



Women and children are Still desperately in need of aid. Their lives are Invisible.

Still Invisible.

An update on the recommendations of the Invisible Lives report.

Introduction

Six months ago, in September 2016, Islamic Relief released *Invisible Lives*. This report outlined the plight of Syrian women in Lebanon and the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq and described the lack of good employment opportunities, the prevalence of gender-based violence in communities and the workplace and extremely limited access to good education for children, including girls.

It also identified the UN's aid appeals for Lebanon and Iraq that were only 38% and 44%, respectively, funded by mid-2016. The consequence was that many thousands of women were simply not being supported at all, as poverty, family debt, and the prospect of securing a livelihood all worsened.

Six months on from our report, ahead of another international conference on Syria, the UN has launched new aid appeals and strategies for Lebanon and Iraq. But what has changed? Is the international community now delivering? Are women refugees receiving more and better support? Are their lives improving?

At the time of our original report there were around 1.5 million Syrians in Lebanon and 235,000 in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.¹ Around half of these were women and girls. During 2016, the number of registered Syrians who fled to neighbouring states increased by almost 200,000.² A further 238,000 Iraqis have been internally displaced by fighting in Mosul, which began in late 2016.³

Note: Throughout dollars (\$) referred to are U.S. dollars

Employment opportunities

Invisible Lives showed that finding good employment in Lebanon is extremely difficult for women because of government restrictions on working rights, high unemployment and lack of access to childcare. In the past six months the situation has improved only marginally: recent research has found that only 12% of Syrian women refugees are working.⁴ However women head 34% of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon⁵ and 61% of these households do not have a working member.⁶

The Kurdistan region is a more favourable context for access to jobs and livelihoods, as many Syrians have access to residency permits, allowing them to work legally.⁷ However an increase in the number of displaced people fleeing fighting from Mosul is likely to exacerbate the employment situation. Employment levels among women refugees, and among young men, are already much lower than the overall employment rates. Recent surveys indicate that in Erbil only 7.6% of women refugees are in employment.⁸

Legal status

In early 2017, the Lebanese authorities abolished the hefty annual residency fee of \$200 that prevented many Syrians from securing legal status in Lebanon. The waiver only applies to those who registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees before 1 January 2015, or who obtained residency through their UNHCR certificate at least once in 2015 or 2016. This will help many of the 250,000 women aged between 18 and 59 who have registered as refugees in Lebanon.⁹ However, the policy excludes Syrians not registered with UNHCR – almost 500,000 people by government estimates.¹⁰ In Iraq there are also some restrictions on obtaining residency permits, which excludes many from the labour market.¹¹

Wage gaps

Many Syrian women work in agriculture as farm labourers and earn less than men – the average salary for women refugees is less than half Lebanon's national minimum wage.¹² Recent UNHCR research found that, during the month prior to the



Employment opportunities

survey, working men earned an average of \$215, while working women earned only \$115, despite being employed for nearly the same number of days (average 14 days for men and 13 for women).¹³

Working conditions

The UN's Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) notes that the working conditions for displaced Syrians are rapidly worsening, as they rely almost exclusively on temporary and informal work in low skilled sectors.¹⁴ Most Syrian refugee households generate income predominantly from temporary sources (65%), while only 27% of households have income coming from permanent jobs, and a small percentage (8%) from seasonal activities.¹⁵ The average monthly earning is only \$200 for 18 days of work per household, or less than half of the minimum survival needs.¹⁶

Informality and the growing lack of legal residency for displaced Syrians have increased risks of exploitation in the workplace (lower pay, longer hours, exploitation by sponsors and more hazardous conditions), and far reduced the possibility of legal recourse, which in turns creates a downward spiral impacting decent work in Lebanon. This is particularly the case for displaced Syrian women, who are often new to the labour market and therefore even more vulnerable to exploitation as they try to provide for their families. A key illustration of this degradation in working conditions is the increase in child labour, which reaches over 7% of Syrian children. Female headed households are more vulnerable in this respect as they are 62% more likely to engage their children in work.¹⁷

Ways forward

The LCRP aims to promote policies in line with our recommendations in *Invisible Lives*. Specifically, it seeks to create or maintain 7,908 jobs in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and 9,000 jobs in value chains.¹⁸ The support will target four types of Lebanese structures: micro-entrepreneurs, start-ups, SMEs and cooperatives.¹⁹ The plan



