11 were reported to be in school**
- **In the 2021 MSNA data, only 55% of children were reported as enrolled in formal basic education, with cost (49%) described as the biggest hindrance to enrolment.**

Other impacts on education were also mentioned. Participants in two focus groups stated that education was insufficient or irregular and listed this as one of the greatest challenges to wellbeing for Syrian refugees in KR-I. A more indirect impact mentioned in two other focus groups, was the household's inability to continue to pay for internet fees, which would affect children's ability to learn from home during lockdown.

These findings are supported by the Participatory Assessment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, which concludes that "[e]ven pre-COVID, low enrolment of refugee children into a KRI parallel education system

was a standing concern. From February 2020, in-person learning closed due to COVID, resulting in roll out of e-learning. Nevertheless, at-home learning added further pressure on families. Refugees repeatedly stressed concerns about out-of-school children."

For all children the Participatory Assessment found that cost, availability, documentation issues, and poor quality were barriers to enrolment. For adolescent girls, respondents were in addition worried about harassment and mixed-gender learning, while for adolescent boys, the main factor was pressure to enter the job market.

IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLD TENSIONS, STRESS AND WELLBEING

Five focus groups were asked questions about household tensions, stress and wellbeing. Responding to the question “thinking about yourself, your family and friends, has wellbeing mostly got better, worse or stayed the same since COVID-19 and pandemic

restrictions began?”, there was general agreement that the pandemic had increased stress and tension within the household:

“Tensions and psychological pressures have increased to a large extent and this has led to a big increase in violence”

“After COVID-19 the camp condition became worse because of financial reason and that lead to increasing domestic violence inside the camp.”

“Psychological stress and pressure and domestic violence have increased.”

Two of the focus groups referred to increasing household tensions due to COVID-19 lockdowns and movement restrictions, such as ‘curfews’ and ‘closure of schools and children staying at home’. Participants

referred to ‘increased stress and conflict in the household’ and restrictions decreasing the refugee’s sense of wellbeing.

“During closures, husbands and children stayed at the small homes which increased stress and conflict among family members”

Domestic tension and violence by male household members was mentioned as a result of pandemic restrictions in three of the focus groups, when asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

on the role of men and women in the household. Men who were no longer able to meet the gendered expectation of being the breadwinner for the family could be angry and frustrated:

“Men sit at home and the problems rose”

“It only made things harder, men and children were home all the time which created tension and pressure on the mothers and men were angry for not being able to provide well and not going outside the home”.

The focus group discussions correspond to some extent with the survey responses on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPPS) in the 2021 MSNA of Syrian refugees in KR-I, but with some important nuances. These may be explained by the fact that most MSNA respondents are male while the focus groups were women-only, which may have created an environment where the tensions and stresses particularly affecting women's wellbeing were brought to the fore. In the MSNA, "financial struggles because of lack of income" was listed as by far the most important manifestation of stress due to COVID-19 (93% of respondents mentioned this). The focus group participants also mentioned financial worries. However, while only 8% of respondents for

the MSNA listed "domestic problems such as fights with spouse" as a manifestation of stress, this was a core concern, together with violence by male members of the household, raised by the women in the focus group discussions. The focus groups are not of a nature or size that enables generalisation, but this may point to a possible gender bias in how struggles and stress is perceived within households, and where the wellbeing of women is less noticed. This was hinted to in two of the focus groups, when asked if women had to make different sacrifices to those of men due to COVID-19 and economic crisis:

"Sacrifices are different. Women are always expected to endure humiliation and violent husbands"

"Women have to endure beating, humiliation and violence for the sake of her children. If the woman is a widow she must sacrifice her whole life to raise her children unlike the man who gets married and lives his life freely."

In the three focus group discussions on wellbeing, the participants were generally aware of services aimed at helping those who struggle with coping with daily tensions, stress and other issues affecting wellbeing. Respondents living in camps mentioned the existence of psycho-social support services. However, many stated that services were not easy to access. Similarly,

respondents in urban areas said they were aware of some services but they all mentioned that these were 'not enough to address their needs'. Two of the focus groups mentioned that women's protection hotlines were always busy or nobody answered. Other services difficult to access included medical care and cash assistance.

"[T]he women's protection hotline is always busy."

"[T]he hotline [...] is always either busy or no one answers."

Women's role in the household

Summary

Syrian refugee women have little decision-making power in the household.

Focus group participants stated that some women may contribute towards decisions made by male household members, especially on issues related to children or housekeeping, but most did not have responsibility for making household decisions.

