

*This newsletter is an update on gender issues in UNRWA and the region. It is issued on a monthly basis for the gender network, the gender taskforce, and our external partners, with the aim of sharing information, tools, reports, and news on gender.*

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UNRWA's gender unit in Headquarters Amman would like to extend its support to the colleagues in Gaza from all programmes and departments, including those working on gender issues, who are working tirelessly and risking their lives every day to provide services to the people of Gaza.

## Highlight on Gaza: Overcrowded shelters in Gaza pose every day challenges for displaced women



The war in Gaza has destroyed the homes and lives of families over the past 36 days, and created massive infrastructural damages causing shortages of water and fuel. Conditions in shelters are overcrowded with currently 207,221 (51.3 per cent male, 47.7 per cent female) internally displaced persons (IDPs) taking refuge in 87 UNRWA schools since July 13, 2014. The Agency is stretched to provide even minimum needs of water, food and non-food items (NFIs) including mattresses and hygiene commodities. At the peak time of IDP movements, shelters were hosting an average of 3,033 IDPs each and some shelters over 9,000 IDPs.

Living conditions have been cramped for all affected persons and pose additional protection needs for women. In shelters, men spend their days outdoors in the school courtyard while women occupy the rooms. Some shelters have established separate rooms for women that provide privacy and be able to socialize. However, the overbearing numbers of IDPs in some shelters make it impossible to designate any additional space for women.

Basic latrine facilities are available in all schools with toilet facilities designated for women and shower points established in both women's and men's Arab toilets and external showers built in Rafah, southern Gaza. However, the high numbers of IDPs means there are not sufficient toilet facilities for everyone. Furthermore, as children tend to use toilets and showers in the women's units, women's toilets get more crowded than those for the men.

In addition to needs of hygiene and privacy, some 350 babies have been born to women taking refuge in the shelters during

the war. While women have mostly been able to deliver in a hospital and return to the shelter, the overcrowded conditions of shelters are far from ideal for new born babies and their mothers, particularly those who have delivered through caesarean surgery and insufficient hygiene conditions are creating a concern of potential health epidemics.

To ensure that imminent needs of hygiene for recent mothers are met, UNRWA has started to distribute maternity packages including a cot, diapers, intimate soap, talk powder, clothes for mother and baby and other essential commodities. Work is being done to emphasize the importance of hygiene and cleanliness of shelters. A health, water and hygiene campaign is currently being rolled out encouraging IDPs to participate in running the shelters. A hygiene committee among the IDPs in the shelters will also be formed and will include two women, two men and four youth (two boys and two girls) who will be supported to advocate good hygiene practices, water conservation and correct treatment of scabies and lice. In many shelters, separate sessions have been held for women.

UNRWA is also establishing health units in each shelter including a practical nurse, a doctor and a health educator who will be monitoring outbreaks of nine critical illnesses such as diarrhoea, typhoid, cholera, scabies and measles. Each shelter also has a psychosocial counsellor and a Protection Focal Point. Cases of GBV have been dealt with but more systematic monitoring is being put in place.

UNRWA has also started systematic monitoring of shelter conditions, whereby

staff visit the shelters to follow up whether provided services of water, food and NFIs are sufficiently addressing the needs of IDPs. Specific questions on access to washing facilities and privacy are addressed to women to ensure measures can be taken to rectify any neglect.

The ceasefire has allowed for better responses to the needs of women in shelters as security concerns have not posed access issues and IDP numbers have ceased to grow. The stressful condition of displacement is expected to increase GBV cases. Recovery planning includes further psychosocial support of children and families, as well as economic and educational empowerment programmes for female headed households and female youth.

Further programmes on creating social and recreational spaces for women will provide a safe place for self-development, exercise and peer-support. For more information, contact [m.hietanen@unrwa.org](mailto:m.hietanen@unrwa.org).



### FACT OF THE MONTH:

According to [UN information](#), the cumulative death toll among Palestinians stands at 1960. 1395 are believed to be civilians, including 458 children and 237 women.

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## Events of Interest

### August 2014 — Hyderabad

Women's Worlds Congress: Gender in a Changing World. August 17th to August 21st, 2014. University of Hyderabad, India. Click [here](#) for more information.

