



## Table of contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Overview of Research</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Overview of Context</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Syrian Conflict and Displacement</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Gender Norms: Syria Prior to Conflict</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Gender Transformation and Women’s Resilience</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Women’s Resilience .....	8
Women in Post-Conflict Contexts .....	8
<b>Method</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Participants</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Research Ethics Plan</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Analysis Plan</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Limitations</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Findings</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Profile of Women Before the Conflict</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Major Challenges as Refugees</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Shifting Norms</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Changing Livelihoods .....	16
Changing Decisions Regarding Marriage .....	24
Changing Social Networks .....	27
<b>Discussion</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Recommendations: Cross-Cutting Needs for Gender Empowerment</b> .....	<b>31</b>

### TABLES

Table 1: Participant features.....	10
Table 2: Examples of how women were empowered before conflict, by domain.....	14
Table 3: Relative prevalence (all, most, some, very few) of major challenges described, based on coding of open-ended response to question about major challenges as refugee.....	15
Table 4: Recommendations for intervention and details of the problem the intervention should overcome	

# Executive Summary

## Overview

In April 2018, CARE Syria and CARE UK contracted GK Consulting LLC (US) to conduct a research study on changing gender roles and norms amongst Syrian women refugees. This research was an extension of CARE's 2018-2019 Syria Resilience Research Project that examined resilience capacities among both men and women inside Syria.<sup>1</sup> This secondary study offered the opportunity to examine in greater depth the transformative resilience and gender norms for Syrian women only in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey.<sup>2</sup> It specifically sought to answer one key question: "How has the Syrian conflict affected the role of Syrian women within their families and communities (positively and negatively) within refugee hosting communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey?" The purpose of the research was to provide CARE Syria with critical information to inform their programming to support and expand the positive aspects of women's changed roles, as well as mitigating the negative aspects.

## Method

The basic methodological approach was a two-month, multi-wave qualitative Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research (PEER) study of 54 purposefully selected refugee women in host communities in each country. The women were visited four times over the course of two months in order to build life story case studies for each. For the first wave of data collection, researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the participants, and then participants chose whether, for the remaining waves, they would like to a) write in journals with new prompts each visit, customised to each participant and based on what was written about previously or b) to create a graphical timeline of their lives, and then to sit for extended one-on-one interviews with new probing question each visit, also customised to each participant and based on what was discussed previously.

Sampling of participants and sites for this study was both purposeful and based on convenience. Locations were selected purposefully to capture a spectrum of the types of refugees living in host communities in each country, and in each country, field team members selected 18 participants to include a broad variety of types of refugee women, but oversampled for women with disabilities, widows, older women, women who experienced early marriage, women who had to drop out of school as a result of the conflict and had not returned, divorcees, women who had never been to school, and other particularly vulnerable women who were likely in need of support.

Qualitative data was stored in a consolidated database (Excel-based) and analysed on a rolling basis, and coded based on key emerging themes as new data was collected. The main themes and codes were then grouped into categories; these categories ultimately made up the headings found in this report. The database was, at this point, primarily used to probe more deeply into the participants' narratives and provide a resource for quotations and any additional nuance that would enrich the report's narrative. The analysis, in short, is designed to capture and illustrate the details and nuances behind some of the challenges that some Syrian refugee women have faced, and in particular the ways that their roles as women have changed. The advantage of the iterative and individually-tailored methods was the high level of detail obtained for each participant. While the findings must therefore not be considered representative of Syrian all refugee women, the findings may be helpful for programming for many.

## Findings

**Profile of women before the conflict:** Some women reported having some degree of empowerment in Syria prior to the conflict, though it was atypical among the study's participants.

**Major challenges for women refugees:** Respondents across all countries most often indicated severe trauma, lack of money for basic needs, and no or inadequate jobs. Most respondents also mentioned lack of official papers and documents, and being looked down upon to some degree by the host population. Respondents in Jordan and Lebanon (and to a somewhat lesser degree among respondents in Turkey), reported substantial exploitation at work, housing security and need for healthcare (including psychosocial care). Despite these challenges, participants described relative stability in their lives as refugees compared to their lives inside Syria; specifically, they were no longer at risk of bombing and aerial attacks, frequent forced displacement, and complete lack of employment opportunity.

**General shift in gender norms:** The most fundamental and dramatic shift that has occurred for women is that they feel more empowered now – more able to make decisions for themselves and follow through with them – than prior to the conflict. The vast majority of women who commented on their perception regarding this shift (32 of 36) said that this was a mostly positive change.

**Changing livelihoods:** Women have profoundly different roles now as the primary or main breadwinners in their families. Of the 54 women in the study, 45 described how they had to work to support their families either all the time or often. Of those who worked, most (40 of 45<sup>3</sup>) indicated they were mostly happy to have the opportunities to work and earn income for themselves, despite the intense pressure from these new roles. When the host country had more progressive gender norms related to women's livelihoods and education, some women indicated that they found it easier to move past the societal pressures against women working that they had grown up with. There have also been numerous opportunities provided by NGOs and other organisations that focus particularly on refugee women to help enhance their livelihood through skills training. However, with the new responsibility of securing and holding a viable livelihood, women face new and unfamiliar challenges. Many of the women in the study who spoke positively about their role as breadwinner also expressed confidence that they would continue working—even if their family no longer needed the income—because it provided them a newfound sense of purpose and power.

#### *Barriers for Syrian refugee women:*

- Some women indicated that a major barrier to their success in pursuing livelihoods is the support she receives (or does not receive) from her family while doing so; traditional gender norms are still present and, despite many women now occupying new spaces, these former norms show signs of enduring.
- Women with poor mental health, and who are also stressed about their children's mental health, describe how profoundly affected they are by the pressures of supporting their family.
- Women with disabilities find themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation with lack of support and accommodations to help them work.
- Women who have never worked outside the household, especially those who also have little education, lack many of the skills that are needed to engage in forms of employment that may be more lucrative.
- Highly educated women, including those who may have worked in Syria, are still unable to access jobs that are in line with their skill levels.
- Women are not eligible to work legally in many industries, limiting their options; others are in the country illegally, or lack requisite documentation, and are further limited.
- Women also cite exploitation in the workplace. They are subjected to longer hours, lack of contracts, and the potential to be fired at will, as well as lower wages and poorer treatment compared to their counterparts in the host country.
- Women who are interested in starting or growing a business lack access to finance.
- Women feel as though Syrians are looked down upon and not wanted in the host country.
- Regardless of work status, respondents typically rely on aid to at least some extent, and struggle when it is unreliable or not the type of aid that would be most needed.

#### **Changing decisions regarding marriage**

The women in this study represent a wide variety of perspectives on marriage, whether it be a reflection of their own marriage, or (if single) thoughts about the importance of marriage generally. Many of these perspectives have shifted as a result of the conflict, displacement, and women's new and empowered roles in other domains. Many women recognize the important role that a man plays in a marriage, both in terms of offering emotional support to his wife and children, but also critically in terms of providing livelihood support, even if it is particularly difficult as a refugee. However, for some women a major shift has occurred in terms of their perceptions of marriage; namely, the recognition that they do not necessarily need a husband in order to survive or thrive, and they are choosing instead to live independently.

#### *Barriers for Syrian refugee women:*

- Divorce, or being a single woman through any circumstances, remains socially unacceptable in Syrian culture, and women recognise this.
- Despite new livelihood opportunities, life as a refugee in a host country is difficult and two incomes is a distinct advantage in terms of easing this stress.

## Changing social networks

One consequence of the conflict is that many Syrians have been physically separated from these tightly woven circles, which is a profound shock. Arrival and adjustment to the host country was difficult due to the absence of familiar social networks to rely upon in times of need. However, refugee women are forming new social networks based on their own choices and relationships, and relying less on networks that had been largely prescribed to them at birth or by marriage. Since adjusting to their new lives and locations, women describe certain advantages that come from the physical separation from former communities.

### *Barriers for Syrian refugee women:*

- Not every woman has access to a new social network as a refugee, and some now live in circumstances of isolation and loss of community.
- The social pressure to remain close to extended family and in-laws remains strong, including supporting them financially.

## Discussion

**Women who live through war do not belong in a single category or group.** Both inside of Syria, and for women displaced to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, there is substantial diversity of experience, perspective, and hope for the future. While some of this difference may result from circumstances beyond the individual's control (such as access to capital or loss of family), it is also critical to acknowledge that women may also process, react, and demonstrate resilience in response to war in personal and individual ways. Simultaneously, there is real utility in noting patterns and instances of described empowerment and challenge for women both inside and outside of Syria. Change in norms, roles, and expectations/plans for the future are important to document in order to continue or increase support to women who are grappling with that change, on their own terms.

**War creates immense social and material demands.** These demands have profound effects on masculine and feminine identities as well as gender roles and norms both inside and outside the household. It is critical to note that the impact of these demands may or may not be permanent or truly transformative. Some changes may occur in response to acute need only. It is important for those external to the conflict to be aware that conceptualization of women's empowerment and women's wartime gains are externally mediated, and there should not be value judgments made (for example, on women who may choose to revert to previous norms). Additionally, support to ease these social and material burdens during and in the immediate aftermath of conflict and displacement is a critical point towards supporting women's decision making.

**Women's gains in times of conflict are contextually and temporally dependent.** Any efforts to support women in consolidating these gains must acknowledge this fact. Social networks gained in camps or host countries will not automatically transfer back to their country of origin. Women's wartime changes may be profound and may also open the possibility of real social transformation.

**Since wartime change is swift and drastic, a backlash may follow as well as a lack of buy-in from some members of society.** It is critical to emphasise that these shifting gender norms are dramatic and have occurred swiftly; as such, they may not be without consequence if not effectively managed.

**It will also be absolutely critical for support efforts to expand their focus beyond women themselves.** Interventions that focus solely on women may introduce the unintended consequence of exacerbating resentment from men or, at the very least, face a lack of buy-in to new roles such as work outside the home. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the effect of such swift social changes on men, especially as they experience profound trauma and violence.

Many Syrian women are now living in circumstances where they are independent from husbands, in-laws, and extended family members. While for some this may be a choice, it is mainly a product of war and displacement. **One must ask what this relatively rapid breakdown in traditional family and social units will do to society on a broader scale, especially in light of the traditional Syrian norms of family centrality?**

**The role of international organizations in supporting Syrian women's empowerment has been essential from the start of the conflict, but it is important to note that such support may become controversial to deliver inside of**

**Syria during the recovery phase.** At such a point, external interventions may be viewed more critically by the national government, especially with regard to social norms that may have changed during the course of the conflict. In the coming years, the recovery and creation of a new Syria will emerge as a nationally-owned project. It will be critical that NGOs and other external actors be aware and careful of respecting the country's vision of its own future.

## Overview of Research

In April 2018, CARE Syria and CARE UK contracted GK Consulting LLC (US) to conduct a research study on changing gender roles and norms amongst Syrian women refugees. This research was an extension of CARE's 2018-2019 Syria Resilience Research Project that examined resilience capacities<sup>4</sup> among both men and women inside Syria. This secondary study offered the opportunity to examine in greater depth the transformative resilience and gender norms for Syrian women only in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey<sup>5</sup>. It specifically sought to answer one key question: **"How has the Syrian conflict affected the role of Syrian women within their families and communities (positively and negatively) within refugee hosting communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey?"**

The basic methodological approach was a two-month, multi-wave qualitative (PEER<sup>6</sup>) study of 54 purposefully selected refugee women in host communities in each country. The women were visited multiple times in order to build life story case studies for each. The purpose of the research was to provide CARE Syria with critical information to inform their programming to support and expand the positive aspects of women's changed roles, as well as to mitigate the negative aspects.

**The objective was *not* to provide a depiction of all or even most Syrian refugee women** in these countries. Instead, the study intended to provide rich details and nuance around the various types of experiences, perspectives, and needs of different types of Syrian refugee woman. The study focused, in particular, on those who were most vulnerable and thus may benefit from additional CARE support. It sought to determine if and how these women's gender roles and norms were transforming as a result of the conflict and their displacement. Because the sample selection was not random and the sample size small (54 women), valid generalizations about Syrian refugee women cannot be made from the data.

However, the in-depth narratives of these women provide important and rich insight into the ways gender roles have and continue to be transformed. The stories and perspectives highlighted in this report were rarely unique to one or two participants; the views included here were expressed by a significant proportion of the women, and we therefore assume that such ideas are not uncommon in the wider population. As such, the findings from this study may inform programming for Syrian refugee women, but larger program decision making should be supplemented by further studies or assessment.

## Overview of Context

### Syrian Conflict and Displacement

The humanitarian situation inside Syria and in the regional response countries remains dire. The Syrian conflict, which began in 2011 and is still ongoing, has caused the mass displacement of Syrians both out of country (5.6 million) and within its borders (6.2 million).

A complex map of stakeholders and actors inside and outside Syria, each with separate political, ideological, and economic motivations, have contributed to the conflict, which has seen the death of 465,000 civilians (including 3,890 children); the use of chemical weapons against civilians by the Assad regime; mass displacement of Syrians both out of country and within its borders; airstrikes and military action taken on the part of other countries (including the United States and its allies, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Turkey); proxy wars and complex regional and global geopolitics; and the emergence of the Islamic State/ISIL/associated groups.<sup>7</sup>

Despite declining levels of conflict in much of the country, critical humanitarian need remains, both inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries. As of February 2020, 5.56 million Syrian refugees were displaced across the region. This includes approximately 915,000 registered refugees in Lebanon; approximately 3.6 million in Turkey; and 655,000 in Jordan.<sup>8</sup> One million children have been born to refugee parents outside of Syria since the conflict began.

