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EMPOWERING SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN IN JORDAN

A Proposal Prepared for UNICEF Next Generation

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Overview

The conflict in Syria continues to cause widespread displacement, deepening the impact of the refugee crisis on neighboring countries. Jordan, known historically as a nation of refuge in the Middle East, has contributed substantial assistance to Syrian refugees over the past six years. Today, Jordan has one of the world's largest numbers of refugees relative to its population and one of the highest densities of refugees relative to its territory. There are 657,000 Syrians officially registered as refugees, and nearly 50,000 vulnerable Syrians that remain at remote locations near Jordan's northeast desert border.¹

The refugee crisis presents serious economic, social and political implications for the region. In Jordan, the massive influx of refugees has placed strain on public services, with children and women being the most affected. In particular, education, health and water are being stretched beyond their existing capacities, resulting in compromises in access and quality of the services provided to children. Jordan also faces urgent concerns due to high tensions over jobs, rising rents and commodity prices, and limited capacity of national institutions to meet the needs of its growing population.

NEWBORN AND MATERNAL HEALTH

Syrian refugees in Jordan are generally younger than the pre-crisis population and have higher fertility rates. Each month, an average of 2,000 Syrian refugee children are born in Jordan. According to a recent health service assessment, many new Syrian mothers and their infants in Jordan lack access to appropriate maternal and newborn health care. Currently, over half of all under-five deaths in Jordan occur in the neonatal period. The assessment suggests a strong need for an evidence-based maternal and newborn health service package that would include counselling on breastfeeding, essential newborn care at home, early detection and treatment of newborn infections and kits with supplies for mothers and their babies.

Globally, up to 36 percent of neonatal deaths occur within the first 24 hours of birth and nearly 73 percent in the first week of life.² This period is also when most maternal deaths occur, making labor, delivery and the postnatal period a dangerous time for both mothers and their babies. **Increasing access to maternal and newborn health services and to lifesaving commodities may be the single most important way to improve these statistics.** The health of mothers and their babies is so closely linked that the delivery of effective interventions can potentially avert 71 percent of newborn deaths, 33 percent of stillbirths, and 54 percent of maternal deaths.³ There has been little attempt to quantify the additional



A young boy in the Za'atari refugee camp helps his little sister fall asleep.

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¹ https://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/UNICEF_Syria_Crisis_Situation_Report_April_2017.pdf

² Oza S, Cousens SN, Lawn JE, et al. Estimation of daily risk of neonatal death, including the day of birth, in 186 countries in 2013: a vital-registration and modelling-based study. *The Lancet Global Health*, 2014, 2(11):e635-644.

³ Bhutta ZA, Das JK, Bahl R, et al. Can available interventions end preventable deaths in mothers, newborn babies, and stillbirths, and at what cost? *Lancet* 2014, 384(9940):347-70.

burden of deaths in the first month of life in emergency contexts, but in all settings the proportion is significant.

Most of the risk factors for the main causes of neonatal deaths are preventable or treatable. However, many cannot be predicted and rely on preparedness throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period to access timely, quality care when needed, and the knowledge and ability to practice healthy behaviors at home. A safe birth and a healthy start in life are at the heart of thriving and stable communities. Accordingly, the neonatal period merits special attention within humanitarian settings, when health services and systems may be interrupted or refugees may not have access to health care services in the countries where they have fled to.

POVERTY AND WORKFORCE EXCLUSION

Poverty and workforce exclusion further compound the problems faced by refugee, forcing many to rely entirely on humanitarian assistance and credit. In 2015, nearly 90 percent of Syrian refugee families took on debt to meet their basic needs.⁴ Without formal residency rights and access to work permits, many refugees quickly exhaust their resources. In several countries throughout Europe and the Middle East, Syrian refugees face significant barriers to economic and social integration. Women in particular are often unable to access the livelihood opportunities that will allow them to secure basic necessities for their families, such as food, water, shelter and clothing. **Restricting the rights of refugees to employment opportunities can actually make refugee children more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, including child labor, trafficking and forced recruitment by armed forces.**

