



# Unpacking Gender

## The Humanitarian Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Jordan

### Executive Summary

With no political solution on the horizon to end the war in Syria, it is clear that humanitarian agencies must continue to prepare for a protracted conflict.

In late 2013, the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) undertook an extensive literature review and a month-long field assessment in Jordan, including in-depth interviews, focus group meetings and observation. The goal of the project was to identify how the humanitarian community was integrating existing gender guidance across all sectors and if gender was being dealt with centrally as an institutionalized way of working rather than peripherally. It looked at the ways in which humanitarian agencies, including UN agencies and international and local organizations, assessed these needs and planned their programs. It also asked questions about the opportunities and good practices/models for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

### Findings

While sex- and age-disaggregated data about the refugees' needs and concerns was being gathered early on, there was little evidence that this data was being used to inform the design and implementation of programs that address the real needs of women, men, girls and boys.

Nonetheless, at the end of 2013, most UN agencies and international organizations were aware of these gaps and were trying to integrate gender in the planning and programming processes, including the need for better monitoring and follow-up. The introduction of the GenCap (Gender Standby Capacity Project) advisor in March 2013, the investment by several humanitarian organizations in the past five to eight years in gender policies and programming, and public attention to the specific issues facing women and girls have collectively had a positive impact on the situation. The GenCap advisor brought tools, provided training and

promoted integration of the gender marker in all sectors' plans for the latest Regional Response Plan (RRP6).

While agencies are starting to take serious steps to ensure gendered needs are being addressed in their programs, there continue to be challenges and gaps in services and resources. The WRC study outlines the context by sector, highlighting ongoing challenges and current practices in distribution of resources, access to services and ensuring protection and reduced risk for sexual and gender-based violence. The research found that certain populations receive less attention and less access to programs, including men, the elderly, women and girls living outside the camps, people with disabilities and sexual minorities. Additionally, gender impacts the ability to access information and thus access services. Finally, accountability and follow-up in referral pathways continue to be major challenges that impact specifically women, girls and boys.

### Good Practices and Recommendations

Several organizations have created impactful programs that support the empowerment of women and girls and meet the gendered needs of the Syrian refugee population. The following encapsulates good practices that the WRC recommends should be adopted by the humanitarian community:

- **Empower women and girls through:**
  - working with local women's rights organizations that have the political vision and know-how;
  - building the capacity of refugee women and girls, as well as local activists and staff, to speak on their own behalf and strategize collectively;
  - creating safe spaces to address protection issues and increase access to information and services.

- **Support host communities, as well as refugees, through:**

- longer-term planning for continued change;
- projects that benefit host communities to reduce tensions;
- building local capacity of community organizers and service providers;
- establishing community centers and working with local CBOs to address local challenges, create welcoming spaces for collaboration and increase access to information and services.

- **Engage refugees in identifying problems and adequate solutions through:**

- leadership development and capacity building;
- relationship building and consistency;
- working with Syrian refugees as volunteers;
- conducting door-to-door assessments and distribution.

- **Advance gender mainstreaming through:**

- gathering and utilizing sex- and age-disaggregated data;
- conducting gender analysis and using it to plan programs;
- going beyond needs to empowerment and potential;
- incorporating GenCap advisors into humanitarian crisis responses from the very beginning;
- creating and training on standard operating procedures and processes for protection;
- adopting an internal gender strategy that fully transforms organizations structurally and programmatically;
- incorporating gender-based violence and child protection mechanisms into all programs.

## Conclusion

The humanitarian community, after years of rhetoric, has clearly begun to better understand and integrate gender into its planning and programming. This is true across sectors. The introduction of the GenCap advisor, the use of the gender marker and the investment of several humanitarian organizations in developing gender policies and programming, have clearly had a positive impact on the situation. However, gender integration is still largely confined to addressing the differing needs of women, men, girls and boys and, for the most part, does not tackle the broader goal of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

When thinking about gender, the immediate response is that yes, we do direct our services to the most vulnerable, thus women and children (both boys and girls). Ideas around gender appear to continue to mostly be connected to women, to needs and to vulnerability. However, the focus should not only be on vulnerabilities as it promotes a notion of victimhood rather than survival and equality. There needs to be a shift so that gender integration goes beyond the notion of need into the notion of potential. Instead of only thinking about what women and girls need, it is important to consider empowerment and possibilities.

Programming and planning must now move beyond addressing the differing needs of women, men, girls and boys to creating equal access and opportunities, advancing social inclusion, tapping potential and planning for and working towards gender equality and a more gender equitable world.

The WRC report assessed only the Syrian refugee response in Jordan and may not be reflective of the response in the other impacted countries. Additionally, as the Syrian crisis has generated significant resources, programmatic responses and involvement of many agencies' best and brightest emergency response and program staff, gender integration in the response may not be reflective of such in less visible, less well-resourced responses in other crisis situations.

*This report will be available on the WRC's website, [www.womensrefugeecommission.org](http://www.womensrefugeecommission.org), in March 2014.*