Ever more displaced people will exacerbate the employment problems

also aims to provide 37,000 temporary job opportunities in 2017 in areas such as road rehabilitation, cleaning services, the agricultural sector (such as irrigation canals, agricultural roads, rainwater harvesting), and environmental work and disaster risk reduction (such as forestation, reforestation, cleaning of drainage, canals and rivers for flood prevention).²⁰

In Lebanon the average monthly household income is \$200 – less than half necessary to meet minimum survival needs

These are important goals but a problem is that the number of jobs created is a drop in the ocean, compared to the need. The LCRP notes that due to underfunding only 32,000 beneficiaries and 540 small businesses have been reached over two years, and 'few long-term programmes aimed at supporting the capacity of national systems and markets to create jobs or income have started'.²¹

The LCRP also accepts that its programmes need to do more to help women refugees increase their access to

income/employment, notably through specific business start-up and development schemes, and apprenticeship/traineeship programmes.²² *Invisible Lives* included interviews with several Syrian women who are becoming increasingly indebted as their businesses are not providing sufficient incomes. Further support in microfinance, favourable credit terms and business training is needed.

Only 32,000 out of 1.5 million refugees in Lebanon have been able to access support for livelihoods

A further key way to help women in work is to enforce labour standards and to uphold decent work conditions, to avoid exploitation of women workers, especially in the informal sector. This is mainly a task for the government, but also community and NGO monitoring can play a key role. The government could also help provide a better enabling environment for employment by undertaking mapping of skills gaps and market needs, helping to match vacancies to job seekers.

The UN plan for Iraq aims to provide economic opportunities, supporting a longer-term, market-oriented approach to fostering resilience and peaceful co-existence of refugee and local populations. The interventions will focus on expanding access to sustainable livelihood opportunities through enhancing the ability of refugees and impacted communities to set up businesses and improving employability with vocational training for marketable skills.²³ However, the plan does not specifically articulate how women, in particular, will be supported to gain employment and does not outline indicators or targets for increases in female employment.²⁴

Employment opportunities

RECOMMENDATIONS IN **INVISIBLE LIVES**

- 1. Local authorities need to ensure that refugees can reside in neighbouring countries legally without discrimination. Procedures to maintain valid documentation and registration must be clear, accessible and affordable.**
 - 2. International funding for livelihoods programmes in Lebanon and Iraq must increase by \$275 million in line with pledges made at the London Conference, to support job creation through business training, skills development and other employment services for women.**
 - 3. Emergency livelihoods activities, including cash-for-work programmes and small business grants, must continue to be provided for the most vulnerable households including single-headed households and those with older people and/or family members with disabilities.**
 - 4. Agriculture-based activities, such as small gardens to grow basic food, should be more heavily promoted to increase employment and support food security.**
 - 5. Women's equality in the workplace should be promoted in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8 by supporting worker rights in relation to health, safety, childcare and remuneration.**
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Gender-based violence

Invisible Lives highlighted violence against women as a major problem in both Lebanon and Iraq and a significant barrier for women's ability to access sustainable livelihoods. The most commonly reported type of violence involves physical violence, mainly linked to violence within the family or home, sexual violence (rape and sexual assault), as well as forced and early marriage.²⁵

Sexual harassment is prevalent in some work situations, and many women say that they have left a job, or not taken a job, because of the attitude or behaviour of employers.²⁶

Vulnerability

The UN says reported incidents of sexual exploitation in Lebanon have also been increasing over the past two years.²⁷ Child mothers, early married girls, unaccompanied and separated boys and girls, women and girls with disabilities, older women, and female heads of households continue to be the most at risk. Assessments suggest that dire socio-economic conditions, lack of legal stay, and impeded access to much needed services contribute to an increased risk of exploitation for women, girls, boys and men, including risk of trafficking and survival sex.

Sexual harassment is prevalent in some work situations, and many women say that they have left a job, or not taken a job, because of the attitude or behaviour of employers

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Islamic Relief's focus groups with women for *Invisible Lives* found that many regard the camps more as prisons than homes, and that fear for their security means women have to be accompanied by male relatives outside their homes. Research conducted in 2015 by a consortium including UN Women and UNHCR found that women's main problems include sexual aggression, rape, sexual violence and sexual abuse by husbands, male

family members, colleagues, neighbours, police, government employees and NGO staff. It found that since arriving in the Kurdistan region only 18% of Syrian women had not been subjected to verbal aggression and disrespect.