Neighbouring countries have stepped up to assist Syrian refugees. As of 2019, Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees of any country in the world; Lebanon, followed by Jordan, hosted the largest number of refugees per capita.<sup>9</sup> Since the start of their displacement, refugees in these countries have faced ongoing challenges. In 2018 in Lebanon, 69% of households were below poverty line; one in three Syrian households were moderately to severely food insecure.<sup>10</sup> Female-headed households were reported as more vulnerable, based on an array of vulnerability indicators; relatedly, 55% of female-headed households had no employed household member (compared to 27% for male-headed households). Negative coping mechanisms, such as child marriage, remain a critical concern. The gender disparity in employment is striking: by the end of 2018, 73% of Syrian refugee men were working, compared to just 16% of women.<sup>11</sup>

As of 2018 in Jordan, 86% of Syrian refugees lived below the national poverty line; 92% of Syrians were considered severely vulnerable based on household inability to access basic needs.<sup>12</sup> 40% of households were female-headed and, like Lebanon, these households were assessed as significantly more vulnerable. Research conducted by UN Women and UNICEF found significant gender inequalities as reported by both Jordan and Syrian women; entrenched norms and formally enforced discrimination reduced freedom of movement, limited income-generating activities, and led to negative coping mechanisms such as early marriage.<sup>13</sup>

In Turkey, 93% of refugees with official temporary protection status lived outside of camp settings, where only 15% of women worked income-generating jobs. In 2017, approximately 24% lived below the national extreme poverty line.<sup>14</sup> Women have poor access to income-generating activities, with language noted as a critical barrier to gaining employment.<sup>15</sup>

In all three countries, obtaining work permits is a barrier to legal employment for both male and female Syrian refugees. Complex and changing national policy in each location has profoundly hindered opportunity for income-generating activities. In each country, formal mechanisms to facilitate legal refugee employment became critical issue in 2016. Yet, despite international agreement and enacted policy, the number of work permits issued to Syrian refugees since that time has remained notably low. This includes 104,000 work permits issued in Jordan by end of 2018; 500,000 in Lebanon by 2018; and 35,000 work permits issues in Turkey by the end of 2017.<sup>16</sup> In both Jordan and Lebanon, Syrian refugees' legal work is limited to certain sectors (agriculture, construction, environment/cleaning services in Lebanon; agriculture, construction, and manufacturing in Jordan). In all three countries, work permits are obtained largely by men. Finally, in all three countries, tensions between host populations and Syrians have increased as the impact of the crisis worsens.

The situation inside Syria is no less dire; In 2019, 6.2 million individuals were internally displaced across the country, with 11.7 million in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>17</sup> Syrian civilians—displaced internally and across borders—have borne the brunt of the violence, with vast and absolute destruction to both urban and rural stretches of the country. By 2018, over fifty percent of Syria's social infrastructure had been destroyed;<sup>18</sup> in 2019, nearly one third of the population was considered food insecure.<sup>19</sup> Despite this continued devastation, between January and March of 2019, nearly 8,000 Syrians returned to their country of origin.<sup>20</sup> According to UNCHR, 117,000 refugees have returned to Syria since 2015, including 37,000 in 2018. Syrian refugees who repatriate find massive infrastructural devastation, lack of economic and livelihood opportunities, and limited access to health, sanitation, education, and other basic services. Further, an additional 900,000 people have been displaced within northwest Syria between December 2019, and February 2020.<sup>21</sup>

## Gender Norms: Syria Prior to Conflict

Gender norms in Syria prior to the conflict must be examined in order to understand the war's impact on women's lives, experiences, and perceptions. Central to this understanding must be an acknowledgement of the interconnected nature of gender norms and Islam, as well as the state's interpretation and instrumentalization of such norms into policy, law, and bureaucratic norms.<sup>22</sup>

Family and women's roles in the protection and nurturing of the household were central to gender norms in Syrian society. Narratives of "women's freedom from oppression" emerged first in the aftermath of Syria's 1946 independence, with the right to vote awarded in 1949 and women as participants in political processes. The ascension of the Ba'athist party and its secular constitution in 1963 further signalled progress towards women's rights. However, such narratives were strongly contradicted by the practices, policies, and laws of the Syrian state, from independence to the start of the war in 2011.<sup>23</sup> Personal affairs laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship, and trusteeship restricted women's ability and legal right to exercise freedom with regard to family and

children. Penal code and nationality law both differed by gender, and no laws prohibited discrimination based on sex. Prior to the start of conflict, domestic violence was prevalent as were permissive attitudes towards honour killings and early marriage.<sup>24</sup> Notably, such attitudes and acceptance of gender norms differed substantially by region and type of location (e.g. urban vs. rural) in Syria.<sup>25</sup>

Despite signals towards more progressive social norms, including near universal literacy prior to the conflict, the Syrian social order has been dominated by male rule, with women's primary role being that of housewife. Prior to the conflict, gross primary and secondary school enrolment ratios (understood as female as % of male student) were 99% and 100%, respectively.<sup>26</sup> While this indicates essential equality in educational attainment, women still made up less than 20% of the labour force in 2010.<sup>27</sup> In 2011, shortly before the conflict began, the UN Global Gender Gap Report ranked Syria 124 out of 135 countries.<sup>28</sup>

## Gender Transformation and Women's Resilience

### Women's Resilience

The impact of conflict on women and women's roles and identities has long been studied, and yet the complexity and specificity of conflict events and contexts mean that comparison, generalizability, and predications are challenging from one situation to the next. The feminist scholar Valerie Moghadam states that, historically, during war women become "caught between weak states, occupying powers, armed opposition movements, and patriarchal gender arrangements."<sup>29</sup> In Syria, such gender arrangements were in place long before the conflict began. War inevitably brings social upheaval and transformation which, in turn, often places women in new social, political, and economic realities.

Based on CARE research conducted inside Syria in 2018–2019 that examined resilience broadly, women's transformations were described both in terms of structural change in wartime, as well as alongside personal experiences, characteristics, and growth.<sup>30</sup> Women described the independence, self-reliance, and sense of identity that they had gained in their new lives since the start of the conflict; still, these relative gains were discussed alongside profound loss and continued hardship. This multidimensional nature of social transformation—underlining the importance of the personal situated in social and political context—aligns with literature that emphasises the sense of agency gained by women during conflict.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, women's potential as resources for social, political, and economic recovery is made clear during wartime. Women inside Syria demonstrated tremendous resilience, ensuring their families' survival during conflict and displacement.

### Women in Post-Conflict Contexts

Rita Manchanda, writing about post-conflict societies in South Asia, notes that the changes in gender roles brought about by conflict may be dramatic, but that "the impulse to women's social transformation and autonomy is circumscribed by the nationalist project, which constructs women as purveyors of the community's accepted and acceptable cultural identity."<sup>32</sup> In some contexts, the ultimate return to pre-wartime gender norms may actually be conceptualised as a return to peace.

During the conflict, alongside hardship women experienced personal growth and individual empowerment. According to Meintjus, "If women do not transform their sense of themselves during conflict, they cannot defend themselves when, in the wake of war, men reassert their claims."<sup>33</sup> Community is critical to this self-growth and transformation. For displaced women, new communities in host countries or camp contexts provide critical support and learning, but such communities are often lost when women repatriate to their countries of origin or are resettled.

Additionally, the widespread backlash against women's new roles is well documented. CARE's 2018–2019 resilience research inside Syria showed how the conflict affected division of labour. Women were working outside the house in significantly higher numbers than before the conflict, which aligned with how gender roles in labour have changed during conflict throughout history; and yet, when women attempted to maintain their newfound identities, post-war, their attempts at autonomy and rights were often met with violence or erasure. While many changes occur during wartime, particularly for women, little evidence suggests that these changes last.

As stated previously, this research conducted for this report sought to build on the resilience research conducted inside Syria in 2018–2019. It sought to utilize the life stories methods successfully used in Syria in order to perform a targeted, smaller version with Syrian women refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Ultimately, this research was able to delve



in greater depth into the transformative capacity of Syrian women who had experienced displacement, and provide an opportunity for them to share their stories and reflect on their futures whether they return to Syria or ultimately resettle elsewhere.

## Method

### Overview

The GK Consulting team was composed of two US-based technical leads; one Gaziantep-based field team manager, one Amman-based field team trainer, and three field teams (one per country). The field research component of the study was conducted over the course of two months (May to July 2019), with four separate visits in total to 54 women in Turkey (Gaziantep), Jordan (Mafraq), and Lebanon (Beirut and Beqaa). The field data collection team was made up of Syrian refugee women (3 to 4 researchers per country), and participants were women whom they knew personally or through contacts in their daily life (PEER methodology). They represented a variety of Syrian refugee women in host communities.

For the first wave of data collection, researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the participants to learn more about their background before the conflict, their experiences during active conflict in Syria, when and how they arrived in the host communities, and their lives since that displacement. Following the initial interview, participants chose whether, for the remaining waves, they would like to write in journals (this included following specific prompts and then sitting for a brief interview to discuss their entries), or to sit for extended interviews for each wave (this included answering questions about key moments in their lives, iterated specifically for each woman based on prior interview information).

Between Waves 1 and 2, journaling participants received a generic prompt to consider:

- *We understand that you have been through a lot to end up in the place you are now. We'd like to know more about what, in particular, you are doing to 'stand on your own two feet' now. What are the challenges you face, and what do you do to try to overcome them? Who do you reach out to?*
- *What are your plans for the next week? Month? Year? Does it involve going back to Syria or staying here, or doing something else?*

They received another generic prompt between Waves 2 and 3:

- *Tell us about your week. Describe some specific instances where you tried to do something to help yourself and/or your family, and it worked well. Describe some specific instances where you tried and it didn't work so well.*
- *What has been motivating you this week? What has been demotivating to you?*

For the remaining waves, journalers responded to specific questions, developed by the technical team and field manager, based on the content that they had written previously.

In Wave 1, interview participants completed a life story timeline, where they indicated key moments in their lives from birth. At Wave 2, they answered a set of questions for one or more key moments in their lives:

1. *Can you describe the event?*
2. *Name one thing that made recovering from/getting through this event more difficult.*
3. *Name one thing that helped you get through this event?*
4. *Who else in your life was affected by this event? How did they help or hurt you in dealing with this event?*
5. *How did this event make you feel in the short term (i.e. right when it happened)?*
6. *How did this event make you feel in the long term (i.e. a few months later, a year later, now)?*
7. *Is there anything that you learned from this experience that will help you in the future?*

For the subsequent waves, the international research team developed specific probing questions for each participant based on what they had said in previous interviews.

In total, teams visited participants over the course of four waves to get at the desired depth and breadth of information needed for this study.

## Participants

Sampling of participants for this study was both purposeful and based on convenience. The international research team selected locations purposefully to capture a spectrum of the types of refugees living in host communities in each country. In Lebanon, two communities were chosen because the experiences of refugees in each location were unique and separate research teams were quickly identified. Selection of communities in each location and individual participants was based primarily on convenience (i.e. where a field team was identified and hired such that they could conduct research with their peers). Women in each of the communities represent a range of experiences related to the country and region in which they are residing. Profiles of each community are included in Box 1, below.

### Box 1: Profile of communities in the study

**Gaziantep, Turkey:** As of January 2020, Turkey is hosting an estimated 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees according to Turkey's General Directorate of Migration Management.<sup>34</sup> In 2019, Turkey remained home to the largest registered refugee population in the world, with over four million people<sup>35</sup>; the majority residing in four main southern provinces; Gaziantep being among them. Situated along the Syrian border, Gaziantep, the sixth largest city and industrial hub of Turkey, is home to over 450,000 Syrian refugees, an estimated 50% of whom are women.<sup>36</sup> One of the challenges faced by Syrian Refugees in Turkey is the language barrier, which has made it difficult for refugees to access education and dignified work, as well as integrate into the host community. According to an assessment conducted by UN Women, only 15% of women in Turkey have income-generating jobs, half of widowed women make around 700 TRY, which is half of the minimum wage of 1,400 TRY.<sup>37</sup> A large number of women are .exposed to vulnerable conditions, food insecurity, and are unable to meet the basic life necessities

**Beqaa and Beirut, Lebanon:** With over 344,000, Beqaa has the highest number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Livelihood opportunities are largely limited to informal agricultural labour. Beirut, an urban centre and capital of Lebanon, has the second highest number of refugees, with over 224,000 as of February 2020<sup>38</sup>. Given that the border between Syria and Lebanon remains more lenient compared to other borders, many Syrian families live between Lebanon and Syria. According to UN Women report, 75% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon make less than 3.84 USD per day, which is under the poverty line.<sup>39</sup> Those not living in organised camps face numerous issues, including residency permits, threat of deportation, and inability to secure basic necessities. Unlike in Turkey, refugees in Lebanon are not legally allowed to work

**Mafraq, Jordan:** Mafraq hosts 24.8% of all Syrian refugees in Jordan (162,317 people in Mafraq governorate; 76,600 of whom are in Zaatari Refugee Camp), second only to Amman.<sup>40</sup> Syrian refugees in host communities in Mafraq are considered considerably poorer than non-camp refugees in other areas, with many lacking access to basic necessities, such as shelter, medical, legal and protection services. Outside formal camps, Syrians tend to live in makeshift shelters and huts crowded with refugee families. In Jordan refugees may work legally, but are restricted by sector.<sup>41</sup>

In each country, field team members selected 18 participants who were residents of the research communities. They ensured this included a broad variety of types of refugee women, so as to capture the spectrum of situations that refugee women face. Women with disabilities, widows, older women, women who experienced early marriage, women who had to drop out of school as a result of the conflict and had not returned, divorcees, women who had never been to school, and other particularly vulnerable women who were likely in need of support were purposefully included in the sample. Given the relatively small sample size, a random selection may have overlooked one or more of these types of women. In addition, some women outside of the above categories were intentionally included, so as to capture their experiences as well. Table 1, below, summarises the features of women included in the study.