Evidence shows that, given the opportunity, most refugees will work in any geographic location and in any field that provides them with a livelihood. Furthermore, access to safe and lawful work, will help refugees contribute to the needs of their family, community and the country in which they reside. Allowing refugees access to employment and self-employment is beneficial to both refugees and their host countries. Well supervised programs with adequate job training can help refugees become an economic and social boon to their host countries. Access to employment is also a fundamental right, enshrined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. However, in practice, efforts to uphold the employment rights of refugees have been limited and many are barred from accessing employment in host countries for at least a generation.⁵

For several years, Mesh'al, a 16 year old boy, has transported people's groceries across Za'atari camp in his wheelbarrow. The massive camp, located in Jordan, is home to over 80,000 refugees. Like many refugee children, Mesh'al has had to drop out of school to support his family through the informal labor market.

"When I was little I loved to read and wanted to become a teacher but now, if I want to go to school, I will go back to 5th or 6th grade. I became old now. It's not going to work," says Mesh'al.

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Workforce exclusion is slowly changing in Jordan, where refugees are now seeing greater opportunities for integration into the formal labor market. In 2016, the Government of Jordan waived work permit fees for Syrian refugees, a positive step toward easing the way for Syrian refugees to find legal employment and helping them become more self-sufficient. "The Jordan Compact" was also agreed upon between Jordan and the International Community. The Compact outlines a new

⁴ https://www.unicef.org/jordan/Running_on_Empty2.pdf

⁵ Taking the Movement from Theory to Practice: A Report by Asylum Access and the Refugee Work Rights Coalition, 2014.

holistic approach to deal with the Syrian crisis and build Jordan's resilience. The central pillar of the Compact is to turn the Syrian refugee crises into a development opportunity that attracts new investments and creates jobs for Jordanians and Syrian refugees.

UNICEF in Action

Since the start of the Syrian crisis, UNICEF has provided urgent humanitarian assistance to refugees in Jordan with special attention given to the most vulnerable children and their families. UNICEF operates in camps and host communities across Jordan with emergency response interventions that encompass health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, education, child protection, and social protection.

UNICEF supports the right to survival and development for all children in Jordan and cooperates with national institutions, communities and partners to reduce neonatal and child mortality and morbidity. Rebuilding health facilities and systems,



A young Syrian girl smiles in her new winter clothes, which her mother bought with a cash grant from UNICEF. © UNICEF/UN047914/Herwig

providing emergency care and training health workers are critical components of UNICEF's humanitarian response in Jordan, and maternal and newborn health services comprise a key domain within that response.

The distribution by UNICEF and partners of lifesaving newborn kits to vulnerable families over the past two years has helped to ensure the best start to life for refugee newborns. Furthermore, given the specific context of the protracted refugee crisis in Jordan, where Syrian refugees have depleted their savings and exhausted all their coping mechanisms, UNICEF has also engaged in a large-scale social protection program, reaching 55,000 Syrian refugee children with cash assistance every month, and providing vulnerable youth and women with employment opportunities.

The Impact of Your Support

With seed funding from NextGen, UNICEF will have the critical resources needed to launch a livelihood empowerment program that has been designed to benefit Syrian refugee women and their families in Jordan. The program will address the above mentioned challenges and opportunities by linking the empowerment and productive capacities of vulnerable women living in camps and host communities in Jordan with the need for a maternal and newborn health package of services. The program is composed of two main components: 1) livelihood opportunities and 2) health care services for new mothers and their infants.

LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

Following the launch of the program, UNICEF will begin preparatory activities, including the identification of vulnerable women within refugee camps and host communities who are interested in employment opportunities. UNICEF will leverage its existing network of 226 Makani Centers - community-based centers in Jordan that provide education and protection services to vulnerable youth – in order to identify the most vulnerable women and recruit them for this project.

The goal is to ensure that Syrian women living in Jordan refugee camps and host communities can engage in safe and lawful employment and do not have to resort to exploitative and high risk jobs. Increasing women's access to monetary welfare is an important step in the fulfilment of Syrian children's rights - employed parents, without high levels of debt, are more likely to provide for their children's basic needs and do not have to adopt coping mechanisms that negatively influence child welfare (i.e. withdrawals from school, child labor and child marriage).

