

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

IN THE AFTERMATH

Gender Considerations in Assessments of Syrian Regions Affected by the 2023 Earthquake

Executive Summary

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OVERVIEW

On 6 February 2023, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake and multiple severe aftershocks struck Syria and Turkey, affecting multiple governorates including Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia, and Hama. Prior to the earthquake, 15.3 million people were estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance throughout Syria.

For most Syrians, this earthquake only compounds existing suffering; 15 March marks 12 years since the start of the conflict which has caused massive displacement, economic collapse, and widespread violence. With approximately 1.9 million people living in around 1,430 camps or self-settled sites in the north-west of Syria (NWS), with 80 percent (1.5 million) being women and children. Syria remains the world's largest internal displacement crisis. The earthquakes have caused new internal displacement movements and at least 86,000 people were reportedly newly displaced since the earthquake happened.

'Women and girls are disproportionately affected by crises in comparison to their male counterparts, including reduced life expectancies, maternal mortality and morbidity, and gender-based violence'

In times of crisis, pre-existing gender inequality can be exacerbated, leading to discrimination, exploitation, and impacting an individual's access to humanitarian, recovery and development assistance, and their access to human rights. Gender inequalities that existed prior to a crisis can exacerbate these differential impacts, making it even more important to incorporate a gender perspective into the response.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by crises in comparison to their male counterparts, including reduced life expectancies, maternal mortality and morbidity, and gender-based violence. Furthermore, when emergencies strike, the rights and choices of women and girls are far too often trampled on or side-lined. While gender inequality represents a major barrier to equitable access to humanitarian assistance and the protection of human rights, activities and approaches implemented during an emergency response are not neutral, and have the potential to either increase and reinforce existing inequalities or challenge them.



WHAT THE DATA SAYS

In the weeks following the earthquake, UNFPA conducted a review of available data from the impacted areas in order to form an overview of the initial gender-specific findings of the various needs assessments and responses analysis that had taken place. This is also in the context of the IASC system-wide scale up operational benchmarks agreed upon by the Whole of Syria (WoS) Strategic Steering Group (SSG), one of which is that all assessments are gender-sensitive and include sex and age disaggregated data, and assessments teams include a minimum of 30 percent female staff. The following is a summary of key findings.



Women and girls were amongst the most vulnerable prior to the earthquake. In addition to widows and divorcees, older and displaced women are most at risk, especially if they suffer from a disability.



The earthquake has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, particularly women-headed households and pregnant/breastfeeding women.



The earthquake has presented and exacerbated nutrition concerns for women, with more than half of women of reproductive age in north-west Syria suffering from anaemia.



The earthquake has disrupted women and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health services, further compounding risks to their safety and well-being. Access to adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities and supplies is also a major concern.



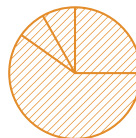
Assessments report high incidences of psychosocial distress, harmful coping strategies, and emerging risks, particularly among women and children.



Even before the earthquake, women and girls in the affected populations were among the most vulnerable to GBV. The earthquake has also impacted the services that were being provided to respond to the specific needs of women and girls.



The earthquake has severely impacted Palestinian refugees living in Aleppo, Latakia, and Hama, amongst whom 22,429 are estimated to be female.



Overall, there is a dearth of sex, age, and disability disaggregated data (SADD) reported across data collection tools, assessments, situation updates, and reports. Sectors also lack the knowledge and expertise to effectively integrate SADD into their responses.



Limited information exists on addressing the intersectional needs of particularly vulnerable groups, despite evident effort to identify specific groups who are particularly vulnerable.



Inconsistent risk mitigation: Efforts to address the risk of (and respond to) gender-based violence are inconsistent across all sectors.



Adolescent girls are alarmingly absent from tools, assessments and reports reviewed, which highlights a gap in understanding the specific vulnerabilities they face.



Biases and stereotypes are being reinforced: There is a concern that some of the analyses conducted on findings from assessments may be reinforcing gender biases and stereotypes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 **Improving disaggregation of sex, age, and disability data:** In line with the IASC Gender Policy and IASG Gender Handbook, it is critical to improve the disaggregation of sex, age, and disability data in data collection tools, with consistent application and reflection in the assessment reports.
- 2 **Enhancing accountability of the sectors/ clusters to meet relevant policies, commitments, and standards:** It is important to note that capacities to apply the IASC Gender Policy and the Gender Handbook should have been in place prior to the earthquake.
- 3 **Increasing representation of female enumerators in assessment teams:** A concerted effort is needed to increase the representation of women in assessment teams to reach the 30 percent minimum benchmark established by the SSG.
- 4 **Improving disaggregation in data collection tools:** It is recommended to review existing tools (inter-sector and sector specific) and ensure that they include questions that capture the intersecting vulnerabilities, risks and needs of affected people, including women and girls, explicitly including adolescent girls.
- 5 **Consistently addressing the intersectional needs of particularly vulnerable groups:** Integrate intersecting variables (through sex, age, and disability data disaggregation) in data collection, analysis, and assessment reports to take into consideration intersectional dimensions of vulnerability and exclusion of the different crisis-affected groups.
- 6 **Consistently addressing GBV risk mitigation and response:** Every sector should integrate GBV risk mitigation into all sector-specific assessment tools, providing training for enumerators on how to collect data on GBV, and ensuring that gender-based violence is adequately addressed in response plans.
- 7 **Addressing the compounding vulnerabilities and needs of adolescent girls:** It is crucial to prioritise data collection and analysis that is disaggregated by age and sex to better understand the specific needs of adolescent girls and to develop targeted interventions to address their vulnerabilities.
- 8 **Making child marriage explicit in assessments and reports:** Child marriage is prevalent in Syria, and it is essential to address this issue in assessments and reports.
- 9 **Placing a stronger focus on women's agency, capacities and opportunities:** This involves engaging with diverse groups of women, which may include widows, women with disabilities, older women and/or adolescent girls) and women-led organisations.
- 10 **Strengthening the meaningful participation of women in humanitarian decision-making processes:** In line with recommendations from the [Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation](#) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls.
- 11 **Strengthening Accountability to Affected Populations and Community Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms:** This includes creating safe and accessible communication channels that allow community members to provide feedback or make complaints without fear of retaliation or discrimination.
- 12 **Defining both gender mainstreaming and gender targeted interventions:** While there is a need to strengthen and integrate gender and age considerations throughout data collection and analysis, findings from this analysis allow to identify some pressing sector specific targeted interventions to respond to gender specific needs per sector/ cluster.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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