Table 1: Participant features

	Jordan (n=18)	Lebanon (n=18)	Turkey (n=18)	All (n=54)
Some high school or more #	10	11	14	35
Less than high school #	8	7	4	19
years as refugee # (Mean / Median / Range)	6.1 6 to 8 3	5.0 6 to 8 1	3.8 4 to 8 0.5	5.0 6 to 8 0.5
Widowed or husbands missing #	6	3	3	12
Single, never married #	4	2	3	9

divorced #	5	4	1	10
married or remarried #	3	10	11	24

## Research Ethics Plan

Every research project demands careful attention to research ethics, but this one in particular required a keen understanding of the vulnerability of the participants and precarious situation many are in. As such, the international research team established rigorous ethical protocols in collaboration with the research Steering Group during the inception phase. Every field team member underwent an intensive training module on research ethics that included detailed information on:

- How to obtain informed consent; making clear to participants that their participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any point they wish. Each participant was read a statement of informed consent, given a copy, and asked to sign it by hand (this process was completed at every wave of research to allow the opportunity for them to leave the study);
- How to maintain anonymity for participants (assigning each a unique letter/number code; never using names in documentation);
- How to conduct research sensitively with vulnerable people;
- How to identify when a participant was becoming too upset to continue, to remind her that it was not essential to keep going, and to provide referrals as needed;
- How to ensure confidentiality for participants, transmitting data and destroying hard copies, and securing field notes in a private location and destroying them after sending to field manager;
- Protocols for reporting child protection and other issues to CARE staff (as per CARE guidelines for such situation);
- Paying close attention to field conditions and observing if it was unsafe for researchers or participants, even if it was only a slight feeling of something wrong, to suspend research temporarily or permanently;
- Adhering to a code of conduct for research team behaviour both with participants and in communities of participants even when not actively conducting research (e.g. not liaising inappropriately with research participants).

The Amman- and US-based teams continually ensured that the local field teams followed the above processes. It was also critical for team to maintain close attention to research ethics in data processing and reporting processes. As such, all raw data was shared amongst team members in a private Dropbox folder; community names were not provided in the report, so as to further ensure participant anonymity. These were labelled in the database that was made available only to the research team and CARE.

## Analysis Plan

The data was analysed on a rolling basis; that is, after each wave of data was translated into English, the technical leads and field team manager were able to identify themes that were emerging, and therefore probe intentionally for the next wave of research. All data was entered into an Excel database and each new entry was coded according to both predetermined and emerging themes. After each wave, new themes were identified and existing themes were further refined with additional information. Accordingly, new codes were assigned in the database. The final database contained all raw data and all codes identified up to that point. For the final analysis, another round of coding was conducted, in which all data was reviewed again and codes refined and/or new codes assigned. This enabled a systematic look at trends and outliers from the data collected.

The main themes and codes were then grouped into categories; these categories ultimately made up the headings found in this report. The database was, at this point, primarily used to probe more deeply into the participants' narratives and provided a resource for quotations and any additional nuance that would enrich the report's narrative. Where relevant, numerical data related to the codes was tabulated and disaggregated by some subgroups. However, this practice was generally avoided because of the purposive nature of the sampling for this research exercise. In this regard, while a numerical depiction of the data codes may be interesting in the types of responses found among the 54 respondents,

it would not be at all typical of the types of responses that one would expect to see in a representative sample of Syrian refugee women. Reporting on the number of participants of the 54 who had a certain opinion was also avoided because each woman was effectively (and intentionally) administered a different tool from any of the other women. While all women had the same questions at Wave 1 and 2, questions on follow-up waves were based specifically on what they had described in the previous wave. So, for example while 8 of 54 women may have described X at some point in their 4 waves of interviews, it does not mean that the remaining 44 women would not have described X if they were asked about it; rather, they were not asked about X, but instead Y. As such, any numerical depiction would be misleading. As such, relative tendencies of types of perceptions and experiences are generally described as occurring in all, most, some, or few women to provide some additional level of detail to understand prevalence.

The analysis, in short, is designed to capture and illustrate the details and nuances behind some of the challenges and opportunities that some Syrian refugee women have faced, and in particular the ways that their roles as women have changed. The advantage of the iterative and individually-tailored methods was the high level of detail obtained for each participant. While the findings must therefore not be considered representative of Syrian all refugee women, the findings may be helpful for programming for many.

## Limitations

### *Methodological*

**Method and Sampling.** As the sample size was so small, the sampling method largely purposeful, and the questions asked to each woman completely different and adapted to probe into her own unique experiences, the data provided to us from the women in this study are not representative of all refugee women, nor of refugee women within each location. As such, while the findings do always indicate the country in which a participant is based (and at times mention her education level, marital status, or other key demographic features), this is used to further enrich and contextualize the data, and not to be used as a basis for analysis of any trends or differences across or within groups. In other words, the study is meant to provide further insights into the situations that some refugee women face, but not to provide an account of what a typical refugee woman faces.

### *Logistical Challenges*

**Data collection during Ramadan and Eid was challenging.** The first waves of research were scheduled to take place during Ramadan and Eid. A number of the participants were traveling to visit family, some to Syria, and this caused some difficulty in conducting the interviews during this time (resulting in delays, not cancellations). Also, during Ramadan individuals were fasting from dawn to dusk, and some lacked the energy to complete an interview, despite still being motivated to participate, and asked that interviews be broken up across multiple days or shortened entirely (and this was always granted).

**The first interview was very long.** The first wave's extensive list of questions took some researchers over four hours to complete, much longer than anticipated as a result of much detail being revealed by the participants, so some participants grew tired. As such, the interview was broken up into multiple meetings over the week or shortened if requested. Researchers shortened subsequent interviews with the specific follow-up questions to each participant, based on the previous wave's data, so as to address this challenge. Even then, the team conducted longer interviews if participants indicated a desire to say more. Researchers followed the cues of the participants in every case.

**Four (of 56) participants had difficulty participating in the fourth wave, though they did ultimately participate.** While these participants attended the first three interviews, by the fourth wave they faced challenges given their multiple responsibilities. As such, these four either postponed interview dates or requested a rapid interview for Wave 4. However, because of the rich detail obtained during the first three waves, they are still considered to be full participants in the study.

**Four (of 56) participants, all in Lebanon, did not participate in the fourth wave as a result of Lebanon's intensifying crackdown on Syrian refugees with no work permits and "illegitimate shelters".** As a part of a campaign to pressure Syrian refugees to leave, the Ministry of Labour had been raiding areas and camps where Syrians lived. Syrian refugees were accused of working illegally, even though it had been extremely difficult for them to obtain work permits. The same was being applied to "illegitimate shelters," and Syrians had been ordered to destroy all shelters that lacked a permit. This caused increased fear in participants, as they worried about themselves and their families, discouraging four of the participants from participating in Wave 4. However, because of the rich detail obtained during the first three waves, they are still considered to be full participants in the study.

## Ethical Challenges

**Participants sometimes felt exhaustion and sadness after telling their stories.** As participants offered details from their past and hardships, some felt grief and exhaustion. Researchers meticulously followed the international team's ethical standards, reminding participants they may stop at any point and no longer continue, or could change the subject to anything else. While some participants wished to continue, insisting they were fine and wanted to share their stories, others chose to end interviews early or to postpone future interview dates. Researchers encouraged them to access psychosocial support where available and provided information for locations, if participants were not aware of any (most were already aware of where they could get this support). This caused a delay in data collection for Wave 3 and Wave 4, but by following the ethical standards, researchers ensured that participants felt more comfortable and unpressured, and they were excited to continue with Wave 2.

**Some members of the research team requested a break to access their own psychosocial support.** Many of the researchers have similar hardships to those described by the participants, and therefore found themselves confronting their own wounds and past. This caused distress among some of the researchers, and they requested (and were given) a break, so they could access psychosocial support. The international research team followed up with them daily to ensure their wellbeing, check that they had been able to access support, and also to remind them that they did not need to continue and even then, would receive full compensation for their work. The field researchers were also told that if they wanted to continue, but if topics became too sensitive for them, they could steer away from such topics. Regional Team Lead and Field Researchers communicated daily to not only follow up with work, but ensure their wellbeing.

## Findings

This section examines women's lives (as self-reported) before the conflict and then details how their lives have changed as refugees. The report examines these changes first generally, and then focuses on gender roles, including a detailed examination of the changing gender roles related to the three key domains of refugee women's lives that emerged from the research: livelihoods/education, husbands/marriage, and social networks (including extended family, in-laws, and friends). Quotations are used to enrich the findings and are identified with a unique ID in which we reveal only the participant's assigned number and location (LB: Beirut or Beqaa, Lebanon; GZ: Gaziantep, Turkey; MAF: Mafraq, Jordan).<sup>42</sup>

The report uses the term 'empowered' to capture the idea that someone has her own agency and ability to make decisions. In some cases, this may be that she makes the decision to be a housewife; in another, it may be that she makes the decision to leave her husband and earn her own money. Accordingly, the report examines the varying degrees of empowerment that women report having (or lacking) and how they perceive this power.

### Profile of Women Before the Conflict

**Women reported that it was atypical for women to be empowered in these terms.**

*"Yes, of course, 70% of Syrian women did not work back in Syria. They did not even go out of their houses to buy groceries. Everything was provided to them" (LB035).*

*"Women... spent most of their time at home, not knowing about the outside world or interacting with it" (GZ017).*

*"Here [in Syria] women are forbidden to do anything" (GZ010).*

*"Men can leave the house anytime without being questioned or stopped, while women have constraints from her husband and children that prevent her from going out in order to do her role as mother and wife within the household" (MAF045).*

This is not to say, however, that no women in Syria were empowered. Indeed, a number of women in the study stressed they have always made their own decisions. They considered themselves independent and were not concerned with society's pressures to be subordinate to men and other cultural norms. This aligns with research and literature describing gender in Syria prior to the conflict;<sup>43</sup> namely, the presence of specific women who attained independence via, for example, education or livelihoods, while situated within a larger context of political, legal, and social restriction.

There is no single, conclusive explanation in the data as to how or why some Syrian women were empowered within a context where most women were not. Participants offered their own explanations, which differed greatly across the data. Some indicated they were empowered as a result of a more open-minded family or community.

“[I am a] female who came from an open-minded community who does not have these old-fashioned ideas related to masculinity” (GZ010).

Others said that they pushed against society’s norms because of some aspect of their character.

“I am rebellious by nature and hate oppression. I challenged everything” (LB032).

“No one supported me in my decision to make my own money, I was determined to be independent alone. I have my independency and my own identity. Other women feel they do not have this freedom to do anything without men’s permission as they confront an oppressive masculine society” (LB019).

Table 2, below, illustrates the ways in which women expressed this empowerment, pre-conflict, as it relates to the three main domains in their lives.

*Table 2: Examples of how women were empowered before conflict, by domain*

<p><b>Work / livelihood / education</b></p>	<p>In general, the empowered women before the conflict explained how they had to rebel in order to pursue a livelihood or education, and eventually found success with much effort:  <i>“My parents made me leave school after elementary, saying girls will end up in the kitchen, though I had great energy to learn and improve. My family forbade me from going out without one of my male siblings. I had no voice, as girls do not have the right to an opinion. I was married to my cousin, arranged by my parents, when I was 19 years old. So, I lived in a new environment and discovered that when I asked my husband to give me an allowance, which was only 10 Syrian Pounds, he opened an investigation as to why I needed the money and where and how I was going to spend it. So, I depended on myself and began to make crochet pieces and sell them in the neighbourhood. Then my work developed and I began to sell products at [two larger nearby markets]. I had a good relationship with my husband; the only problem I had with him was his stinginess, which affected our relationship and motivated me to work, to avoid asking for money. I became financially independent and distributed work to the neighbourhood women while I did the marketing”</i> (LB019).</p> <p>Some pointed out that most Syrian women were expected to stay at home, but that some educated and/or professional women were respected and had special freedoms based on their role in a very particular type of employment. This type of empowerment was encouraged:  <i>“Syrian woman were not allowed to leave her house for long hours, and her role was be a housewife unless she was a teacher, an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer or a government employee. Otherwise it was impossible for her to work in workshops alongside men and be with them for long hours”</i> (GZ001).</p>
---	--

<b>Marriage and Familial / Social Networks</b>	<p>Some women were sufficiently empowered before the conflict to divorce a husband who was abusive or otherwise unsupportive. One woman described her divorce as relatively easy as a result of her supportive background:  <i>“My family supports and empowers me as I came from a liberal environment and open-minded family. Thus, my divorce [from a man who had different political opinions] was not a big deal for me”</i> (LBO20).</p> <p>Conversely, another woman described how she decided to divorce her husband despite never thinking she would divorce, and, in the process, lost almost all of her possessions:  <i>“In 2006, I got divorced from my husband, because I was beaten and insulted in his house, and his mother used to lock the fridge sometimes, so I wouldn’t eat. I stayed for a week without food and I was prevented from going outside the house. I used to be worried about my parents getting a divorce; I didn’t know that I would get one. I decided to commit suicide. I went to the roof and promised myself to jump, but then I thought about my son and what would happen to him, so I decided to leave my husband and get a divorce... In the same year, he married another woman and took all my stuff in his room and gave it to her”</i> (MAF039).</p> <p>Others felt empowered to make the decision not to marry or have children when both society and their family expected it of them:  <i>“In Syria I would only spend money on myself. I challenged my family to complete my education and refused to get married before I gained self-realization. I am rebellious by nature and hate oppression. I challenged everything and got out of my community to pursue education”</i> (LBO32).</p>
--	--

To summarise, prior to the conflict, some individual and social opportunity existed for women in Syria, and some women did become empowered, though many did not. As will be discussed below, a major impetus to increased empowerment was the massive shock that women and families experienced as a result of the conflict and their changed lives.

### Major Challenges as Refugees

Throughout the interviews, women described the many challenges they faced as refugees. These are summarised in the table below, and will be revisited throughout the findings, discussion, and recommendations sections that follow.

