



Strengthening resilience of Syrian
women and girls and host communities
in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey



Funded by the
European Union



**EU-UN WOMEN MADAD
REGIONAL PARTNERS' VIRTUAL EVENT**

11 NOVEMBER 2020

Overview

This outcome document provides a brief summary of the key points discussed during the UN Women-organized Madad Regional Partners' Event. As the [UN Women "Strengthening the Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey"](#) programme funded by European Union (EU) through the [EU Regional Trust Fund to the Syria Crisis](#), the 'Madad Fund', is coming to an end, UN Women organized a strategic dialogue, in collaboration with the EU, to draw lessons from the programme's implementation and help inform the future of gender equality and women's empowerment resilience programming within the Syria regional response. The event, held on 11 November 2020, brought together 95 virtual participants, including a variety of key partners such as government representatives of the countries of implementation, civil society and non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, and donor organizations as well as UN Women, the EU Trust Fund and country delegation staff.

Over the course of two-and-a-half hours, participants engaged in a discussion that took stock of the programme's achievements throughout the sub-region, particularly in light of major global developments in gender-responsive programming. Key observations made during the discussion include:

- The programme's successful track record and its far-reaching achievements where targets were surpassed by an impressive 17 percent. The programme has also offered a wealth of knowledge and experiences, providing a successful model for synergy and coordination.
- The importance of galvanising the multitude of perspectives and expertise encompassed in the programme, including those of government agencies, civil society, service providers, humanitarian actors, and technical experts.
- The need for continually identifying and responding to the changing landscapes on the ground, particularly given the complex socio-political dynamics of the region.
- Adapting to the far-reaching challenges and changes imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had direct implications on the rights, and protection of women and girls, as well as women's economic resilience and their participation in the labour force. This includes ensuring women's leadership and participation in the response to COVID-19 and its ramifications.
- Providing women access to services especially during the pandemic, as well as the programme's holistic approach providing a range of services ranging from protection to economic strengthening interventions.
- Engaging men and boys in dialogue aimed at promoting women's rights and empowerment.
- The continued need for protection of women and girls from gender-based violence in all its forms, which has become even more essential in light of COVID-19.
- The urgent requirement of providing economic support and capacity building services to women in need, and the inseparable nature of economic empowerment and gender equality. This includes supporting women, particularly women entrepreneurs in creating viable roadmaps towards achieving financial independence as well as highlighting the need for women to be involved in leadership roles.
- The need for continuing to advocate for adequate financing to build on current achievements and respond to evolving and emerging challenges.



Photo: UN Women

Programme monitoring results reveal the multidimensionality of the programme's impact captured in women's improved ability to engage in income generation opportunities, strengthened livelihoods, increase in women's empowerment and decision-making, and improved mental health and wellbeing as well as a reduction in levels of acceptance of gender-based violence (GBV).

Programme monitoring efforts resulted in the development of a resilience-focused approach to monitoring. Evidence suggest that the programme has produced a positive impact on women's resilience on the short term and longer-term.

Different results have been produced by the different programme interventions and when disaggregated by community of origin (Refugees, host community and internally displaced persons)



Photo: UN Women

Summary of Key Statements

In her opening remarks, **Susanne Mikhail Eldhagen, UN Women Regional Director for Arab States**, underscored the fundamental differentiating factor of UN Women's Madad Programme, which is the diversity and richness of its partnership network. While underscoring the EU's unwavering support, she also shed light on the central issue facing all humanitarian actors in 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic, which has not only had severe and far-reaching economic and protection implications but also compounded the complex situations in Syria and the neighbouring countries.

In essence, the pandemic – compounded with the crisis itself – has intensified the exposure to violence and socioeconomic inequalities that impact the lives of refugee communities, particularly women. This has been demonstrated by the programme data over the past year, including two recent studies conducted by the UN Women Arab States Regional Office that exposed [women's experience of violence during the COVID-19 lockdown](#) from the individual as well as the [civil society lenses](#). The pandemic has also affected the lives of refugees throughout the region, costing them their livelihoods and sense of security, while preventing many from accessing their most basic needs of shelter, food, health, and education. Women, most of whom work in the informal sector and have limited social security frameworks, are in need of urgent assistance to recover from the worst impacts of the pandemic.

Susanne Mikhail Eldhagen highlighted the four pillars of future response efforts within the programme "I am speaking about moving from surviving to thriving," she noted, "from assistance to self-reliance, I am referring to job opportunities, service provisions, and of course, opportunities for women and girls to be an integral part of peace and reconciliation efforts".