Lack of services

A number of barriers still prevent women and girls in need of services to respond to gender-based violence. These barriers include disruption of services due to humanitarian funding gaps, documentation requirements, restrictions on mobility, high costs and limited availability of specialised services, such as safe shelters, and clinical management of rape and mental health services.²⁸ Similarly in Iraq women had few places to go for refuge, as there were no shelters or refuges to take care of victims of violence in the refugee camps.²⁹ These risks largely remain for Syrian women refugees in Iraq.³⁰

Ways forward

The UN's LCRP outlines a range of ways it will address gender-based violence, such as through community-based interventions, offering targeted protection services and legal, health and psychosocial support, which are in line with our recommendations in *Invisible Lives*.³¹ The LCRP's working target is for 140,000 people at risk to have access to gender-based violence prevention and response services in safe spaces.³² It also aims to provide community-based and psychosocial support to 266,000 children and 347,500 caregivers, while some 30,700 children, including children living and working on the streets, children at risk or victims of child labour, will benefit from child prevention and response services such as psychosocial support services and life-skills training.³³ However, while some of these figures are impressive, they amount to around 68% of the number (942,000) recognised in the LCRP as vulnerable Syrian refugees needing service delivery and economic recovery.³⁴

In Iraq, the UN plan says it aims to consolidate protection services for refugees in camps and to expand interventions

in non-camp areas through the establishment of multi-purpose community centres in high density areas of urban displacement to provide integrated protection services in collaboration with local authorities and communities. In addition, the UN will fund capacity building; support regional services to increase capacity and outreach in rural and semi-urban areas; and enhance and harmonise standards of protection service delivery together with the communities.³⁵

The UN plan envisages providing support to 95% of known survivors of gender-based violence and training 1,800 government and non-government actors in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.³⁶ But the UN plan is short on some specifics and it is unclear the extent to which women will be supported in, for example, access to legal aid or the extent to which their safety in refugee camps will be addressed, which were among our key recommendations in *Invisible Lives*.³⁷

Religious leaders and faith groups must be better integrated into strategies to end stigma around GBV and to strengthen community-based counselling services and referral pathways

As *Invisible Lives* documented, more studies need to be conducted to assess the extent of violence and what strategies are most effective. Most women will not seek formal services, and are often reluctant to say they are victims, hence there is much that community-based organisations can do to enhance the support that women and girl refugees receive. This includes working with religious leaders to challenge the stigma surrounding sexual and gender-based violence, and involving faith groups in community-based counselling services and referral pathways.

Gender-based violence (GBV)

RECOMMENDATIONS IN *INVISIBLE LIVES*

1. Increased funding and policy support are needed to strengthen prevention and response programmes for gender-based violence, including the addition of specific budget lines for GBV in donor allocations and monitoring.
2. Funders and international aid agencies should do more to tackle GBV across livelihoods, education and health programmes, making more effective use of available tools and guidelines, such as the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP).
3. Safety in refugee camps needs to be improved by providing better lighting, establishing separate bathrooms for men and women, and increasing women's participation and leadership in helping to reduce danger zones in and around camps.
4. Women must have access to legal aid and appropriate procedures for investigations, prosecutions, effective remedies and reparations in order to promote justice and end impunity for perpetrators of violence against women.
5. Concrete support is needed for sensitisation and training for local police and security services, accompanied by strong monitoring to assess how protection and access to justice are progressing.
6. Faith communities are key players in empowering and preventing gender-based violence, and this needs wider recognition. Religious and community leaders need to be equipped to help raise awareness, end stigma and challenge cultural norms that limit women's access to public places.

Access to good education

Invisible Lives noted that to help rebuild livelihoods and prepare for the future, it is critical to support the education of child refugees. In Lebanon, 48% of primary school age Syrian refugee children and 84% of those aged 15-17 are out of school.³⁸ The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan notes that in 2015/2016, with support from the international community, around 42% of Syrian children were enrolled in formal public education programmes but the rest did not access any type of education.³⁹ This means that many children may not receive schooling for years.