*Table 3: Relative prevalence (all, most, some, very few) of major challenges described, based on coding of open-ended response to question about major challenges as refugee*

	Jordan	Lebanon	Turkey
Not enough money for basic needs	All	All	All
No jobs / inadequate jobs	All	All	All
Exploitation at work	Most	Most	Some
Housing insecurity	Most	Most	Some
Lacks official papers / documents / certificates	Most	Most	Most
Looked down upon by host population	Most	Most	Most
Need healthcare, including psychosocial	Most	Some	Some
Lack of educational opportunities	Some	Some	Some
Severe trauma	Most	Most	Most
Lack of familial or social network	Very few	Very few	Very few

Despite these challenges, participants described relative stability in their lives as refugees compared to their lives inside Syria; specifically, they were no longer at risk of bombing and aerial attacks, frequent forced displacement, and complete lack of employment opportunity. Life in displacement has not been without challenges, though, and still there are shocks and stressors that women continue to face. The main difference is that, as refugees, they were not at risk of active and recurring conflict. Participants described extreme gratitude for this, as well as the intention to remain outside of Syria until they become confident the country has become truly stable again.

*“It is been seven years since I became a refugee. I lived in a camp in the middle of the desert, though I felt it was paradise as there was no sound of bombing. But, the bitterness of the situation, dust, and hardships made my son sick”* (MAF053).

Amongst these challenges, all women in the study indicated that they relied to some extent on aid in the form of cash assistance, housing stipends, food baskets, livelihood trainings, psychosocial support and/or counselling. Others mentioned attending ‘women’s empowerment trainings’ that were multi-faceted in helping women gain confidence and learn skills. Assistance in this variety of forms was said to come from a variety of sources: local NGOs, UN, international NGOs, religious organisations, and others. This support was often critical for them, though not always reliable and sufficient; as such, women indicated how they turned to multiple different sources at different points in time.

## Shifting Norms

**The most fundamental and dramatic shift that has occurred for women is that they feel more empowered now – i.e. more able to make decisions for themselves and follow through with them – than prior to the conflict.** Of the 36 respondents who commented on their opinion of this shift, only four said outright that it was a mostly negative change.<sup>44</sup> The others viewed this general shift toward being more empowered as a positive development that they hoped would endure.

Still, their empowerment remained limited. They faced barriers to truly experiencing full agency (such as males in their lives or communities continuing to deny them rights) and barriers to capitalizing on this newfound agency (for example, not having sufficient education to get a better job). Women often described intense stress and struggle as a result of their new responsibilities; while they were empowered and able to do new things, this did not come without some adjustment.

All participants in the study expressed that Syrian women’s roles in general (and their own specifically) had fundamentally changed as a result of the conflict. They described a variety of hardships that they had endured and/or new responsibilities they now had.

*“I believe that the crisis has positive and negative effect at the same time. Positively Syrian women managed to break their fear, depend on themselves. Negatively: I believe that the crisis put extra burden on women that exceeded our ability and femininity” (GZ004).*

*“Because of all the pain and shocks that occurred in my life, I learned to be rebellious from the inside, and I became more aware of the experiences and relationships I had, especially at work. When a subject is open for discussion, I have become able to express my thoughts and with a discourse that sometimes convinces others of my point of view. At the same time, I am able to listen to the other point views; I can now admit my faults and confront others with theirs” (LB022).*

In the following sections, these changing roles will be explored around three main domains: livelihoods and education, marriage, and broader social/familial networks.

## Changing Livelihoods

**Women have profoundly different roles now as the primary or main breadwinners in their families.** Of the 54 women in the study, 45 described how they had to work to support their families either all the time or often. Two specified they did not work at all, and two were students (the remainder did not specify). As a result of the conflict and its consequences, men (husbands, fathers, brothers) were arrested, killed, kidnapped, recruited, severely wounded, traumatised, and/or forced to live far away from displaced families. Women, thus, took over the previous male-occupied role of the sole or primary breadwinner: *“Syrian women have different roles here because they lost their providers and have to work in order to provide for their families” (MAF047); “When we came here, we suffered, and our lives drastically changed, as we used to live with my husband and sons, and they provide for us everything we need. Here, I had to be responsible for everything, which was hard for me and for my daughters” (LB033).*

In families and contexts where men were still present and able to work, women often also worked outside the home in order to cope with a dramatically reduced income as well as increased prices for basic necessities. Displacement to another country came with additional costs, including vulnerable employment for men, and displaced women needed to work in order to help their families survive.

*“My husband’s illness and the negligence that occurred during his surgery, with its severe side effects, are irreparable and made him lose his ability to move and deal with challenging conditions. He lost the ability*



to perform his duties in the family, and what makes it harder is that with his condition, he could not find a suitable job to secure even the minimum income to help me with expenses for our son's education" (GZ005).

*"My son was working then in Gaziantep [when we were living outside of Gaziantep in Turkey], returning home only on Saturdays for six months. Then we decided to move to Gaziantep because there are more job opportunities and because my son's work does not cover all of our expenses. My husband was still recovering from his injury and could not work, so we went there, rented a house and I went to work with my son in a workshop" (GZ001).*

**Of those who worked, most (40 of 45<sup>45</sup>) indicated they were mostly happy to have the opportunities to work and earn income for themselves, despite the intense pressure from these new roles.** For many women, working and contributing income (in some cases, the entire household income) have vastly increased their confidence and belief in their abilities. Holding the role of household breadwinner, and in particular going outside of the house to work with other people and using skills that they hadn't used elsewhere before, has translated into an increased sense of self-worth that extends beyond their value as a caregiver within their family. This has created a newfound confidence to express their agency in other domains in the household, in relationships, and in society generally.

*"Everything changed once I started to work and become an independent woman, I feel that I am the strongest among my family and friends. I have three siblings and I am the youngest, but they all ask me for advice. They feel that I am very strong, because I challenged everybody and nothing stood in my way. I wasn't a strong woman before, and I couldn't make my own decisions, but now I am completely changed and have made my own decisions in life. My daughters got affected so much, because when I was weak, they used to copy what I did, and now, since I became strong and responsible, they copy what I do as well, and I consider it a positive thing in my life. In the past, I was afraid of the society, because I was a woman and it wasn't allowed for me to do everything, but now I do not fear anything and I can do whatever I want. For instance, I couldn't divorce my husband in the past because of my weak personality and because of people's thoughts about me, but now, I managed to do it" (GZ003).*

*"My family in Syria refused my work [taken on because the husband died in conflict] and they were afraid of this step, but I decided and insisted on trying, which was a successful step for me that changed my personality and gave me financial independence. I do not need anyone now as I am a strong woman... I will maintain this role because I do not want to marry again, and I am now adjusting to my new situation, and even if I return to Syria, I would do the same. I aspire to have a political role after the conflict ends. I would like to have a part in political decisions because this role did not exist in Syria before. If I stay in Jordan, I wish to have a job at one of the organizations, not a volunteer" (MAF037).*

*"I can now make decisions because I am the one who works and provides for the family. For example, I chose when to move from the house, when and where" (MAF044).*

**When the host country had more progressive gender norms related to women's livelihoods and education, some women indicated that they found it easier to move past the societal pressures against women working that they had grown up with.** They indicated that now, they worried about returning to Syria, because traditional gender attitudes may remain and could be detrimental to their newfound empowerment.

*"I don't think of going back to Syria. I want to stay in Turkey, in the place that helped me to be a strong woman and strengthened me and my personality" (GZ003).*

*"Lebanese society differs from the Syrian one regarding their perspective on working women. For them, it is normal for women to work, while Syrians do not accept it. Some Syrian men disdain working women, saying, 'now you have tongues to talk with' and they become abusive" (LB033).*

*"For me, within the current circumstances, I managed to work and secure living for my children. If I was still in Syria, I would not even dream of having work, so how would my children live?" (GZ017).*

**There have also been numerous opportunities provided by NGOs and other organisations that focus particularly on refugee women to help enhance their livelihood through skills training.** Every woman described some sort of livelihood training (e.g. learning crafts, business skills, empowerment seminars) that either she had accessed, or knew

she'd be able to access (with the exception of two older women in Mafraq who indicated that the trainings were too far for them). Many had been to dozens of livelihood trainings or enrolled in short-term programs. One woman even remarked that,

*"I think that most organizations support women and children more than they support men. For instance, when I worked in agriculture their target group was only women. Also, paid vocational training courses benefitted women more than men... There are many NGOs that support women by teaching them languages, new professions such as hairdressing, culinary and handcraft. Some NGOs provide women with raw material in order to do work from her home. They also organize exhibitions to display women's work and sell it, the returns normally go to those women in addition to volunteer women at the same organizations. I think that Syrian families and the community in general are satisfied with NGOs services to support women and help her provide to her family" (GZ001).*

**However, with the new responsibility of securing and holding a viable livelihood, women faced new and unfamiliar challenges.** They described profound stress and worry related to successfully occupying "both the roles of men and women." Some of them felt such intense stress that they looked back fondly on their previous life, where they were only responsible for female roles in the house, and hoped to return to these roles one day.

*"I used to be a housewife in the past, a mother and a lady in my community, but afterward, I became like a cactus, hard with thorns on the outside due to enduring hardships and coping with the unstable life circumstances and atmosphere. Without a doubt, responsibilities were a heavy burden to me and changed the old female inside me. It may be a result of my husband's illness, displacements, or the fear of the unknown future for me and my family. All of the above, forced me to gain maturity fast, which was burning me, due to the rapid change, so I lost my femininity and became hard as a rock, emotionally. The reality imposed this change, and I had no choice in it. Holding to hope is what helps me keep going" (GZ005).*

*"I am not only a housewife, I am taking his role and my role at the same time... I will maintain this role, because, as I told you, my husband has a weak personality and sidelines himself regarding our living, though I am getting tired of this role and I do not want everyone to rely on me all the time" (LB033).*

*"I came to Jordan to seek refuge escaping war and suppression in Syria. I am the head of the family and the only provider. I carry the responsibility of this family that consists of females only. My role in Jordan changed because I was forced by social conditions to be the mother and the father for my daughters. This role took a great effort until I succeeded in it. I have had this role for seven years during which my life was turned upside down as I was carrying a responsibility bigger than me. In Syria life was much easier socially and mentally. In this hosting country, we encounter marginalisation and psychological pressure; we endure the household responsibilities, rent, children education and living needs. At the beginning of refuging I was depressed to the point that I was living on antidepressant and anxiety medications because I could not stop thinking" (MAF053).*

**Many of the women in the study who spoke positively about their role as breadwinner also expressed confidence that they would continue working—even if their family no longer needed the income—because it provided them a newfound sense of purpose and power.**

*"This change [in women's roles related to work] will happen here and inside Syria, because I went through crisis in Syria, and after nine years, I got used to my new life as a productive, active woman" (GZ004).*

*"I think it will continue because it is impossible to make women weak again or dependent without work as it became reality for a long time and became normal for them" (GZ001).*

*"If I return to Syria I believe that I would carry the same message of my work here. I will start my own project where I will engage women who are vulnerable and without a supporter. My dream is to find work opportunities for such women in order to give them dignity and security because I went through such circumstances as being lost and felt the bitterness of being in need while I was bearing responsibilities of my son and my family. I am not just satisfied, I am proud to have this role because I feel power inside that make me feel responsible towards refugees" (MAF039).*

### *Barriers – Societal Pressures*

**Some women indicated that a major barrier to their success in pursuing livelihoods was the support she received (or not) from her family while doing so.** Traditional gender norms were still present and, despite women occupying new spaces during times of acute need, such changes may not endure.

*“My parents don’t support me, they always tell me that women are supposed to be at home, but I want to be strong and I don’t want to listen to their words” (LB030).*

*“These [NGO and other civil society] organisations support women a lot and encourage them, even when they face difficulties and pressures from their families, who sometimes prevent them from going to the organization., When parents know that the organisations are giving them food and money, though, they allowed women to go” (LB020).*

Other women described moderate shifts towards accepting women’s employment, but only in certain sectors.

*“Members of my family are still conservative regarding work at factories or workshops for long hours away from home, and my family members still in Syria have the same perspective regarding working outside home, but to them, working from home to secure income or working with an organization—because it is a humanitarian profession—is acceptable” (GZ004).*

*“I worked in a carton factory. My parents told me that ‘you got married to not work’, but I started telling them that I do this for the kids and because my husband’s salary is low too. Our expenses were too high, we had to pay \$5000 every month including rent, electricity, basic needs... until my husband found a better job. He asked me to leave my work, but some clashes happened between us and affected our relationship and our family’s relationship” (LB030).*

*Of course, men have different views, as men do not accept women who work for long hours outside the house, especially workshops, though now men’s opinion changed somehow, as most men now work with their daughter and wives in workshops, and sometimes, like at the agricultural project where I worked, I saw whole families there” (GZ001).*

Also, some women worried that when men begin finding viable employment again, the women would be pressured to return to their roles in the home. This may become relevant with increasing stabilization and a return to Syria, and/or more complete integration into a host country.

*“There will be a clash if men return to the workforce and have working opportunities. They will force women to stay at home again, like before, because they believe that women are created to be housewives. While women who are without men, they will return strong and independent” (LB033).*

*“Men living in Syria today still disapprove of work for Syrian women in Turkey, because they have not lived in the same situation [as we refugees] in a host country. Customs in Syria are very different from Turkish customs. I do not think that the opportunities I have here for work would be similar in Syria. They would be much less” (GZ001).*

### *Barriers – Concrete Limitations*

Even if refugee women had emotional support from family and friends, they still faced concrete limitations when pursuing viable livelihoods, including health issues (in particular dealing with trauma), skills, finance, underemployment/lack of job opportunities, ineligible legal status, and exploitation.