Widows and working women have more decision-making power than homemakers, at times being the leading decision maker in the household. However, two focus-group participants who were the sole earners in their households stated that they only contributed to decisions and that their views came second to those of male household members.

Focus group participants differed in their views on whether women's status had changed. Many stated that culture and tradition ensured that change was minimal.

Others found that women's roles changed when they became earners, and they sometimes received more respect and authority, but that this came with many challenges. Foremost among these were the double workload falling on women in paid employment and a sense of guilt felt over not being sufficiently present for their children.

A conclusion across the focus groups was that while women's roles were changing, those of male household members were not, and this was leading to enormous pressures and stresses on women.

Introduction

The participants in four focus groups were asked a series of questions around women's decision-making role in the household, and the extent to which this role has changed in recent years, particularly if women have become earners who contribute income to the household.

Before setting out the responses from the four focus groups, it is important to note that the respondents are not representative of the Syrian refugee population in KR-I. More of the women reported themselves or a female relative to be the head of the household and more stated that they were working outside the home than

the demographic data for the MSNA suggests – which found only 2% of households to be female-headed and

4% of households to have at least one female adult member working.

Women's decision-making role in the household remains limited.

Focus group respondents generally felt that Syrian refugee women have little decision-making power in the household. Some women play a part in and contribute towards decisions made by male household members, but most are not responsible for making decisions regarding the household. Key points from the discussions included:

- Widows and working women have more decision-

making power than homemakers, sometimes being the leading decision maker in the household

- Two working women stated that they contributed to decisions, but their views came second to husbands or eldest sons, even though they were the only providers of income to the household
- Women who did not work stated that their decision-making role is participatory and is limited to issues around housekeeping, parenting, and schooling
- There was consensus that women were most likely to have a role contributing to decisions relating to their children and housekeeping expenses and were not likely to contribute to decisions on finances and money.

When asked if the decision-making roles of men and women in their household had changed in the last three years, many replied that culture and gender norms posed strong restrictions on how much women's role can change:

“Not much, only some women started working and participating in generating income, even if changes take place it will be very limited.”

“...culture is hard to change, the fact that the male is the dominant, women will most likely avoid creating tension in their households.”

“Women will always be the part that tolerates the most, and sacrifices the most in every aspects to

avoid tension and problems inside the household”.

Others pointed out that the responsibilities of women have in fact changed a lot, but that this has not affected decision-making roles in the household:

“Our lives as refugees have changed a lot. The roles of men have not changed at all.”

Some again found that refugee women had increased the boundaries of their lives and their decision-making roles:

“Yes, to some extent, before the war women were more bound to traditions and there were a lot of prohibitions, after we came to KRI the refugee community adapted with some positive sides of the culture here that is giving some freedom to women, and being in need made the men overlook some traditions and extend their boundaries in allowing women to participate in generating income.”

When women become earners their role changes, but new challenges emerge

Asked whether becoming an earner changed a woman's role in the household and community, focus group respondents differed in their views. Most

found that becoming an earner increased a woman's freedom, decision-making power and respect in the household and community.

“Working women are more respected, they created their existence and the society value them because they are independent. A lot of relatives and neighbours changed when they started working.”

However, and somewhat contradictory, community stigma and criticism were also strongly connected to working women, as Section 3 above on employment and economic security makes clear. The focus group

participants highlighted the importance of the outlook of husbands and other adult male members within the household:

“The role of a working women may change or not, it depends on her husband's mindset, but she can somehow be heard better and make some decisions in the household.”

Since, in the participants' view, few men start helping at home when a woman starts working, women in employment often have to work double. Any guilt

about neglected household, cooking and childcare duties was placed squarely on the working woman's shoulders (as section 3.4 above also notes):

“The household duties are piling up and the children are more neglected”.

A recent ILO, UNHCR and UN Women report on shifting gender roles as Syrian refugee women pursue livelihoods, came to similar conclusions. The report noted some changes in attitudes and behaviour towards more acceptance of women as workers and some changes in household roles with some husbands willing to help out at

home. However, the report focused on livelihoods initiatives by humanitarian organisations in KR-I camp settings, and refugee women noted that for livelihoods to be sustainable they need to move away from facilitated programmes to the acceptance of women entering the labour market.

Sexual and gender-based violence

Summary

Gender-based violence (GBV) worsened during COVID-19 due to increased tensions and conflicts and increased violence by men against women within the household.