Susanne Mikhail Eldhagen further emphasized that gender equality and social empowerment are both fundamental to peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion in the region. She also added that inclusivity is imperative, particularly with regards to engaging with men and boys as champions of women's rights and empowerment.

In closing, Susanne Mikhail Eldhagen noted that while a key achievement of the programme has been that no less than 31,000 refugees and host community members – primarily women – have benefitted from an array of services, this is largely due to the combined efforts and commitment of the Madad partners in achieving real and measurable change.

CURRENT **CONTEXT** AND CONTINUED **NEEDS** FOR FUTURE **GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT** RESILIENCE PROGRAMMING

01 | 

Advancing
financing for
women

02 | 

Investing in
protection of
women

03 | 

Ensuring women's
leadership and
participation in the
response to crisis

03 | 

Investing in women's
economic
empowerment and
livelihoods
opportunities

Meanwhile, **Claudia Miller, EU Trust Manager**, tackled the new reality brought about by COVID-19 and the immense challenges it presents to continue providing assistance to those in need in a flexible manner in the context of the Syria crisis in particular. She noted that The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the vulnerabilities women and girls are facing. Major gaps between the realities of women affected by the Syrian crisis and international standards such as access to services, legal assistance, protection and cultural barriers persist. Claudia Miller underlined the innovative multidimensional approach of the joint programme addressing the immediate protection needs of women while providing longer term livelihood opportunities and promoting social cohesion.

Claudia Miller also noted the unprecedented scale of the Syria crisis, reiterating the EU's contributions to the response as a major donor, particularly given the absence of the conditions required for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees to their country. She underlined that the EU will equally provide substantial contributions in the future, and that the EU is currently at a critical juncture in its funding planning process, with funding modalities being transferred to the EU's new Multiannual Funding Framework (MFF).

Claudia Miller finally touched upon the fundamental connections between gender equality and quality overall responses to crises, citing the examples of strong responses by female leaders to the COVID-19 pandemic, which show that supporting and empowering women leads to measurable improvements in the real world.

“ The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the vulnerabilities women and girls are facing, in particular those affected by the Syrian crisis.

Working together to give them better access to services, legal assistance and protection will not only help them personally but also untap their potential to contribute to better societies. ”

Claudia Miller
EU Trust Fund Manager



Photo: UN Women

Ekram El-Huni, the Regional Programme Coordinator at UN Women, provided a general overview of the UN Women Madad programme and its key objective of involving women in crisis prevention, conflict management, peacebuilding and provide protection support to women and girl survivors of gender-based violence, especially sexual abuse.

The programme, she explained, works through a multi-dimensional strategy that aims to: i) enable women's empowerment through addressing issues of economic vulnerability and violence by increased access to recovery and livelihood opportunities, paired with comprehensive protection services and support to national justice structures to promote accountability for violence against women, and ii) promote a culture of peace and co-existence through supporting women to lead and engage in peacebuilding, reconciliation and conflict prevention. The programme also builds on UN Women's efforts around strengthening the resilience of Syrian women in refugee camps and host communities through protection services, economic empowerment, and increased access to multi-sectoral services.

Ekram El-Huni also reviewed the key achievements of the programme through its major performance indicators, including the fact that since inception a total of 31,076 Syrian refugees and host community nationals have been reached, exceeding the programme target of 26,500 by an impressive 17 percent. Other achievements include:

- 25,101 women benefited from comprehensive GBV services.
- 6,691 women benefited from economic opportunities.
- 3,161 men and boys engaged in dialogues promoting women's rights & empowerment.
- Programme monitoring efforts resulted in the development of a resilience-focused approach to monitoring. Evidence suggest that the programme has produced a positive impact on women's resilience on the short term and longer-term. Different results have been produced by the different programme interventions and when disaggregated by community of origin (refugees, host community and IDP women).
- Programme monitoring results reveal the multidimensionality of the programme's impact captured in women's improved ability to engage in income generation opportunities, strengthened livelihoods, increase in women's empowerment and decision-making, and improved mental health and wellbeing as well as a reduction in levels of acceptance of gender-based violence (GBV).