**Women with poor mental health, and who are also stressed about their children’s mental health,** described how affected they were by the pressures of supporting their family combined with the trauma they had faced enduring and/or escaping active conflict in Syria. Though they had continued to hang on, some indicated that it was becoming increasingly difficult to continue coping:

*“Last year, I was better off than this year. My work was better, and I was able to provide for my children. But health issues hindered me from supporting my kids. To me, it was tiresome, physically and mentally, as*

*I worried about my kids and their wellbeing during my illness. I went to the doctor and I was admitted to the hospital for 15 days, which caused me to lose my job, because my employer fired me for being absent for so long. Thank God, after recovering, I went looking for jobs and I found one similar to the one I had, washing dishes, preparing coffee and tea in offices and houses. Unfortunately, I am working for a Turkish employer, as I could not cope with people here. Sometimes I feel that my brain could not comprehend what happened to me and how I reached this point, but my only motive was my children” (GZ017).*

*“I got through this year under great psychological pressure... One time, I was standing in the line, waiting for my turn to get the [aid] box. I felt dizzy and my eyes got blurry. I felt like I was going to faint. Suddenly, I saw the employees putting water on my face. I waited a little bit to get better and then I went back home. I cried a lot. What have we done to be exposed to all of this humiliation? No one can understand, except by going through all of this. We didn’t want anything from this life except to live with dignity. We haven’t hurt anyone. Why is this happening to us? I am in my 50s and I thought that I raised my children to be responsible for themselves, but I am still worried about them. I still live in fear, I still don’t know how we’re going to buy food tomorrow. They cut the electricity at night, and it’s very hot, so we can’t sleep, because there are a lot of insects. I noticed that my daughter is always stressed and scared by everything, especially fireworks. Even the older people get afraid sometimes, and then we remember that we are not in Syria, and this is not a war. Once we were going to the supermarket to buy bread, and suddenly fireworks started, and it was so close to my daughter, she was really scared, as if something happened to her. I hugged her while she was shivering and screaming: “Isn’t it enough, what they did in Syria? Why are they after us?” I recognised at that moment how scared she had been in Syria without showing us. I started telling her that we are not in Syria, and there is no war here. She calmed down a little bit. When we went home, I opened this conversation again, so she could say everything in her heart. I will never forget what she said: “What are we children guilty of? Why are they killing us and terrifying us? We can no longer go to the parks...” I am not only a housewife. I am taking my husband’s role and my role at the same time. I have to accept and do it, but I am exhausted... I support the whole family morally and my sons support the whole family financially... I am getting tired of this role and I do not want everyone to rely on me all the time” (LB033).*

**Women with disabilities found themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation** as they tried to pursue livelihoods. Those with physical disabilities explained how they were limited to the types of work they could do, though, as one woman with a disability stressed, *“Every disabled person has energy inside, but he/she needs an opportunity”* (MAF050). Some found work opportunities, but they could not necessarily rely on them to be long-term.

*“I found a volunteering job in Turkey. they didn’t want to accept me at first because of my eye disability, but then a man felt for me and helped me to work with them. They gave me a paper with students’ names on it, I used to take a picture of the paper and zoom in, my job was to go with the students in the bus from their home to the centre. I formed good relationships and forgot my pain, but after two months my job was over and I went back home” (GZ014).*

Others required specific accommodations, such as ability to work in the home because of poor mobility, but struggled to find such opportunities that match their skill level.

*“Of course this choice was imposed on me. It was not my choice to be a refugee or bear responsibility, despite my illness and my leg disability, which keep me from doing many things. I do not think I have other choices regarding the situation in this country and refugee conditions, because it is worsening every day. I do not think there will be choices, because my situation is difficult. I need work that suits my condition, which is difficult to find here due to the situation in this country and also because my mother’s illness—she could not be left alone. I hope to find work from home, but those jobs need experience, which I do not have” (LB021).*

One woman specified how her disability affected her mental health, though she tried to not let it.

*“My hand condition, though it does not hinder me from doing work, has a psychological effect on me due people’s gazing and pity. Despite all that, I learned from hardship not to stop and to move forward for my children and family; also because of refuging I learned to depend on myself only and not to wait for help from anyone not even my husband or children or family” (LB027).*

Treatment to reduce the impact of the disability could be life-changing, as for one woman who worked as a nursemaid but suffered a fall down the stairs.

*“The problems that I have now are basically from my injury. I can’t walk a lot and I can’t stand for a long time, and some work hurts, like cleaning and standing for a long time to wash the dishes. I take physiotherapy sessions in a centre for refugees; I treat my leg and my back and I have gotten much better than before. But every 15 days I have to take another session. My perspective has changed in a good way and I started believing in God’s will for our lives and that he is with us always” (GZ012).*

**Women who had never worked outside the household, especially those who also had little education, lacked many of the skills that were needed to engage in forms of employment that may be more lucrative.** Many explained how they worked as cleaners, childcare attendants, or cooks; they were essentially doing jobs that they have done as housewives. While some had taken courses to learn new skills for employment, not all had access, or the courses offered had not resulted in better jobs.

*“Because I did not have education, I did not know what kind of work I would do to secure my children’s livelihood ... So I worked for two months picking fruit... Work on farms was not new to me. Back in Syria, we have land that we used to plant and work on, but the difference here is, I am constrained by the owner’s rules regarding what time I can come and leave. I was forced to abide by his rules in order to provide for my kids and pay the rent. Because I live far from the city centre, I did not know about aid or trainings that are provided by NGOs. NGOs work within the city of Mafraq, while the rural areas do not have their support. As refugees, we need not only trainings; we need to have jobs after them. I am thinking of starting my own project to support me and my children” (MAF053).*

*“I did not work outside the house. I only took care of my children and family, but when I became a refugee, everything changed. I learned to depend only on myself and not wait for help from anyone, not even my husband or children or family. Honestly, it [the need to work to support family] was imposed on me, and I did not want to work. I do not want to remain in this job, working in people’s houses as a maid, where I have to bear their tempers and personalities. Maybe I chose this job only because I did not want to need anyone, to depend on myself and support my family, but the nature of the work was not my choice, as I did not have other opportunities. I do not know if there are other choices for me, because the situation is the same. I wish I could find a better job, even if it was in school services, at least I would have a secure job” (LB027).*

**Highly educated women, including those who may have worked in Syria, were still unable to access jobs that were in line with their skill levels.** They were generally able to find some kind of work as a result of their education level and associated skills (e.g. reading, writing, computer), but the work was not necessarily related to their expertise.

*“I gained experience in teaching and I started to teach in school, even though I am a lawyer. But I couldn’t work in that field. I worked as a translator and a teacher and helped women all over the country, because a lot of them lack encouragement and their financial situation is very bad. It’s very hard for Syrian people to work here, and the ones who found work were very lucky” (LB020).*

*“I am a student at the university and working at the same time. I work in graphic design in a place that gathers skilled refugees, and earn a small amount of money. I also make wool clothes, especially in the winter, and mostly for girls at the university. Living in Jordan, I have to work, and it would be difficult to cope and settle if you are not financially independent. Currently, I cover the university expenses to feel respected by my family and anyone who knows me, by managing my time between work and study... Because I am educated, I will be able to start my life from scratch” (MAF050).*

This also applied to women who attended skills training programs as refugees, but then found themselves with no job opportunity to use these new skills.

*“My friends and I started an initiative to help Syrian refugees on campus in sewing so they could start working and depending on themselves. We managed to help them in three months, and now we are a women’s empowerment initiative... My job with the displaced women is good but I get frustrated sometimes, because no one supports [purchases products from, or offers jobs related to] the projects that the women want to do. We empower and support women, but unfortunately, jobs aren’t available for them nor is*

*a market that can buy from them what they do. Everything they learned was just for experience...The participants were worried about the products [not selling] so we had to stop the initiative at that point. We were really sad about what happened and we started to look for new [market] needs other than sewing, so we tried cosmetics” (LB020).*

**Women were not eligible to work legally in many industries, limiting their options.** Some women were in the country legally, but special work permits were required that employers did not always acquire.

*“In Syria, I had absolute freedom in everything, while here in Lebanon, regulations restrict Syrians from moving from one area to the other. Syrians do not have permits to work, and sometimes authorities close their businesses and deport them. In Syria, it was much easier to have a business, while here, though I have freedom, spending my money, I found difficulties when it came to having a business” (LB019).*

*“I wish to have official work, where I will have all the rights. I am trying to have it, but not having the nationality prevents me, because refugees are not allowed to join the governmental workforce” (MAF043).*

*“I hope to have a job, but I cannot have it, because I’m not Jordanian. We need NGOs to change their rules in order to allow us to work in their programs” (MAF048).*

*“The hardest situation for me and my family was last year. I was working as a translator in a hospital. While working, I was suddenly summoned to the manager’s office and found security forces there. Then the manager told me I was not allowed to work there anymore, because I was not certified from Kilis university with a translation certificate” (GZ002).*

**Others were in the country illegally and ineligible to work:** *“I’m trying to find a way to go to another country as a refugee, because I can’t go back to my country, I don’t have money and I entered Lebanon illegally. I just want to have legal papers, so I can work and educate my children” (LB031).*

**Others were in the country legally, but did not have proper documentation,** often because they left Syria with nothing or had not been able to return to renew expired documents, and were thus ineligible to work at all, or only in certain industries.

*“Because I am from Syria and my kids are Syrian, we can’t get residence, because the kids got out of Syria without taking their IDs. We got out with our passports only, and now they are expired, and I need \$2,000 to have the residency” (LB030).*

**Still others had tried to open businesses, but were closed down as a result of improper or inadequate permits; this deterred them from continuing or expanding a business.**

*“Changes in the area are becoming worse; security here are trying to put pressure on Syrians by closing their businesses to make them go back... After we stood up on our feet [and opened a clothing shop], the security forces in Lebanon came and closed the shop, so we returned back to point zero... We could keep the shop, but we had expenses along with the pricey license that cost \$7,000. In addition, we have to open a bank account to maintain our business, which is difficult for Syrians” (LB033).*

*“I hope to have a mini supermarket, so I can pay our expenses and pay for my children’s education. I need financial support and I need residency papers, because if anything happened, I could be kicked out of Turkey. That’s why I need this kind of support, in order to start working and to be somehow stable, without being afraid of displacement once again” (GZ017).*

**Syrian refugee women also cited exploitation in the workplace. They were subjected to longer hours, lack of contracts, and the potential to be fired at will, as well as lower wages and poorer treatment compared to their counterparts in the host country.** Often, this was a result of their working illegally, and therefore not having access to the rights given to host country or otherwise legal workers.

*“There are contradictory views in the hosting community regarding the aid received by Syrian refugees, such as food and the eye scan. People here are convinced that the money came from their country’s resources*

and that this aid belongs to them. At NGOs, even if a Syrian refugee is educated, he would only receive 10 JOD a day, while Jordanian employees at the same NGO would not accept working for less than 700 JOD a month. NGO only operate to benefit their employees<sup>46</sup> (MAF039).

*“I believe my role is different from Turkish women’s role. I work for 12 hours a day, while Turkish women who are working at the same place have only 5 to 9 working hours, with better salaries. They also have further stability, as they have signed contracts, so they are more comfortable than I am... I feel worried, because I may be released from work at any time, because I do not have a contract. This applies also for the house I am renting” (GZ002).*

*“I now work in a candy shop and before this I moved from one job to another, because I used to get teased a lot, and my bosses always threatened me that if I didn’t do what they asked, then they would fire me. Most of the time, I lost my job, because I refused to do things that I didn’t believe I should do in my role. I used to work for 12 hours a day for a small amount of money, even though I have experience and have worked since I was 13 years old. Syrian people aren’t allowed to work in Lebanon, but we work in an illegal way, so we have no rights in work and no health insurance” (LB023).*

**Women who were interested in starting or growing a business lacked access to finance.** Many were confident that the business would do well, given their existing customer base, knowledge of using social media to advertise, and the quality of products they were already selling.

*“I want to open a clothing shop. I consider it the best job for me as a female. In the meantime, I am studying Turkish, so I can communicate with people, in order for my project to succeed. As for the barriers I face, I struggle to open my shop, because I don’t have enough money, and the license would take a long time for this project. If I had money, I would start this project, especially because my brother knows a lot of businessmen who are able to help me with the products” (GZ003).*

*“Here we struggle... I want to work with my husband in a small shop, but we do not have the capital to start such a business, as the minimum amount we need to have to rent a shop and fill it with products ranges between 10,000 to 15,000 lira, excluding licensing and other related expenses” (GZ005).*

*“I work in small-scale clothing retail. I have financial shortages and inadequate income, because I have to pay rent and also have my own household expenses, which is keeping me from growing the business. If I had financial support, I would not only support myself and my family, I would also support other women, by establishing a project, for example, establishing a sewing and crochet workshop. This was like a project I did in Syria, but here I do not have the financial support to start such project. I hope one day I will be able to achieve it in order to continue supporting women and helping them gain their financial independence” (LB019).*

*“Finding an affordable house is not easy, especially with the additional expenses of insurance and commissions, not to mention the sudden increase in rent. This situation has become common among refugees, because they do not own properties and only depend on rent. I make clothes and toys from wool to support me and secure income. I put all of my energy in my work and I am very good at it. I would like to improve myself and increase my income by opening a store to sell my products to more customers, but in order to avoid closing, I need to have a license from the municipal government and money for rent. I trust that my business will flourish, because I publish my work on social media, where people like my work and place orders. This profession is my only love. I keep myself updated with new products and techniques by watching YouTube. I improve myself and create new designs and products that interest people” (GZ008).*

**Women felt as though Syrians were looked down upon and not wanted in the host country.** They felt pressured to return to Syria, despite the safety concerns they had.

*“One thing that pressured me a lot was how much they [host community members] hated the Syrian refugees, as if we were indigent. They are very racist. My children tried to renew their residency, but they told them that they have to leave the country, and we don’t know what to do. We are lost” (LB033).*

*“People look down on us Syrian women, as if we are less and unworthy” (MAF040).*

*“Some people from the host community look down on people who depend on charity and aid from NGOs. They disdain and do not accept us. Some of them think that the aid we have is provided by their government and that they have the right to take this aid, not us” (MAF041).*

**Regardless of work status, respondents typically relied on aid to at least some extent, and struggled when it was unreliable or not the type of aid most needed.** One woman mentioned that material aid was declining and all that was available were trainings that were going to ultimately require a woman to get a job; meanwhile, she could not work due to health issues.