### August 2014 — Online

Keeping the Flow Going: Mental Health Matters (MHM) Advocacy. August 18th, 12am to August 19th, 12am, 2014. Join [WASH United](#) and others every Monday on Twitter to discuss the importance of good menstrual hygiene. #MHM #Menstravaganza [Read more](#)

### August 2014 — Online

Women's Power to Stop War webinar series. Episode 5: Political Economy of Violence Against Women. August 21st, 2014, 5:00-7:00pm EDT. Click [here](#) for more information.

### August 2014 — Online

Human Rights & Justice Group online certificate course on Gender and Development Training. August 20th to September 26th, 2014. Click [here](#) for more information.

## Reports & Resources

### UN News Centre

According to data released by UNICEF in July 2014, more than 130 million girls and women have experienced some form of female genital mutilation in Africa and the Middle East. Additionally, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children. More than 1 in 3 of those were married before the age of 15. [View the report](#)

### Women's Major Group

According to the Women's Major Group, the Sustainable Development Goals still lack real ambition for the urgent transformational change the world needs to achieve gender equality, women's human rights, sustainable development in harmony with nature, and to end inequalities. "8 Red Flags" have been outlined. [View the report](#)

### VAWG Helpdesk

The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Helpdesk is a research and advice service for DFID run by a Social Development Direct led consortium that publishes quarterly reports. It includes information on the latest research, policy, news, and DFID programmes on violence against women. [View the report](#)

### Women's Refugee Commission

In 2013, the Women's Refugee Commission undertook extensive research in Jordan to identify how gender was being integrated across sectors for the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan. [View the report](#)

### UN Women

UN Women has released a report on gender based violence among Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. "We Just Keep Silent" is what Syrian women do after they have been violently attacked or harassed or pushed to do some sexually-related act against their will," disclosed a UN Women Representative. The report is based on a survey of men and women living both inside and outside refugee camps. [View the report](#)

### UNFPA

UNFPA has released an E-Learning course called "Managing Gender-Based Violence Programmes in Emergencies." It includes an overview of core concepts, a framework for intervention, as well as prevention and response strategies. [View the report](#)

## Regional News

### Gaza

The emergency department of the al-Shifa hospital receives 25 to 50 pregnant women per day. Children here are born into a country under siege and grow up with the sounds of bombs. "We must have many children here, because we lose so many in the wars," said Mariam, a mother of eight about to give birth to her ninth child. [Read more](#)

Fearing for their lives and that of their children, Palestinian women in Gaza are suffering from severe mental health issues. [Read more](#)

The vast majority of murdered Palestinians in Gaza are civilians, and sources claim that a disproportionate number of these are women and children. According to anthropologist Maya Mikdashi, what is missing from popular discourse and the media is the public mourning of Palestinian men also killed in the war. The gendering of Israel's war on Gaza is conversant with other discourses of war where men are often presumed guilty of what they *might* do; therefore they are largely excluded from public mourning. [Read more](#)

### Iraq

UN Special Representatives are concerned by new reports of sexual violence in Iraq and have issued a joint statement condemning the acts, urging for immediate civilian protection. Accounts of abduction, detention and rape of Yazidi, Christian, Turkomen and Shabak women, girls and boys are reaching the

UN officials at an alarming rate. Reports claim that 1,500 Yazidi and Christian persons have been forced into sexual slavery. [Read more](#)

### Syria

Recent reports from the IRC indicate that Syrian women and girls are growing more vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Lebanon as their exile drags out and poverty increases. Some women are driven into prostitution or survival sex with men who can provide rent or food. Some mothers force teenage daughters into marriage because they can't afford to care for them or because they hope a husband will protect them. Women and children make up 80 percent of the 1 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon. [Read more](#)

### Global

One in three women in the European Union has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15. Worldwide, an estimated 35 percent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence. Although the struggle to end violence against women is a long one, there is hope: the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, or "Istanbul Convention" treaty has come into force. Groups have started using the treaty. [Read more](#)

Maryam Mirzakhani, from Iran, is the first woman to win the most prestigious mathematics prize in the world since the establishment of the award 80 years ago. [Read more](#)