GBV is widespread, but the focus group responses shows that women can differ in their understanding of what GBV entails. Some participants mentioned husbands routinely beating their wives in response to direct questions about tensions in households, but would then later on say that GBV is not a problem. This may be an example of normalisation of domestic violence, rendering it less visible in statistics and surveys.

Participants in focus groups within camps showed a greater awareness of all kinds of GBV, and were aware of and using support services for women that existed in the camps.

Most focus group participants stated that incidents of GBV would not usually be reported, unless it was very serious. If the perpetrator was a person in a role of authority, reporting was particularly unlikely and punishment of the perpetrator even less so.

Asked specifically about sexual violence, focus group participants agreed that it existed and that the risk existed at home, on the street and in the workplace.

The risk of reporting sexual violence is higher than for other forms of violence, with obstacles to reporting ranging from blaming the victim to killing survivors of sexual violence for 'shaming' the family.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is entrenched and widespread. Domestic violence and intimate partner violence taking place within the home is the most common form of GBV for Syrian refugee women. Stigma and shame; fear of retaliation from the perpetrator or the family (in the form of honour killings); an insufficient legal system and lack of national protection capacity; gaps in services that enable the safe reporting of GBV incidents and provide support

to survivors; pressure from family to remain silent; and gendered social and cultural norms that normalise domestic violence against women, all conspire for GBV to remain unreported.⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic has been reported in several studies to have increased the risk of GBV, as financial stress and movement restrictions interacted with gender norms and deep power imbalances between men and women. This was confirmed by focus group participants:

“Tensions and psychological pressures have increased to a large extent and this has led to a big increase in violence.”

“After COVID-19 the camp condition became worse because of financial reason and that led to increasing domestic violence inside the camp.”

“The increased stress, conflict and pressuring during COVID led to an increase in violence in the family and violence against women.”

HOW COMMON IS GBV FOR SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN?

Participants in five of the nine focus groups discussions were asked a series of questions specifically on GBV. While the number of women consulted is not large enough for generalisations, the discussions bring out both the widespread prevalence of GBV and its hidden nature. Many of the answers given were somewhat contradictory, both from one question to the next within one focus group and between the three focus groups.

When asked directly how common violence against women is in the Syrian refugee community, answers ranged from “a very small percentage” and “sometimes” to “violence against women and girls are increasing because most women do not have their own income to depend on, that is a big reason of violence”.

When participants in the four other focus groups were asked about tensions within the household (thus not GBV specifically), respondents noted unprompted that violence from husbands was common and something women had to endure. These contradictory responses

(GBV is a very small percentage but violence from husbands is a part of life) may signify that terms such as gender-based violence, violence against women and girls, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, are seen as something different and perhaps more serious than the ‘everyday violence’ that can happen within the walls of the home. Indeed, when focus group participants were asked where the risk of sexual violence is highest for Syrian women, most suggested that this was outside the home, at work, in public places and on social media. This risk of sexual violence outside the home was considered to be high and something women had to be vigilant about. In one of the focus groups participants agreed that women were most at risk of being subject to violence within their homes, followed by the workplace.

Encouragingly, in the focus group discussions taking place within camps, participants said that support services were available, and that women were aware of and using them. Their discussion spoke to an increasing awareness of ‘all kinds of violence’. Emotional and psychological violence was referred to as being the most common form of violence, a form of violence against women and girls that is less frequently understood and identified by victims.

5 3RP (2022), Iraq Country Chapter 2021-2022, 9 March, p.17, [link](#).

How is GBV DEALT WITH?

The five focus groups were asked whether, if an incident of violence against a woman had happened, it would be spoken about or reported. Some responded that it depends on the severity of the violence – if it was serious, the woman would report, and reporting would take place for instance to female

family members, humanitarian organisations, NGOs, government centres, women's centres in camps, and protection organisations. However, others did not think the incident would usually be reported:

“If a woman experiences violence she will keep quiet for fear of the society, what people will say, the stigma and culture and traditions. But not all.”

“Generally, incidents of violence against women are not reported because of traditions, the fear of scandal and of the violence increasing.”

Asked whether perpetrators would get punished, most focus group participants felt that if the woman reported it and it was serious, then sometimes it would be punished. However, this would not be the case if the perpetrator was powerful or an authority figure. There was general consensus among participants that survivors would have access to medical, legal and psychosocial support, with one woman referring to her own personal experience of receiving such

support from an organisation. But, crucially, such support was only available if she reported the incident. It was unclear if some of the reporting mechanisms referred to outside of NGOs, such as the police and internal security forces (Asayesh), were perceived as reliable and trusted by participants. This could be a contributing factor to women being unlikely to report GBV incidents.