*“I was a housewife, cooking food, but due to my illness and vision issues, I couldn’t provide anything except for kind words. I had this role for 40 years in Syria... I hope for direct assistance to the refugees for education and paying the rent and debts. Most organizations offer psychological support, but we lack money and job opportunities. I think that your priorities must be to help urgent conditions, such as surgeries and deliveries” (MAF047).*

At the same time, while aid has been indispensable in helping all the refugee women access at least one form of assistance (housing, food, skills training, cash), it was described as unreliable and not always accessible. Some women went from agency to agency asking for help and hoped that someone would have something to contribute. Others were suddenly cut off from aid they had relied on for years.

*“We did not receive any aid or support from anyone. The only aid we had was at the beginning, from the UN, as they paid rent and financial aid, in addition to food coupons. Now, they cut the financial aid and evict us from the house. I only ask for aid from the UN, but they disapproved, I am asking them too to pay the rent, but we are not eligible according to their conditions, as we have to have another family willing to live with us, and the UN have to approve the family condition in order to accept our request. After my previous application for aid failed, I lost any hope of having a positive response. I never asked for aid again, from any organization or association” (LB021).*

## Changing Decisions Regarding Marriage

**The women in this study represent a wide variety of perspectives on marriage, whether it be a reflection of their own marriage, or (if single) thoughts about the importance of marriage generally. Many of these perspectives have shifted as a result of the conflict, displacement, and women’s new empowered roles in other domains.** Of the 43 women who offered their thoughts on marriage, 20 considered their marriage or the thought of marriage to be good, 7 were presently married but strongly desired for a divorce that they felt unable to get, and 16 had gotten a divorce already and/or did not want to have a husband.

**Many women recognized the important role that men played in a marriage, both in terms of offering emotional support to his wife and children, but also critically in terms of providing livelihood support, even if it was particularly difficult as a refugee.** Twenty of the respondents remained happy in their marriages (or looked forward to a happy marriage) and described mutual support both before and after the conflict. Notably, many described their husbands’ profound struggles alongside their own, and the challenges of supporting their families through it all: *“my husband works every now and then to secure income though it is intermittent... I feel stability with him and we love each other as money is not everything the most important thing is to have compatible relationship.” (MAF046).*

*“Before, when we were in Syria, my role was complementary to my husband’s, as he was an employee and we depended on his salary, so my salary was only for my own expenses. In the last seven years and currently, I endured the burden of providing expenses, rent and everything else. Now I and my husband have major roles in the household. In winter I work while his work stops, and vice versa, so our work complements each other’s... When I face some challenges in my life I run to my husband because he is the only one I trust and he is always there for me to overcome my challenges and I am there for him too” (LB024).*

*“[My husband] suffers mentally as a result of the war because during his job back in Syria at the hospital he used to see bodies and body parts of massacred people which was not a pleasant scene; this affected his mental health severely. He also refused to take his medication which was another struggle for me because he used to hit me. I endured so much for my children as I was afraid for them if I got separated from their father, but thanks to God with patience and persistence I managed to convince my husband to have mental*



health treatment. Then we went to regular visits to the IMC (international medical corps) and they provided my husband with the treatment and he got better.... we are in a better place now from the last few years, we coped with our living and circumstances here” (MAF043).

**However, for some women a major shift had occurred in terms of their perceptions of marriage; namely, the recognition that they did not necessarily need a husband in order to survive or thrive, and they were choosing instead to live independently.** A number of factors have contributed to this, including: (for widows or women separated from their husbands) having lived without men for so many years that they recognise they do not need to replace them; finding power in other domains, such as livelihoods. For some, this has enhanced their confidence to break free of harmful relationships.

Women explained that they had lived for the first time without husbands or fathers helping to support them financially and had realised that they were financially capable of supporting themselves and did not require a man in their life to do so. Instead, they became independent and capable of making their own decisions. Women described empowerment that came with not being subjected to the pressures of traditional gender norms.

For example, a number of women shared stories of abusive and negligent husbands whom they stayed with through the conflict, but whom they have since decided to leave. These women found strength in themselves in the face of the hardship they had endured.

*“My father made me marry my cousin when I was 14; he was 26. He made my sister marry his friend, who was 28. After I got married, I went to stay with my in-laws in Lebanon. I lived with my husband, mother-in-law, father-in-law, four single brothers-in-law, and two other married brothers-in-law with their wives, one who has three children and the other two—16 people in one room. I suffered from my husband’s bad behaviour toward me and was not comfortable with the huge number of people living in the same room. After six months, I moved with my husband’s parents and three of my single brothers-in-law to live in a tent. I got pregnant with my daughter at that time. My husband started to work, because he had to provide for his daughter. I was treated badly even when I was pregnant. He was very abusive, physically and verbally. He used to say that even dogs got pregnant, so do not expect us to spoil you. Once while pregnant, he severely beat me, because I tried to argue with him about his mistreatment, and because he was cheating on me. I went to my parents, who were living in a nearby village. I stayed for a month at my parents’, and my mother insisted that I divorce him, but one day, when my mother was gone, my father took me back to my husband. My father was not supportive, and I felt he will never be a source of security to me, as I was a burden he wanted to get rid of. My husband continued his verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. My marriage lasted for five years, and my daughter became the centre of my life, and I decided not to have another child, which was a great effort. During these five years, I went to my parents five times due to his abusive treatment. The last one was six months ago, when I decided to stand up for myself, challenging my father and refusing to live with that monster. During my marriage, no one took care of me, except my mother, who supported my divorce decision. In July 2018, I decided to divorce my husband, and I came to my parents to inform them of my decision. The hardest situation was when my husband came and kidnapped my daughter and deprived me of seeing her. Then he neglected her and left her with his parents. My in-laws love her, so she is safe, but I miss her” (LB022).*

Others pointed out that observing their husbands’ experiences of trauma and recovery made them realize that men, too, need support in the aftermath of the devastations of war. They described the realization that women/wives could be the source of strength, and that a husband was not essential to their own well-being.

*“This incident [being threatened by a landlord] taught me that men are weak in a foreign country. Before displacement, we felt that men are our rock and strength, but now we feel they are weak, that they need someone to support them in life” (LB019).*

*“My situation is hard nowadays. I am not a widower, so I don’t get the help that all widowers get. I am married, but no one knows that my husband is a burden on me. Even so, I will fight till the end and I will always be strong. I am sure that the best is yet to come” (GZ002).*

## Barriers

Barriers still exist that limit a woman's ability to make a decision regarding marriage. **Divorce, or being a single woman through any circumstances, remains socially unacceptable in Syrian culture, and women recognised this.** Families frequently pressured women to remarry or to stay in a relationship despite its challenges (including abuse). One young woman (now 19, but 14 at the time) was married off against her will by her mother, who struggled herself as a refugee:

*"I got married when I was only 14. After my father died, my mother arranged this marriage to an old man, in order to be able to secure her needs and provide for my siblings. I did not want to have children in these circumstances, as I did not want them to feel hungry and suffer from this harsh life of ours. [When I was a girl] I dreamed of completing my education and being an active person in the community, but poverty and need [as refugees] made my mother a selfish person who could only think of how to provide for living at my expense. She ruined my future with that marriage of convenience, without considering how it would affect me. Then I became a housewife who could not get out of the house unless getting permission from my husband, and only after I took care of all his needs. At the same time, he did not provide my basic needs" (MAF046).<sup>47</sup>*

*"Because I am Syrian in this community and living alone as a female, they expect me to be easy prey. People say that I should be married and ask why I did not get married till now, telling me that I became a 'old maid' even in the Syrian society. I challenged them all and continued to live my life, in order to change their perspective towards me and to make them understand my reasons and choices" (LB032).*

*"The society is the main challenge with its conservatism and its negative views on divorced strong women. Society judges divorced women, and this judgment is the main challenge for women's improvement. Customs and traditions control the society around me" (LB022).*

Another woman described instances of her husband raping her more than once and said she could not leave because of familial pressure against divorce.

*"We are living as expatriates, in a dire situation, making a great effort to cope with our reality, but the most dire thing is living these horrible days and years knowing that your partner is not someone you can rely on, especially in difficult times, knowing that his only concern is his lust and putting all of his energy to it [earlier in the interview, she elaborates on how the day after my father's death, he raped her and another time, he raped her when she was unconscious on medicine]... One of the reasons why I stayed with my husband is the fact that I cannot ask for divorce, because it is a taboo in my family. It did not matter if I was living the life I wanted or not, or if I was happy or not. What mattered to my family was that they did not hear that their daughter is divorced; therefore I stayed with my husband, because I did not have the courage to take this step" (LB025).*

This same woman considered work to be a potential pathway out of this harmful marriage:

*"I searched for work for several days and finally I found my job, to start the beginning of the following week. I congratulated myself on this step as it was a good step for me... I headed to my job and started to restore myself from below zero, but still I was the weakest link in the house. The decision to work was one of the decisions that may start a time bomb in the house, but I was determined to have control of my life. I started my work and problems increased with doubts and opposition. Every morning I had to create and act out a new scenario in order to go to work. Men's decisions were sacred but I stepped over them and I began to take the next steps of my plan [to leave husband]" (LB025).*

**Despite new livelihood opportunities, women explained how life as a refugee in a host country was difficult and two incomes was a distinct advantage in terms of easing this stress.** This was exemplified in women's descriptions of playing the role of "both man and woman"—two adults generating income to support the family clearly offers greater stability than one, so they remain married:

*"I've never been respected in my marriage. Once, we were making apple juice, my relative wanted to help my husband, but I told her that I can help him. He suddenly started hitting me, even though I recently had a baby... I tried to handle it, I tried to be patient, I talked to my mirror, and I read the Quran. I was prevented from going out of the house for six years, and even though I managed to stay busy, I had my own world. I*

*cried a lot and I thought about getting a divorce, but what stopped me was that I had no income. He always teased me and made fun of my certificates... I decided I would get a divorce once I manage to provide a house for my children and work for myself... I'm still married to him" (LB031).*

## Changing Social Networks

**One consequence of the conflict is that many Syrians have been physically separated from these tightly woven circles, which is a profound shock.** Prior to the conflict in Syria, many women had small but tightly woven social circles, linked mainly to those they knew in their family and community. These social networks have undoubtedly been critical for women and others in dealing with the shocks and stressors of the conflict. Displaced or otherwise conflict-affected families often stayed with extended family members or in-laws; borrowed money from them; worked for them; protected one another physically during active conflict inside Syria; and helped secure papers to cross borders. However, while some travelled to locations where family members had already settled (or travelled in groups of extended families), others travelled alone or with children and husbands only.

In either case, **arrival and adjustment to the host country was difficult due to the absence of familiar social networks to rely upon in times of need.** Fourteen of the women described how they still felt alone and lacked community.<sup>48</sup> Eighteen of the women<sup>49</sup> described feeling ostracised by the host communities where they lived. Thus, they preferred to spend time with other Syrians in the same situation as they: *"Some people view refugee women as a burden, weak and unlikable" (MAF048).*

*"90% of Lebanese society is afraid of anything called Syrian, as they suffered when Syria controlled Lebanon. So many families lost their loved ones and have scars reminding them of that period. They think that all Syrians are very loyal to Bashar and Hafez Al Assad. I can't blame them, because I had a different perspective about Lebanese people. I thought they were like people we saw on TV" (BA032).*

**However, refugee women were forming new social networks based on their own choices and relationships, and relied less on networks that had been largely prescribed to them at birth or by marriage** (e.g. in-laws, extended family, neighbours). Ten of the participants<sup>50</sup> described new, wider circles of friends and relatives than they had in Syria. For women in particular, the people in these networks also differed significantly from those in Syria (where networks were based on proximity and family ties). Many refugee women had met others through employment, through NGO training courses or drop-in centres, or in the neighbourhoods in which they live. Often, they formed new networks with other refugee Syrians.

*"I have a wide network of connections due to my work in retail. Also, I have a good reputation in the area. Here, relations are wider, because I have customers and friends from other areas and some of them are Lebanese, not only Syrians. They have a positive effect on me psychologically, by planting hope and determination to continue work and not surrendering to the hardships we face as refugees" (LB019).*

*My relationships in Syria were only with my relatives and school friends. Now I have wide relations with people from a variety of backgrounds. These relations, with men and women, young and old, help me and give me courage and strength, because I learned about other experiences and the hardships they went through. I derived my strength from people I work with and I have the ability now to cope with any situation" (LB022).*

*"My relationships in Syria were limited to people from the same area where I used to live, while in Jordan I have a wide network of connections" (MAF054).*

*"In Syria, I only knew my college friends and my work colleagues, but now I know my social circle is much bigger, and that helps me to adapt more quickly with the circumstances" (LB020).*

*"My friends who work with me in the agricultural project are like my sisters; they gave me the support I needed and I contact them all the time to tell them about what is going on with my life" (GZ001).*

*"I know people here more than in Syria. In Syria, it was just my parents and my siblings and some friends from school, but our relationships were shallow. I didn't have a relationship with my neighbours, because I didn't have time. I used to go to work and then come back home and so on. In Lebanon, I have good*

*relationships from college, even though I don't really have time, because of my studying and my courses, but I trust them in everything... My social network here is way better than it was in Syria. When I went to visit Damascus after the war, my relatives refused to welcome me, and no one wanted to see me. I depend on people in Lebanon more than in Syria" (LB031).*

**Women and their families in Turkey faced a particular barrier in forming new social networks as a result of their unfamiliarity with the Turkish language.** *This also created some obstacles for them in trying to pursue livelihoods:*

*"My role is different from host country women. They are living in their own country and we are refugees without a country or home. This not my country nor my home. I do thank the Turkish government for hosting us, but it still their country and it is easy for their women to work when they want because they are speaking the language, and we could not because of the language barrier... Here in Turkey I do not have relatives in the region I live in, and I don't know a lot of people because I can't speak their language. I know some Syrian people from my agricultural project last year" (GZ001).*