Ekram El-Huni also noted that UN Women has also developed a Gender-sensitive Resilience Index (GSRI) – a monitoring tool developed in partnership with the FAO to gauge women's resilience both directly and indirectly in the short, medium and longer-term, thus making it easier to objectively measure the response's overall progress and the impact on empowerment, wellbeing, livelihoods and acceptance of GBV.



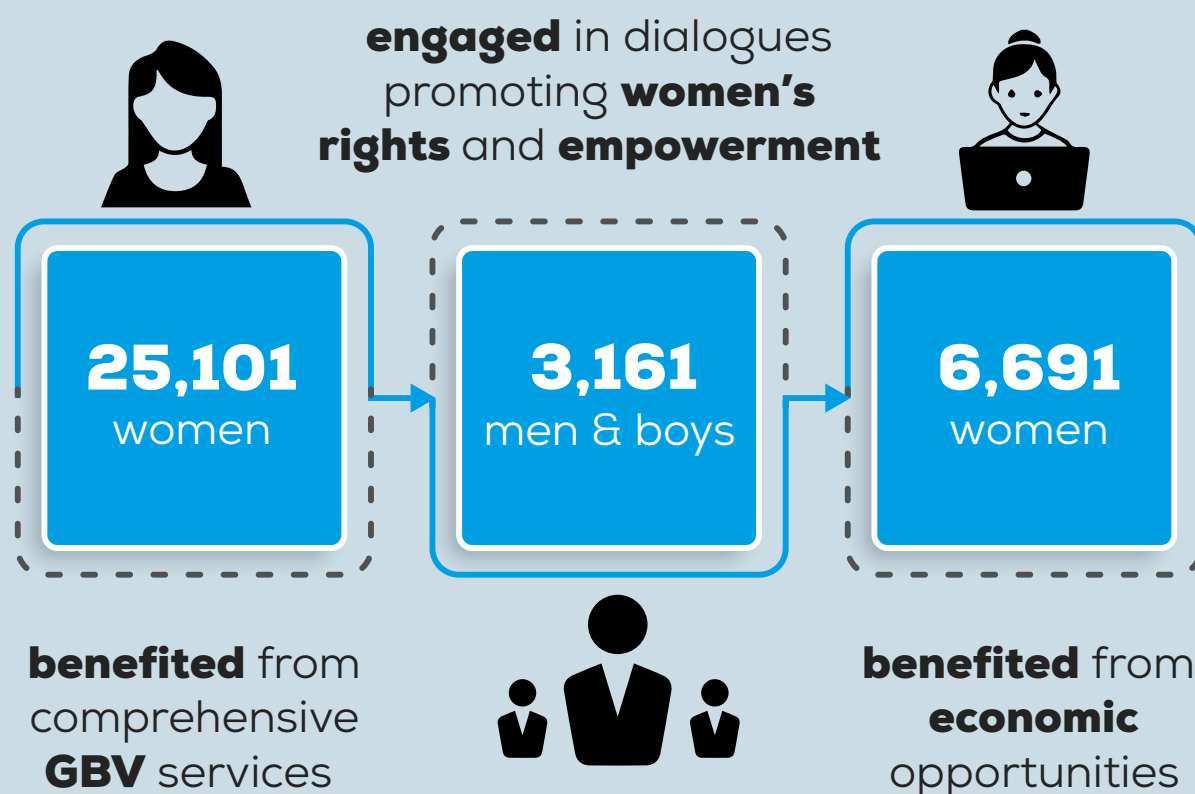
Photo: UN Women

Summary of Case Studies and Best Practices

The discussion featured a variety of case studies and examples of best practices delivered by key partners and stakeholders in the countries of implementation, namely Turkey, Jordan, and Iraq. Primarily notable were the intersections and parallel experiences shared within these countries despite the seemingly varied contexts, which served to highlight the universal nature of the challenges experienced by both refugees and host communities alike. Issues such as economic disenfranchisement, harmful coping mechanisms and social norms, as well as inherent gender and other inter-sectional inequalities dominated these narratives, coupled with the now overarching challenge of COVID-19, which has now exacerbated the situation of refugee women.

In addition to causing significant restrictions on movement that have compounded gender-based violence risks and hampered access to life-saving services, the pandemic has also escalated economic inequalities, which has further placed the safety and dignity of women and girls at risk.