The women who are selected to participate in this program will receive training on how to produce the newborn kits. The kits will consist of several vital items for both babies and mothers, including clothing, essential winter items, cots, diapers, soaps and other hygiene items. The distribution of newborn kits is already part of UNICEF's emergency health response within Jordan. **This program rethinks the conventional production approach and engages Syrian refugee women in the assembly process.**

During this time, UNICEF will also begin procurement of supplies and commodities required for the production of the newborn kits. As always, the objective of these procurement activities is the timely acquisition of the right goods, while addressing UNICEF's mandate, fairness, integrity and transparency, economy and effectiveness, and best value. Businesses contracting with UNICEF will be required to accept and comply with the UN Supplier Code of Conduct, which reflects the ten principles of Global Compact in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption.

Following job training and procurement of supplies and commodities, the women will begin supervised production of the kits. Monthly payments will be administered to the women who produce the kits, in line with national standards and regulations.

IMPROVING MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH

Once the newborn kits are assembled by refugee women, they will be distributed to other vulnerable Syrian refugee families living in settlements and host communities. Community health workers will distribute the kits during counselling

visits to new mothers in order to promote maternal and child health care. The distribution of these kits will be integrated into routine antenatal and postnatal health services as part of a continuum of care.



Community health counselling is one way in which UNICEF improves health equity and ensures that everyone in Jordan has access to needed healthcare services. All community health workers providing counselling will be trained on essential newborn care, and provided with guidelines and resources to ensure that they have the knowledge and expertise to help mothers understand the critical interventions that save newborn lives. Essential life-saving interventions include: immediately drying the newborn and keeping

the baby warm, skin to skin contact, delayed cord clamping, initiating breastfeeding as soon as possible after delivery, supporting the mother to breastfeed exclusively, giving special care to low-birth weight infants, and diagnosing and treating newborn complications such as asphyxia and sepsis.

The community health workers involved in this project will also consist of women, including Syrian refugees. This community-based approach to health care allows UNICEF to deploy more workers to deliver basic health services directly in refugee camps and host villages. Identification of pregnant women by community health workers and continued follow-up and support during the antenatal and postnatal period can promote healthy practices reduce infant mortality rates.

The Way Forward

With \$100,000 in funding from UNICEF Next Generation, UNICEF Jordan will be able to reach an estimated 1,300 vulnerable women in Jordan. Funding will provide 30 vulnerable women with livelihood opportunities for a one year period, while supplying 1,000 mothers and their newborns with critical health care packages.⁶

After six years of unrelenting conflict in Syria, creative approaches are needed more than ever to enhance the resilience of refugees and host communities affected by the crisis. After fleeing conflict, the opportunity to make a living is one of the most effective ways refugees can rebuild their lives and restore their dignity. With support from NextGen, UNICEF can empower Syrian refugee women – providing them with opportunities to participate in the workforce and make a meaningful difference in the lives of vulnerable mothers and their newborns.



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On behalf of Syrian refugees in Jordan, thank you for your support!

⁶ Funding for the community healthcare workers outreach will be supported by other donors.

The Impact of Your Support



\$100 could provide a mother and her infant with a newborn kit containing critical items to support their health and well-being.



\$250 could employ one Syrian refugee woman for a month for the production of newborn kits.



\$500 could reach five mothers and their newborn children with newborn kits.



\$1,000 could employ a vulnerable woman for four months.



\$1,500 could provide the machinery needed to produce newborn kits for vulnerable Syrian refugee mothers and their newborns living in Jordan.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works in more than 190 countries and territories to put children first. UNICEF has helped save more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization, by providing health care and immunizations, clean water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief and more. UNICEF USA supports UNICEF's work through fundraising, advocacy and education in the United States. Together, we are working toward the day when no children die from preventable causes and every child has a safe and healthy childhood. For more information, visit www.unicefusa.org.

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