*"In Turkey I only deal with Turkish people who speak Arabic, which makes it easier to communicate with each other. The language barrier prevents me from dealing with other Turkish people. I remember once my husband's friend, who is Turkish and speaks Arabic due to his work as Imam at the Mosque, but whose wife does not speak Arabic, invited us for dinner. I could not understand a word from her mouth and she was the same. Her husband managed to do interpretation though this limits my relations in comparison to what I have in Syria because the language affected my ability to cope in Turkey. Despite all that, we have friends and we do not live in isolation in this society which is better than other European communities who almost lack social relationships except with Syrians and Arab residents" (GZ005).*

*"In terms of challenges, there is mostly the language barrier. It is difficult for me to communicate with doctors regarding my husband's health conditions. I enrolled in training courses that gave allowances in order to learn the Turkish language and have money. My son failed in his class twice due to the language barrier, so I had to take Turkish language courses to help him study. Now he is advancing in school" (GZ005).*

**Yet, some of these women had been successful at learning the language and having an easier time integrating.**

*"The project I wanted to start was opening a clothes shop, I consider it the best job for me as a female. At the meantime, I am trying to study the Turkish language so I can communicate with people in order for my project to succeed. I learned the Turkish language despite the hardships, I enrolled in a computer skills training in the Turkish language in order to empower myself" (GZ003).*

*"There are many organizations helped Syrian refugee women as Sada organization provided job opportunities by learning new skills such as sewing, culinary, handcrafted, Turkish language and they are all paid training... we had to learn the Turkish language in order to stay in the country and that's a good thing because you can't do anything if you didn't speak the country's language, you have to start everything from the beginning and be strong and patient to learn everything... I managed to learn the language and I started to get to know the people there and to socialize with men and women...I felt that I made something really special in my life and all my family were proud of me" (GZ002).*

**Since adjusting to their new lives and locations, women described certain advantages that came from the physical separation from former communities.** In particular, women noted that being distantly separated from in-laws and extended family members was liberating. These women described not having to answer to these family members, as well as leaving harmful or otherwise unsupportive relationships behind. For one woman, freeing herself from a harmful family was worth the profound housing insecurity that she then experienced:

*"We moved to Lebanon at the end of 2012 because my husband has relatives (sister and her Lebanese husband) there; I expected to stay for only two months, so did not take anything with me. We stayed for seven months at one relative's house; the husband treated us badly, and he did not allow us to register ourselves at the UN organizations or any other association because according to him, we were his guests. We could not afford to rent a house at the time. I also encountered bad treatment from my sister-in-law. Our family consisted of six individuals, and my sister-in-law only gave us two mattresses and two blankets. I used to collect clothes from the garbage containers at night, then wash them to dress my children. I was*

looking for a house to rent. My husband feared that moving might upset his brother-in-law. My neighbour encouraged me to register at the UN, and I did. Once I received the aid, my sister-in-law took half of it. ... My situation is much better now" (LB019).

"I have the ability to make decisions. In Syria, I used to live with my in-laws. I had no right to make decisions or have an opinion, which is opposite to what I have now, because now I live with my husband alone. For example: I decided to put my children in a good school. Also, I decided to enrol in trainings for empowering women, and in the future I will decide to pursue my education. When I got out of Syria and away from my in-laws' house, I became like the women who have the ability to make decisions. With the training, I know my rights and duties and how to protect myself" (MAF048).

"I convinced my husband to rent me a room, so I could leave his parent's house, because I wasn't comfortable at all there. His mother and his brother's wife didn't like me at all. I had to take care of the house after a long, exhausting day. His mother and his brother's wife didn't do anything, even though they didn't work. I had to work outside the house 10 hours a day and my daughter was so young. When I arrived home, I'd find her asleep, so I couldn't spend time with her. I had to work to pay the rent, even though my husband and my two kids and I slept in the kitchen. The house consisted of two rooms besides the kitchen. His parents slept in one room, and his brother and his family slept in the other room. My husband used to take care of my children, because he didn't work. I used to cry a lot, because my kids would sleep without seeing me. After six years, I managed to convince him to move to another house, because I got so tired of our situation, and my health started to get worse. I was worried that my kids would get sick. I finally convinced my husband to move to another house under one condition: we had to stay close to his parents. Everything got better when we lived alone. I started to get some rest, and our expenses decreased a lot, because we used to be 13 and now we are four people. Even my relationships with my husband and my daughters are better now, and we are more stable" (LB024).

Women who lived with or near extended family also described the potential benefits of separating from them in order to establish new communities and relationships. These women have now been exposed to different familial arrangements, as well as new ideas about a woman's role within the house and community. Many described their unwillingness to live with family members who were unsupportive of their decisions.

"After I had women's empowerment trainings, I became aware of my rights and my ability to make decisions in the house. I decided to move out of my in-laws' house and live alone with my husband in a place for us" (MAF043).

### Barriers

**Not every woman had access to a new social network as a refugee, and some lived in circumstances of isolation and loss of community.** A few women described being too busy to do anything besides work, study, and take care of the house, and therefore had few people they could physically reach out to in times of need. Others lacked opportunities to socialise without being able to access employment or schooling, so their networks remained small.

"My relations here are different, because in Syria we had more relations. I think if we did not have our relatives around in Lebanon, we may not be able to cope with the situation here, though it did not improve my situation as a refugee" (LB021).

"Yes, I have a wide range of social relations. I have friends from the university, from my previous work also in the orphanage. They are different than what I had in Syria, as I only knew people from the same city, with the same background. Here, with the current circumstances, I became acquainted with different people from different backgrounds. In the beginning, I rejected having social relations with people who have different culture and traditions, but with time, I realized that differences break dullness and make us think in a positive way. Therefore, in order to live in a place with a mixture of cultures, I have to adapt and take care of myself" (GZ007).

"No, here I do not have any relations other than my siblings. There is a huge difference between my relations in Syria and here, because back there, I have a lot of relations, while here I only have my family. Maybe if I have relations and connection, I would be able to find more work cleaning houses. Without my sisters, I would not be able to cope in this place, because they helped me get acquainted with places here. I also

*reside with one of them, and she encouraged me to work” (LB027).*

*“The thing that has changed in my life recently is that I am lonely now. No one helps me and no one supports me except my young son” (GZ013).*

*“My relations in Turkey are limited comparing to what I had in Syria, where relatives and family visited on a daily basis. On Friday, I got the Kimlik [Turkish ID]. This will be the start of my new life, since I am now able to enrol in the university and make friends, and I can also be employed and make friends through work” (GZ004).*

**Additionally, the social pressure to remain close to extended family and in-laws remained strong, including supporting them financially.** Some women felt saddled with the burden of caring for their existing social networks, because it was the right thing to do. They identified and described how challenging this was and fantasised about being independent and free from this pressure. However, many expressed the belief that it would never be possible to break free from such responsibility.

## Discussion

**Women who live through war do not belong in a single category or group.** Women’s experiences during conflict differ, and women’s perceptions of and relations to the conflict itself differ as well. Prior research reflects different experiences of gender norms before the conflict, which differed across such factors as, for example, location type (urban/rural) or age.<sup>51</sup> Both inside of Syria, and for women displaced to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, there is incredible diversity of experience, perspective, and hopes for the future. While some of this difference may result from circumstance beyond the individual’s control (such as access to capital or loss of family), it is also critical to acknowledge that women may also process, react, and demonstrate resilience in response to war in personal and individual ways. The effects of war are compounded by displacement, loss, and profound change; it is important to note that both the ways women experience that change and describe it may be wholly individual. Even in a small and purposively sampled group as this research, there were widely different descriptions offered both within and across locations.

Simultaneously, there is real utility in noting patterns and instances of described empowerment and challenge for women both inside and outside of Syria. Change in norms, roles, and expectations/plans for the future are important to document in order to continue or increase support to women who are grappling with that change, on their own terms.

**War creates immense social and material demands.** These demands have profound effects on masculine and feminine identities as well as gender roles and norms both inside and outside the household. It is critical to note that the impact of these demands may or may not be permanent or truly transformative. Some changes may occur in response to acute need only. It is important for those external to the conflict to be aware that conceptualization of women’s empowerment and women’s wartime gains are externally mediated, and there should not be value judgments made (for example, on women who may choose to revert to previous norms). Additionally, support to ease these social and material burdens *during* and in the immediate aftermath of conflict and displacement is a critical point towards supporting women’s decision making.

**Women’s gains in times of conflict are contextually and temporally dependent.** Any efforts to support women in consolidating these gains must acknowledge this fact.

- Social networks gained in camps or host countries will not automatically transfer back to their country of origin (i.e. different people go to different places). Women’s access to employment outside of the home may improve only in relation to the acute need of the household; many women may choose to return work within the home after the conflict. This may be a woman’s individual choice, or that of a husband or family member. Aid organizations considering interventions and mechanisms of support must acknowledge that these women are also empowered in their decision, even as their decision may change in the future. Support should not be contingent on (or only support those women in) a break with traditional norms.
- Wartime changes to women’s lives may be profound and may also open the possibility of real social transformation. As evidenced by the above research, changes to the domestic power dynamic, and women’s sense of self have certainly occurred since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. It is important to support these positive transformations while such change is still ongoing, instead of waiting for the

next phase of large-scale social and political recovery. As Syria and the displacement of Syrian civilians begins to stabilize, new relations and norms will become entrenched.

- Positive impacts in terms of changing gender norms among women may not necessarily translate into positive impacts for girls in this generation. Given social and financial pressures also associated with the conflict, many young women and girls have had to cut formal education short, and/or to marry early. The pressures that have created new openings for Syrian women outside of traditional family roles, have had the opposite effect on many younger women.

**Since wartime change has been swift and drastic, a backlash against changes in the traditional male/female division of labour may follow.** It is critical to emphasise that these shifting gender norms are dramatic and have occurred swiftly; as such, they may not be sustainable without clear interventions, if not effectively managed. For example, there was a great deal of description of strong, enduring traditional gender norms (especially in the view of older generations). People in favour of the continuation of these norms may accept drastic deviations during times of acute crisis, but expect a return to the status quo after the conflict. In the aftermath, reconciling contradictory notions of gender norms for a future Syria may be deeply challenging. This is supported by much literature on women and post-conflict societies,<sup>52</sup> which document backlash and violence against women who are empowered to demand their rights and take part in recovery and political processes after a conflict. For these reasons, it is critical for international organizations to prioritize a “do no harm” approach, and to allow Syrian women and Syrian women’s groups to take the lead on reconstructing and solidifying new social norms for their country’s future.

**It will also be absolutely critical for support efforts to engage men as well as women.** Interventions that focus solely on women may bring about the unintended consequence of exacerbating the resentment of men towards women or, at the very least, may encounter a lack of buy-in for the new roles – such as work outside the home – that some women will see, or seek to continue. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the effect of such swift social changes on men, especially in addition to the profound trauma and violence that they have experienced throughout the conflict. **Research inside Syria points to a diversity of men’s perspectives regarding changing gender roles,** with some men describing surprise at the incredible strength demonstrated by the women in their lives to others noting a need to protect fragile women and a desire for return to previous norms.<sup>53</sup>

General research on post-conflict gender role transformation underlines a myriad of reasons that men must be included in any intervention. These include addressing: men’s disempowerment in times of economic and political conflict, when they can often not provide for their families; the profound trauma associated with exposure to violence and war that men have also endured; and the psychosocial challenges that all face as families and social units are restructured and reconceptualized.<sup>54</sup> Non-gendered-based psychosocial and livelihoods support will be essential, as will be efforts to sensitize and outreach to men in gendered programming.

Many Syrian women are now living in circumstances where they are independent from husbands, in-laws, and extended family members. While for some this may be a choice, it is mainly a product of war and displacement. **One must ask what this relatively rapid breakdown in traditional family and social units will do to society on a broader scale, especially in light of the traditional Syrian norms of family centrality?** How can such change be supported appropriately so that women maintain and engender agency, while full-scale social recovery remains possible? Interventions to support women’s empowerment should be flexible and respectful of this reality when planning and adapting programming.

**The role of international organizations in supporting Syrian women’s empowerment has been essential from the start of the conflict, but it is important to note that such support may become controversial to deliver inside of Syria during the recovery phase.** At such a point, external interventions may be viewed more critically by the national government, especially in regard to social norms that may have changed during the course of the conflict. In the coming years, the recovery and creation of a new Syria will emerge as a nationally-owned project. It will be critical that NGOs and other external actors be aware and careful of respecting the country’s vision of its own future.

## Recommendations: Cross-Cutting Needs for Gender Empowerment

The findings above demonstrate shifting gender norms in the direction of increased women’s empowerment across three major domains. This indicates an overall positive development for many refugee women, alongside much tragedy and struggle in their lives, both before and during the conflict.

**Despite this progress, barriers and challenges limit the extent to which women can fully embody on their new roles. Assisting refugee women in overcoming these barriers will be instrumental in helping them recover and rebuild.**

In particular, it is critical to support decision-making processes regarding livelihoods, so that women can find success in whatever choice they make. It will also be critical to ensure men and boys and others in influential positions are involved in supporting women who want to exercise these new gender roles.

These cross-cutting challenges and needs span all three domains and, to different degrees, they exist in each country. They all should be considered when delivering interventions designed to help refugee women. The suggested types of interventions, along with the details of the problem the intervention should aim to overcome, are provided in Table 4, below.