“In most cases, the perpetrators of violence against women are not punished and in general they are not reported.”

“There are accessible reporting mechanisms in camps, like the police or Asayesh, but in general their help is not sought in cases of violence against women.”

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN

Five focus groups were asked specifically about sexual violence, how common it is and whether survivors were likely to ask for support or report sexual violence. Although one participant felt like sexual violence was reducing because of 'awareness sessions to all age groups', all participants felt that sexual violence existed within their community and was most likely to happen at home, on the streets or in the workplace. Children being harassed on the way to school was also mentioned.

Some respondents referred to marital rape as being common while others thought marital relations were mostly consensual, although it was mentioned that 'sexual relations between married couples are not talked about'.

Focus group participants answered differently when asked specifically about reporting and access to justice for survivors of sexual violence than for GBV in general, conveying that stigma and risks for survivors are higher if the violence is sexual in nature:

“Yes, she will get justice if her family is supported. There are a few cases where the survivor did not get support and was killed.”

“When an incident of sexual violence occurs, some people decide to report and others do not for fear of the scandal.”

There was also a perception among participants that women would be unlikely to achieve access to justice if they were to report sexual violence, be that legally or from society and family members. One participant referred to women 'not having sufficient guarantees from the host community' to report

sexual violence, suggesting there is a perceived lack of legal and financial support mechanisms for Syrian refugee women in Iraq. Others referred to 'norms and traditions' being a key reason for victims not having access to justice.

“Victims do not get justice. Even if the law rules in her favor, the women victim of sexual violence will always be blamed by society.”

“It is said that it is always the women’s fault.”

Five focus groups responded that for women who reported sexual violence, they were aware of psychosocial, legal and medical support which survivors can access. However, most participants from a focus group based in an urban setting did not know where to report sexual violence and it was mentioned that victims did not have opportunities or resources to ask for help.

In the MSNA 2021, 75% of respondents answered “Do not know” to a question about the types of support that members of their household were aware of and able to access in the case of a GBV incident. However, 89% of the respondents to the 2021 MSNA were male, which may affect knowledge of such services. There

are nuanced differences in how the focus group participants answered questions about access to MHPPS services in the case of GBV and the responses to the 2021 MSNA. While women in the focus group seemed generally aware of women-only services such as women’s centres and women’s protection hotlines, only 19% of respondents to the 2021 MSNA stated that members of their household were aware of and able to access women’s centres in the case of GBV.

Conclusions and recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the nine focus groups analysed alongside the results of the 2021 MSNA paint a picture of a significantly worsened situation for Syrian refugee women in KR-I, not only economically but for well-being, mental health and gender-based violence.

COVID-19 restrictions and economic pressures have led to increased household tensions and stress, with a rise in violence against women within the household.

Most refugee households in KR-I are not able to meet their monthly basic needs and are resorting to a range of coping mechanisms and sacrifices. Economic pressures have led more Syrian women to enter the labour market, but this is happening at a time when there are fewer jobs and worse working conditions and pay for those who try to find salaried employment.

For many Syrian women, seeking paid employment is seen more as a necessity than an opportunity, since the challenges and criticism that come with entering the workforce are substantial:

- Double work – at home and at work – as husbands and other household members often do not adjust their behaviour when a woman starts working outside the household, and she is still expected to do all the cooking and cleaning in addition to her job.
- Worry and guilt about children's welfare, as the responsibility for raising and looking after

children remains with her and quality affordable childcare services are not available.

- Criticism from the household and the community for taking jobs that are considered inappropriate or shameful for women.

While there are signs of changes in women's responsibilities, this is not yet manifesting in stronger decision-making power within the household as long as there are male household members present.

Comments from focus group participants on violence against women within the home suggests that they do not always understand this as falling within the category of GBV. Some focus group participants mentioned husbands routinely beating their wives in response to direct questions about tensions in households, but later stated that GBV is not a problem. This may be an example of normalisation of domestic violence, rendering it less visible and thus harder to address.