In both Lebanon and Iraq, the cost of education, including indirect costs such as transportation, is a major barrier to accessing school.⁴⁰ Many parents are also afraid of sending their children to school because they fear that schools might not be safe and children might be exploited on their way to or inside schools. The need for child labour, at a time of deteriorating livelihoods, is a further factor.⁴¹

In Lebanon, 48% of primary school age Syrian refugee children and 84% of those aged 15–17 are out of school

Lebanon's Ministry of Education has taken several positive steps to enrol Syrian children in formal education. Authorities have allowed refugees to enrol in school without providing proof of legal residency, school enrolment fees have been waived, and afternoon 'second shift' classes in 238 public schools have been opened up to provide Syrians with formal education. In 2016, Lebanon adopted a five-year plan with the goal of enrolling 440,000 Syrian children in formal education by the 2020/21 school year.⁴² However, the system has struggled to keep pace with demand.⁴³ Lebanon needs much more international financial support to respond to the educational needs of Syrian refugees, including rehabilitating and expanding schools, investing in good-quality education, fully including children with disabilities, training and hiring more teachers, and subsidising school transportation.⁴⁴

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, the most recent UN figures are that of the 78,000 school age population, some 63% of



To help prepare for the future it is critical to educate child refugees

boys and 64% of girls are enrolled in primary and 0% of boys and 22% of girls are enrolled in secondary.⁴⁵ In Iraq, years of displacement have depleted refugee families' savings and ability to afford the costs for educating their children, such as costs for transport and school supplies. Due to the financial situation, refugee youths often face a trade-off between attending school and supporting their families by working or helping in the household. The language barrier is another main reason that Syrian refugee children do not enrol in school, since most schools in the Kurdistan region teach in the Kurdish language.

The region has too few teachers and over-crowded classrooms; it is in dire need of textbooks, payment of teacher incentives and student/teacher transport.⁴⁶

Ways forward

The LCRP outlines a range of impressive aims to address the areas outlined in our recommendations in *Invisible Lives*. The basic aim is to expand access to formal or informal education, and to rehabilitate schools, improve teaching, increase school transparency, strengthen the education system, support a revision of the curricula, and monitor violence against children

in schools, among other areas.⁴⁷ The plan aims to benefit 281,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon of whom 146,000 are female.⁴⁸

In Iraq, the UN plan also envisages expanding access to formal and non-formal education, providing teaching and learning materials, promoting back to school campaigns, providing transport for teachers and students, training teachers on child protection and other activities.⁴⁹ The UN is supporting some innovative ways to improve schooling. For example, partners are piloting the use of technology to reach out-of-school children with interactive self-learning modules. Mobile schooling units are driven every day to remote areas where refugee children cannot easily access a formal school. Cash-for-education projects are using cash transfers to address families' financial constraint barriers.⁵⁰ Also important is to integrate protection of girls into schooling so that children feel safe in school and are encouraged to attend.

Technology can help those out of school to access education through interactive self-learning modules

The UN plans are good, and critical, on paper. But implementing them will depend on securing adequate levels of funding; these have not been forthcoming in recent UN appeals.

Access to good education

RECOMMENDATIONS IN **INVISIBLE LIVES**

- 1. Better access is needed to high-quality formal and vocational education through the creation of new and expanded schools. This will require an additional \$228 million to fulfil pledges from the London Conference.**
 - 2. Non-formal education should be fully recognised and standardised by Ministries of Education through accreditation and referral systems, to ensure pupils are better able to re-enter formal education when possible.**
 - 3. Greater funding is also needed to ensure that indirect costs, such as books and transport, do not prevent children from accessing education, particularly for those attending evening classes.**
 - 4. Barriers to education such as residency requirements and language barriers must be removed.**
 - 5. Specific funding should be earmarked for teacher salaries and training, and for curriculum development, including measures to ensure access and participation of children and teachers with disabilities.**
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The 2017 appeal

Another looming funding gap

Invisible Lives noted that not only has the international community failed to bring about an end to the war in Syria, it has also failed to adequately support those who are fleeing it. Sadly, this trend continues.