*Table 4: Recommendations for intervention and details of the problem the intervention should overcome*

Broad recommendation	Details of the problem the intervention should aim to overcome, as it relates to each domain
Provide regular (or, at a minimum, reliably scheduled) access to finance to women	<p><b>Economic security is the most frequently mentioned problem for refugee women.</b> Now that women are financially responsible for their families (whether as sole income or supplementing that of other family members), it is a source of intense stress for them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With too little cash on hand, women struggle to pay all their bills, send their children to school, pursue their own education, and/or start or maintain their own small business. They lack the money to access key documentation that they may need in order to pursue their livelihoods (e.g. business permits, residence cards to access public school).</li> <li>• Women are sometimes reluctant to leave abusive or unsupportive husbands, extended families, or in-laws as a result of feeling they can't provide for themselves, economically, without the financial support.</li> </ul>
Provide legal support; facilitate acquisition of documents and permits (assist in procedures and cost)	<p><b>Refugee women often lack access to legal support, legal documents and other official papers (whether they left behind all identification when fleeing Syria, or entered the country illegally). This lack of documentation limits their ability to pursue certain livelihoods, and further affects their agency when it comes to decision making.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of necessary documentation limits the jobs (e.g. those only for residents, or those only with work permits), their confidence that they will be able to remain in-country indefinitely (and open a business, for example, that they would not need to abandon).</li> <li>• Without access to legal assistance, some women who would otherwise have chosen to leave their marriage, are reluctant to seek divorce for fear of losing their children and/or all their assets.</li> <li>• Without proper documentation, they may not be able to access aid that is provided to refugees, which would be critical to their survival and – possibly – to their independence. Women fear in-laws or extended family members may try to take assets or children in case of separation and may need legal assistance to navigate legal hurdles.</li> </ul>



<p>Provide mental health support</p>	<p><b>Many Syrian women have been traumatised as a result of the conflict. Some of these have also experienced mistreatment at the hands of family members, including husbands.</b></p> <p><b>In addition to these challenges, Syrian women have also been required to cope with displacement and the social changes that brings – including the breakdown of family and community ties, and support systems – as well as being required to take on both the breadwinner and caregiver goals in their immediate families. Many Syrian women are under extreme pressure.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many women have indicated challenges working or pursuing education as a result of their poor mental health.</li> <li>• Some women have been affected by poor treatment from their husbands and in-laws (in the past or ongoing).</li> <li>• Many Syrian women are still reeling from the loss of their husbands, children, other family members over the course of the conflict as well as mourning the loss of their past lives in Syria generally.</li> <li>• Long-term mental health should also be considered for those who may not be struggling now but may in future as situations continue to be difficult.</li> </ul>
<p>Facilitate access to supportive social networks with both Syrian and host community members</p>	<p><b>Women without supportive social networks (or social networks that are actively harmful) struggle to maintain their autonomy.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some women are under pressure to support multiple family members financially. Others are working so often that they do not have time to find new networks and feel isolated.</li> <li>• Women who do not have access to a supportive network do not feel able to leave an unsupportive or abusive environment.</li> </ul>
<p>Provide assistance to enable secure housing (assist in rent payments, assist in placement in locations with uninflated prices, legal assistance for eviction or rent disputes, etc.)</p>	<p><b>High rent, sudden eviction, cancelled rent subsidies from aid organizations, and lack of rights (or knowledge of rights) related to housing can put incredible stress on women and their families.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The time it takes to secure housing upon eviction, or struggling to find money to make rent, takes away from time to pursue livelihoods.</li> <li>• Lack of secure housing, or even the fear of losing accommodation, can leave women dependent on husbands and networks that they might otherwise choose to remove themselves from.</li> </ul>
<p>Facilitate access to healthcare for all; disability services for those with particular needs</p>	<p><b>Women with disabilities or specific healthcare needs find themselves dependent on others as a result of inadequate access to free or affordable healthcare and/or disability services and aids.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women with physical disabilities are limited in terms of the jobs they can do and are discriminated against for some work that they believe they are capable of. Others with specific healthcare needs require treatment in order to go to work every day, and without it are forced to stay at home.</li> <li>• As a result of having a difficult time working and earning income for herself, women with disabilities and healthcare needs find themselves more reliant on husbands and families than they want to be; this limits their agency in deciding to stay or leave.</li> </ul>

<p>Provide advocacy and sensitization on shifting gender norms to men, women, young people to help consolidate changing gender roles</p>	<p><b>All women participants agreed that norms were shifting such that women had more power, and that this was a generally good thing. Still, all agreed that this was not an easy shift, and that it may not sustain as things return to 'normal' (e.g. peace returned to Syria).</b> There is a risk that increased attention to women only (in terms of assistance) will have the unintended consequence of increasing resentment from men, in particular. Positive changes may also not extend to younger generations of girls.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general, it is accepted that women work so that families survive, but there remains an underlying sentiment that women belong in the home. As such, as men get better jobs, there may be pressure for women to leave jobs, regardless of their wishes. Both men and women should be supported to find viable livelihoods.</li> <li>• While many women are demonstrating confidence and autonomy to make decisions about who they are married to and who is in their networks, societal pressure remains for them to stay married, and remain close with previous networks.</li> </ul> <p>young people, especially girls, may be at higher risk of dropping out of school and early marriage in order to help support their families.</p>
--	--

To summarise, there is much work to be done in order to support the continued empowerment of Syrian women. **This will be essential in assuring that women are able to capitalise on the opportunity to reach their maximum potential, and also to assure that, after the conflict has ended, positive changes can endure.**

34 General Directorate of Migration Management (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>

35 UNICEF (2019). Turkey Humanitarian Situation Report #36, 1 January - 31 December 2019. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/unicef-turkey-humanitarian-situation-report-36-1-january-31-december-2019>

36 UNHCR Turkey (2019). Provincial breakdown of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Retrieved from: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67952>

37 UNWomen (2018). Needs Assessment of Syrian Women and Girls Under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey. June 2018. Retrieved from: <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/country/turkey/the%20needs%20assessmentengwebcompressed.pdf?la=en&vs=3139>

38 UNHCR (2020).

39 <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/2018/16-days/syriacrisisimpact-lebanon-final2.pdf?la=en&vs=3545>

40 UNHCR (2020).

41 Ministry of Labour Syrian Refugee Unit (2020). Syrian Refugee Unit Work Permit Progress Report January 2020. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/syrian-refugee-unit-work-permit-progress-report-january-2020>

(Endnotes)

1 CARE (2020). Understanding resilience: Perspectives from Syrians.

2 CARE (2020).

3 Among all participants who were working or not, seven in total indicated that they did not want to work at all. Four of these were in Jordan, two in Lebanon and one in Turkey.

4 In humanitarian contexts particularly, individual, household, and community resilience is often considered within a typology of resilience capacities. CARE's own conceptual framework for understanding resilience in the face of complex humanitarian emergency is built around these four capacities, which are: (1) Anticipatory capacity is ability of individuals, households, and communities to foresee and therefore reduce the impact of hazards that are likely to occur and be ready for unexpected events through prevention, preparedness and planning; (2) Absorptive capacity is the ability of individuals, households, and communities to accommodate the immediate impact of the shock/stress on their lives, wellbeing, and livelihoods, by making changes in their usual practices and behaviours using available skills and resources, and by managing adverse conditions; (3) Adaptive capacity is the ability of individuals, households, and communities to adjust their behaviours, practices, lifestyles, and livelihood strategies in response to changed circumstances and conditions under multiple, complex and at times changing risks; and (4) Transformative capacity is the ability of individuals, households, and communities to influence the enabling environment and drivers of risks to create individual and systemic changes on behaviours, local governance and decision-making structures, market economics, and policies and legislation.

5 CARE (2020).

6 The PEER method is a way to understand the lives and experiences of people in a community through stories and narratives. Specifically, community members are trained to develop and conduct interviews within their own networks, so that participants feel comfortable and safe discussing their lives, feelings, and experiences. The method is truly community-based and prioritises the contextual and experiential knowledge of the field team members, who are thus well-equipped to get exact, nuanced, and in-depth information. The methods and toolkits for PEER in this project were developed and adapted using: Elmusharaf, K., Byrne, E., Manandhar, M., Hemmings, J., & O'Donovan, D. (2017). Participatory ethnographic evaluation and research: reflections on the research approach used to understand the complexity of maternal health issues in South Sudan. *Qualitative health research*, 27(9), 1345-1358; International Planned Parenthood Fund. (2013). *Rapid peer review handbook*. Explore: Toolkit for involving young people as researchers in sexual and reproductive health programmes; Price, N., Hawkins, K. (2002). Researching sexual and reproductive behaviour: a peer ethnographic approach. *Social science & medicine*, 55(8), 1325-1336.

Among all participants who were working or not, seven in total indicated that they did not want to work at all. Four of these were in Jordan, two in Lebanon and one in Turkey.

7 UNOCHA (2019). 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved from <https://hnosyria.org>

8 UNHCR (2020). Syria Regional Refugee Response. Operational Portal Refugee Situations. Retrieved from: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

9 3RP (2018) Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan 2018-2019. Regional Strategic Overview. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/partners/donors/5a54c1957/2018-2019-regional-refugee-resilience-plan-response-syria-crisis.html>

- 10 UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP (2018). Vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. Retrieved from: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67380>
- 11 UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP (2018).
- 12 UN Women (2018a) Unpacking gendered realities in displacement: The stature of Syrian refugee women in Jordan. Retrieved from: <https://jordan.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/gendered-realities-in-displacement-jordan-report#view>
- 13 UN Women (2018a); Refugees International (2018) Out of reach: Legal work still inaccessible to refugees in Jordan. Retrieved from: [https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2018/9/10/out-of-reach-legal-work-still-inaccessible-to-refugees-in-jordan?gclid=Cj0KCQjwh8jrBRDQARIsAH7BsXdrebrYfm3TWSivSwAS-jdm71Qnlv1-c3RFnZ6vZOZLVVkX9fsJhwcaAsw4EALw\\_wcB](https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2018/9/10/out-of-reach-legal-work-still-inaccessible-to-refugees-in-jordan?gclid=Cj0KCQjwh8jrBRDQARIsAH7BsXdrebrYfm3TWSivSwAS-jdm71Qnlv1-c3RFnZ6vZOZLVVkX9fsJhwcaAsw4EALw_wcB)
- 14 UN Women (2018b) Needs assessment of Syrian women and girls under temporary protection status in Turkey. Retrieved from: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/country/turkey/the%20needs%20assessmentengwebcompressed.pdf?la=en&vs=3139>
- 15 UN Women (2018b).
- 16 UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP (2018); Refugees International, 2018; UN Women (2018b).
- 17 UNOCHA (2019).
- 18 UNOCHA (2018). 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/whole-of-syria/document/2018-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-21-nov-2017>
- 19 UNOCHA (2019).
- 20 WFP (2019) Situation Report- Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieve from: <https://www1.wfp.org/publications/syria>
- 21 UNOCHA (2020). ERC Statement on Northwest Syria, 17 February 2020.
- 22 Freedom House (2010) Women's Rights in the Middle East and Africa – Syria. Retrieved from: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4b99011dc.html>
- 23 See: Freedom House (2010)
- 24 Freedom House (2010).
- 25 Freedom House (2010); CARE (2020).
- 26 UNESCO (2019) UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Sustainable Development Goals, Syrian Arab Republic, Education and Literacy. Retrieved from: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/sy>
- 27 World Bank (2019). World Bank Data Bank, Labor Force. Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=SY>
- 28 UN (2011) Global Gender Gap Report 2011. Retrieved from:
- 29 Moghadam, V. (2013) *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. 3rd ed. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- 30 CARE (2020).
- 31 See: Meintejes, S., Pillay, A., and Turshen, M. (2001). *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation* London: Zed Books; Cockburn, C. (2000) *The Space Between Us: Negotiating Gender and National Identities in Conflict*. London: Zed Books.
- 32 Manchanda, R. (2001). Ambivalent gains in South Asian conflicts. *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation*, 99-120.
- 33 Meintejes et al. (2001).
- 42 In total quotations were used from 40 of the 54 women interviewed.

43 CARE (2020); Freedom House (2010); Moghadam, V. (2013)

44 Two in Jordan and one each in Lebanon and Turkey indicated it was a negative change; 7 in Jordan, 11 in Lebanon, and 14 in Turkey indicated it was a positive change.

45 Among all participants who were working or not, seven in total indicated that they did not want to work at all. Four of these were in Jordan, two in Lebanon and one in Turkey.

46 The respondent is referring to a volunteer position, used among NGOs in Jordan who are not allowed to officially employ Syrians, and cash received is part of a cash assistance programme.

47 The girl divorced the man after two years of marriage (circumstances are unclear). Two years later, she remarried someone closer to her age.

48 Five in Jordan, four in Lebanon, five in Turkey.

49 Ten women in Jordan, eight women Lebanon, and one in Turkey offered this information.

50 One in Jordan, five in Lebanon, and four in Turkey offered this information.

51 See CARE (2020); Alsaba, Khuloud, and Anuj Kapilashrami. "Understanding Women's Experience of Violence and the Political Economy of Gender in Conflict: The Case of Syria." *Reproductive Health Matters* 17-5 :(2016) 24.47. *Reproductive Health Matters*. Elsevier, 31 May 2016. Web. 23 Oct. 2016.

52 See: Meintejes (2001).

53 CARE (2020); Cohn C. *Women and Wars*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

54 See Meintejes (2001).  
CARE (2020); Cohn (2013)







**CARE International UK**

**89 Albert Embankment**

**London SE7 1TP**

**6000 7091 020**

**[www.careinternational.org.uk](http://www.careinternational.org.uk)**

**[insights.careinternational.org.uk](http://insights.careinternational.org.uk)**

**Registered charity number: 292506**

**PHOTOS:**

p1, Mariam (name changed) works on a farm where she earns the equivalent of 20 US cents per day – barely enough for her and her four children to survive. She received support through CARE's partner the Syria Resilience Consortium. Photo © Abdullah Hammam/Syria Resilience Consortium 2019

p3, A displaced family in northwestern Syria © Syria Relief 2019

p10, A man and boy in southern Syria carrying relief items through bomb-damaged buildings © CARE 2016

p17, People with boxes of emergency relief items in southern Syria © CARE 2016

p25, Mariam (name changed) with her two youngest children in the small room where they live. She had to take her two older children out of school to help look after the younger ones. Her oldest daughter also works with her on a farm to help provide for the family. Photo © Abdullah Hammam/Syria Resilience Consortium 2019

p57, Hamdou, a father of five children, was severely injured following an airstrike on his workplace. CARE's partner Emissa provides vulnerable families with agricultural inputs such as seeds and tools. Photo © Emissa/CARE 2017

p62, Children playing in a makeshift camp for displaced people in Idlib © Syria Relief 2019