Participants in focus groups within camps showed a greater awareness of all kinds of GBV compared to women living out of camps, and were aware of and using the support services for women that existed in the camps. However, both within and out of camps, respondents stated that GBV incidents, and particularly sexual violence, would not be reported. The risk to the survivor of reporting sexual violence is significant, and can include her death.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions, the following areas of recommendations are identified:

Increase **programmes and interventions that engage both individuals and their households**: The current experience of working women, as presented by the focus group participants, is not a sustainable pathway to economic empowerment for refugee women. **Livelihoods interventions to support women to enter the labour market must go hand in hand with interventions targeting the women's households, particularly husbands and other male household members**. This should not be an extra, added on activity, but integral to the design of women's livelihood interventions. Interventions should particularly engage men in the household in order to build their support for women's economic activities and address the gender-normative barriers within households that hinder women's ability to be economically active. Efforts to influence wider perceptions and gendered social norms that confine women and prevent them from seeking employment are also central. Engaging households could reduce the risk that programmes aimed at expanding female economic and decision-making roles contributes to double work and increased mental strain for women, increased tension within households and increasing risks of physical harm to women and girls. At the same time, practical support such as safe and inexpensive transportation and quality and affordable childcare (see recommendation 3 below) are also important for the sustainability of women's livelihoods interventions and the well-being of working refugee women.

Ensure that **programmes are well targeted to avert harmful coping strategies, particularly taking children out of school**. Removing children from school hurts children by reducing their overall well-being and future livelihood options, and it also reduces employment prospects and well-being for women who care for them at home. Economic factors are the most-cited reason for removing children from school, so targeted support to improve affordability of transport and learning materials could help address this directly.

Ensure that the question of **child-care support is considered for all livelihoods/economic empowerment interventions for Syrian refugee women**. The focus groups highlight that women's employment opportunities are circumscribed by a wide range of household responsibilities and chores that fall on women only. Some of these could be alleviated by **providing quality and affordable childcare and/or supporting the emergence of**

community-based childcare schemes.

Provide interventions that provide opportunities for home-based businesses. While livelihoods and employment programmes are positive schemes that economically empower women, they may exclude those who in the absence of a support system and/or childcare facilities, would find it difficult to commit to work outside of their homes. Projects that build on pre-displacement skills coupled with assistance in marketing would give such women opportunities to earn a living.

Develop **enhanced referral and reporting assistance for Syrian GBV survivors**: as these women are often reluctant to report incidents to authorities, and there are significant risks to those who report. Women living in camps had more women-only support services, and showed a stronger understanding of GBV and what they could do to protect themselves. Similar services could be strengthened in out-of-camp settings, for refugee and host community women alike. Supporting government in making its legislation on GBV more attuned to the rights, wishes and safety of survivors is also important.

Support the establishment of more safe women-only spaces where women in physical danger can seek help, even in times of COVID lockdown. Shelters for survivors of GBV are important, but as other UN Women evaluations have shown, the creation or enhancement of multi-sector women-only centres would not only provide safe spaces, but also the opportunity to combine protection and empowerment interventions. Women-only centres can provide livelihoods training, increase awareness of GBV and provide quality protection services in one space. The added strength of such centres is the sense of community and mutual support they can foster among refugee women using their services.

Increase the **GBV hotline capacities and access with sufficient funding**. Focus group participants highlighted that hotlines did exist but women who tried to call them were met with a busy signal or no answer. The awareness of such services among focus group participants suggests that hotlines can be an important aspect of GBV protection services, but if callers frequently do not get through to a person at the other end of the hotline this undermines the immediate efficiency and long-term trust in this type of service.

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ANNEX: NOTE ON FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

Nine focus groups were conducted during February and March 2022 with Syrian refugee women in KRI. There were seven participants in each group, with a total of 63 participants. The focus groups were not representative of the Syrian refugee population, with more women as heads of households and earning incomes. This is a lot higher than the 2% female-headed households and 5% of households with female members working reported in the MSNA and is due to the recruitment of the workshop participants through activities organised by UNHCR's NGO partners.

The four focus groups on employment, coping mechanisms and women's decision-making role in the household had a total of 28 women participants.

- **HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD:** 7 reported that they or another female relative were head of household, while one reported that she and her husband were heads of household together.
- **PARTICIPATION IN LABOUR MARKET:** Of the 28 participants, 9 reported that they were working, a further 6 that they used to work but don't work now, and 13 reported that they had never worked..

The five focus groups on wellbeing and GBV had in total 35 participants.

- **HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD:** 10 reported that they or another female relative were head of household while 3 reported that she and her husband were heads of household together. 20 reported that their husband or other male relative was the head of household (2 not reported).
- **PARTICIPATION IN LABOUR MARKET:** Of the 35 participants, 6 worked (one from home, five outside the home), 7 used to work but do not work now, and 20 had never worked (2 not reported).