Programme **results** and **achievements**



Mürfet Calcul, representing Tomorrow's Women Committee in Turkey, highlighted many of these issues in her statement, with examples of meaningful transformations that have taken place on the ground as a direct result of empowering women, engaging men and boys, and providing viable roadmaps for women to reach their inherent potential. Her own story represents the life journey of many women benefitting from the UN Women Madad programme, as she herself is a mother whose life prospects were significantly broadened by the communal support, capacity building, and engagement programmes being made available to those in need. As she explained, "I started to see my aspirations and my dreams being realized on the ground in this committee. We started to widen our horizons we learned about human rights, women rights, gender equality, GBV and the meaning of early marriage."

This was echoed by **Hiba Jajjah, community leader from the Gaziantep-based solidarity programme of Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (Turkey)** whose work during COVID-19 is a shining example of the importance of community support when it comes to addressing the challenges faced by women and girls in refugee and host communities. Through her work, Jajjah witnessed firsthand the pandemic's harmful impact on women's access to education, livelihoods, healthcare, and overall access to services, which underscores the importance of flexible service modalities that allow those gaps to be bridged throughout the span of the pandemic.

Hiba Jajjah also stressed the importance of psychosocial support services for the overall mental health and wellbeing of women in need, noting that this allows beneficiaries to overcome their individual traumas and to develop their own roadmaps towards a more dignified and stable life.

Liza Hido, President of the Baghdad Women's Association, praised the programme's success in helping women achieve real and measurable empowerment. "This programme created women leaders and strengthened communities," she said, noting that "empowering women, gender equality, and women's rights were some of the issues that the organization depended on to implement the UN Women Madad programme in Iraq. The implementation required group work from the stakeholders and other partners." She further underscored the importance of providing women with a complete package of services that includes economic, livelihood, psychological, and legal support services, all of which come together to create a catalyst for women seeking self-development and empowerment.

She noted that the programme's experience in Iraq has also highlighted the effectiveness of providing women with access to legal aid, particularly when it comes to ensuring that their rights and privileges are safeguarded. This, she added, was only made possible through the gender-responsive allocation of resources – a key component in any response aimed at the needs of women and girls.

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Liza Hido
President of the Baghdad Women's Association



Photo: UN Women

Meanwhile, **Nadia Abd al-Hussein, Head of the Research Division in the Department of Social Protection for Women in Iraq**, offered a sombre picture of the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has not only complicated the challenges for people in need but for service providers as well, many of whom remain on the frontlines and as such face a heightened risk of infection. Nadia Al-Hussein herself has contracted COVID-19 but has nonetheless continued to provide services given the significant escalation in the needs in light of the pandemic, particularly in terms of the rise in cases of gender-based violence throughout the country.

Nadia Shamruk, General Manager of the Jordanian Women's Union, also underscored the importance of economic empowerment as a cornerstone in the fight for gender equality and agency, noting that integration in the labour market continues to emerge as a frequent challenge. Shamruk also tackled the inseparable relationship between negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and access to education, noting that one of the more crucial elements in the response are the continued efforts to help survivors of early and forced marriage to resume their education in order to reach their full potential as individuals.

Nadia Shamruk highlighted the key partnerships that have been taking place in this regard, including with the Ministry of Social Development in Jordan, with whom active efforts have continued toward combating these coping mechanisms in both refugee and host communities nationwide. Lastly, she discussed the longevity of the programme itself, stressing that the response needs to incorporate a longer-term vision for refugees when it comes to securing livelihood and self-actualisation opportunities irrespective of the refugee status of those receiving services. As she phrased it, "the fate of being a refugee is a temporary one. Therefore, we had to integrate Syrian women into the programme, and this is one of the most successful initiatives to make female beneficiaries move from being volunteers to having effective roles and be able to offer services to other refugees."

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Nadia Shamruk
General Manager of the
Jordanian Women's Union



Photo: UN Women

When asked about the best approach to strengthening sustainability prospects in the context of this refugee crisis, **Dr. Abdullah Aksoy, Head of the Department of Women, Family, and Training & Social Services (DWFTS)** at the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, he echoed the experiences of other service providers with regards to long-term economic support for women, highlighting the need for integrated approaches to supporting women entrepreneurs in particular. He noted the DWFTS' experience in this regard, underscoring the positive results that emanated from financial counselling services that offered women entrepreneurs a clearer roadmap towards transforming their visions into viable, revenue-generating businesses. He also shared some of the experiences of the department in terms of combating child labour and marriage, stressing the importance of awareness raising and direct engagement as well as partnerships with other humanitarian actors in the region to ensure a harmonised approach.