In 2017, United Nations and NGO partners outlined funding requirements of \$5.6 billion for the Syria and regional crisis and appealed for \$4.69 billion in extra resources (beyond those already available) to support national plans. Of this, \$2.8 billion is for Lebanon and \$228 million is for Iraq.⁵¹

However, the signs are – yet again – not good. By March this year:

- ▶ Only \$1.2 billion (21%) had been received, leaving a funding gap of \$4.4 billion.⁵²
- ▶ Lebanon had only received \$320 million in funding (11%).⁵³ Figures were not available for the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

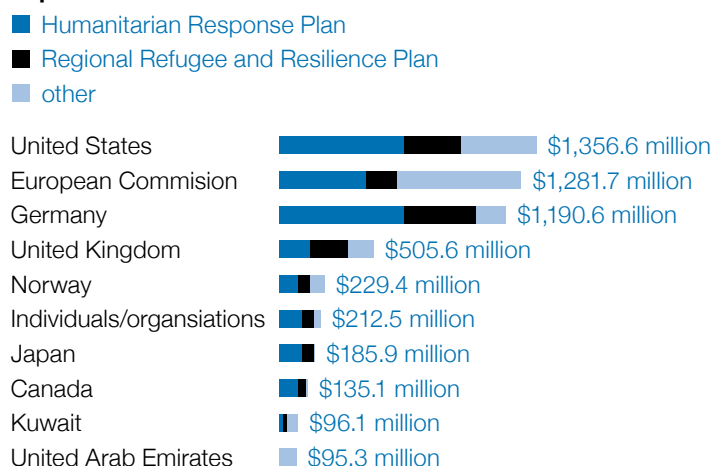
The danger is that financial shortfalls of 2016 are simply going to be repeated. The London Conference early in 2016 raised \$11.2 billion in pledges for the Syria crisis for 2016–20, of which \$5.9 billion was for 2016 alone, but by the year end:

- ▶ The appeal for Syria and the region was only 59% funded.⁵⁴
- ▶ The appeals for Lebanon and Iraq were only 46%⁵⁵ and 60%,⁵⁶ respectively, funded.

Of particular concern was – and is – the under-funding of key sectors of the UN appeal. Only 50% of the funding requirement for education was met, while just 19% of the requirement for protection, and 36% for livelihoods, was received.⁵⁷

Seven donors contributed the bulk of the funds to the UN appeal for Syria and region in 2016 – the United States, European Commission, Germany, the UK, Norway, Japan and Canada. But many other rich countries such as France, Sweden, Australia, Italy and Ireland contributed negligible amounts.

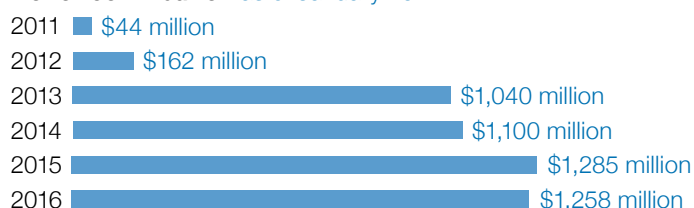
Top 10 donors 2016⁵⁸



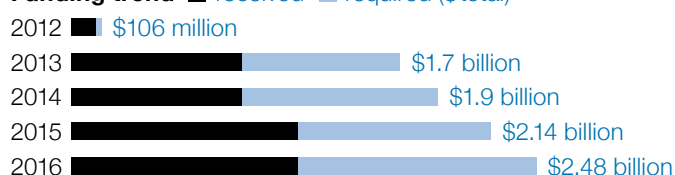
The funding gap in Lebanon

The following tables⁵⁹ show that international aid for Lebanon has in recent years consistently been well below what is required. In 2016, the UN appealed for \$2.48 billion but received only \$1.26 billion.

Donor contribution as of January 2017



Funding trend ■ received ■ required (\$total)



Recommendations

Islamic Relief calls on the international community, including donors, the United Nations and its partners implementing the humanitarian strategies for Lebanon and Iraq, to:

- ▶ Fund 100% of the UN aid appeals for Lebanon and Iraq, by ensuring all states meet their respective commitments.
- ▶ Fulfil the recommendations made in our previous report, *Invisible Lives*, in the areas of employment, gender-based violence and education.
- ▶ Ensure that all humanitarian plans and actions optimise their focus and impact on women refugees from Syria.



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End notes

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