Similar experiences were shared by **Tanya Ghareeb, Head of the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**. The ministry's outreach and awareness efforts have helped a multitude of beneficiaries to escape the cycle of violence impeding their development, to cultivate agency and self-empowerment, and to build the capacities required to achieve economic independence.

Kahraman Abdullah, Director of Productivity Enhancement and Poverty Reduction Directorate at the Ministry of Social Development in Jordan highlighted how the Oasis model, which is implemented in the country, is a key component of national efforts that ensure the most vulnerable are reached.

She noted that the Oasis model, which was rolled out in 8 social development centres within host communities, was extremely well received by community members because it offered women training on a wide scope of issues including civic rights and political engagement. Capacity building also covered areas like agriculture, sewing, weaving as well as plumbing thus empowering women to generate income within their communities.



Photo: UN Women

Conclusions

Alia El-Yassir UN Women Regional Director Eastern Europe and Central Asia, stated that “women, whether they are refugees or members of the host community, are not in the passive position of recipients of services and assistance they are actually active drivers of development and they play a transformative role for their communities.” Alia El-Yassir’s statement and its underlying principles of encouraging women’s empowerment and agency had permeated the interventions made throughout the discussion.

Overarchingly, there was a clear consensus among participants regarding the need to continue and scale up the level of support provided within the scope of the programme throughout the region. This is especially true in light of the fact that the protracted conflict in Syria is far from over and has arguably passed a tipping point, with far-reaching and cumulative ramifications impacting those in need. Moreover, many of these ramifications have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further eroded the remaining safety nets and resilience frameworks throughout the region. A key recommendation has been adapting interventions to ensure continuity of services throughout the course of the pandemic, particularly with regards to prevention and response to gender-based violence.

Corinne André, Head of Cooperation at the EU Delegation to Jordan, helped place in perspective the pillars of effective responses in this regard, which include safeguarding the physical and psychological integrity of women and girls, promoting their socioeconomic empowerment and independence and – as noted by other participants – ensuring their active participation in the development process. This requires the continuation and expansion of targeted support for women and girls, who are undoubtedly shouldering the bulk of the burdens and risks of the crisis.

As noted by **Janneke van der Graaff Kukler, Deputy Regional Director of UN Women in the Arab States Region**, such targeted support should not only be restricted to the preservation of human rights and promoting women’s empowerment within the context of the crisis – it must extend to include providing women and girls with agency over the programmes that target them, and to continually work with them to advance conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and economic advancement – processes that have historically been more effective when women are consistently involved. In this regard, it is paramount to continue building on the partnerships that have been formed within the programme and promoting the continued sharing of knowledge and experience sharing on a cross-regional scale.



Photo: UN Women

“ Women whether they are refugees or members of the host community are not in the passive position of recipients of services and assistance they are actually active drivers of development and they play a transformative role for their communities. We're proud that as UN Women through the amazing partnerships across the three countries our joint efforts have paid off for the benefit of women and girls and communities at large. Today we're celebrating the achievements of Madad programme and we need to stand ready and willing to build on these results and lessons learnt. There have indeed been synergies built that we need to nurture further. ”

Alia El-Yassir
UN Women Regional Director Europe and Central Asia

Recommendations

- 1.** Advancing Financing across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. It is high time that heavier investments be made toward gender equality and women's empowerment through funding women's organizations as well as gender and human rights institutions and the engagement of other key governmental stakeholders and partners to maintain critical service provision, advance decent employment opportunities for women and girls and ensure women are at the center of peace and reconciliation efforts, including social cohesion interventions.
- 2.** Investing in Protection – In response to the dramatic rise in violence against women and girls in light of COVID-19, it is key to ensure that vulnerable women are reached particularly with onsite support as and when the situation and healthy safety permits.
- 3.** Ensuring women's leadership and participation in the response to crisis – It is critical for the response frameworks, like the Syria refugee and resilience (3RP), to apply a more gender-responsive approach by ensuring women's leadership and consultation are well embedded into the response framework.
- 4.** Investing in women's economic empowerment and livelihoods opportunities – Concerted efforts are needed to ensure economic assistance and flexible modalities for income generation, in conjunction with support for caregiving roles. Governments, CSOs, donors, and the UN must focus on strengthening the resilience of vulnerable Syrian refugee and host community women by both advocating as well as intensifying programming efforts for decent livelihoods and employment opportunities.



Photo: UN Women