



The MENA region has the greatest number of refugees.

➔ Conflict is ongoing in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Palestine and nearby Afghanistan and South Sudan.

➔ **600,000+** people have been infected with COVID-19 in MENA,¹ although conflict and lack of access cloud the picture. (as of June 16, 2020)

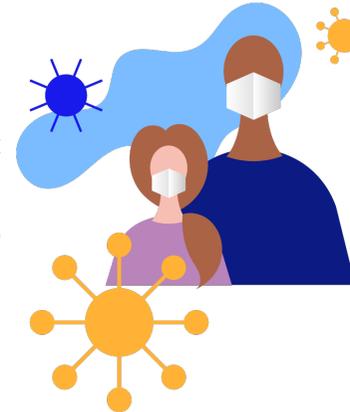
➔ Refugees in MENA are already insecure, living in densely populated areas, facing housing insecurity, and with less access to water and sanitation.

➔ Female-headed households—as much as one-third of the refugee population—face gender barriers and discrimination and rely on informal labor that has been hit hard by COVID-19 mitigation measures.

¹ See <https://covid19.who.int/>. Definitions of MENA vary but here we have included: Algeria (11,031), Bahrain (19,031), Egypt (46,289), Iran (189,876), Iraq (21,315), Israel (19,121), Jordan (979), Kuwait (36,958), Lebanon (1,464), Libya (467), Morocco (8,921), Oman (25,269), Qatar (80,876), Saudi Arabia (132,048), Syria (177), Tunisia (1,110), United Arab Emirates (42,636), Palestine (690), and Yemen (848).

COVID-19: One More Setback for Refugees in MENA – Especially Women and Girls

Refugees and the displaced, the majority of them located in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, are now facing the COVID-19 pandemic and economically damaging efforts at its mitigation. CARE's soon-to-be-released Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) gathers together data from its country offices in MENA and beyond¹ to provide a sobering picture of the pandemic's impact on women and girls.



INCREASED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Confinement at home can mean confinement with an abuser, without private access to a phone to seek help.²

COVID-19 mitigation efforts have closed shelters and other lifesaving assistance options for those who need help – already a scarcity for refugees in MENA.

Jordan



2 of 3

urban refugees & camp residents are concerned for the safety of women and girls since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. (Source: CARE Jordan RGA)



1 of 2

camp residents are concerned for the safety of women and girls since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. (Source: CARE Jordan RGA)

Palestine

Calls about abuse to a help hotline

↑ **up 20%**

– most from adolescent boys and young men.

Calls from women

↑ **up 38%**

when the hotline extended its hours of operation. (Source: CARE Palestine WBG RGA)

¹ CARE offices in Syria, Jordan, Palestine West Bank/Gaza, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, Morocco and the Caucasus all contributed to our forthcoming Regional Rapid Gender Analysis on COVID-19.

² 15% of respondents in Lebanon said they did not feel safe seeking help over the phone, and 2% said their partner would not let them use the phone. CARE et al, [“Impact of COVID-19 on the SGBV Situation in Lebanon”](#).

Lebanon

54% – mostly refugees – reported an **increase in violence and harassment** against women and girls.

44% felt **less safe** themselves at home.

(Source: CARE Lebanon RGA)



Iraq

89% of respondents, including refugees in 3 Kurdistan Region camps, **reported increased GBV**

37% said they **knew girls that had married** during the pandemic. There are concerns that abuse is being followed by forced marriage. (Source: The Lotus Flower, Post-COVID-19 Assessment)

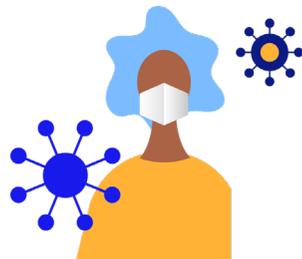
Egypt

51% said they **had no access to safety** and protection services (police, shelters, etc.) after the COVID-19 crisis.

Refugees spoke specifically of the hardship of **postponed divorce and child custody court proceedings** or delays in filing a police report.

(Source: CARE Egypt RGA)*

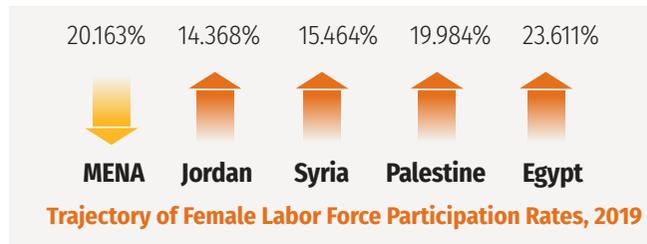
“**Egyptian women need us more to clean their houses—however, we are still being paid the same. I was locked down with my employer for a month.**”—Sudanese refugee in Egypt



WIDE-SCALE ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

Female labor force participation rates for the MENA region are actually in decline, weighed down by persistent gender norms that limit women to household duties, displacement and conflict, and other gender barriers.

But Jordan, Palestine West Bank/Gaza, Egypt, and Syria¹ have seen modest increases in female labor force participation—gains put in jeopardy by COVID-19 stay-at-home orders during which the burden of schooling, caretaking, and housekeeping continue to fall mainly upon women and girls.²



Egypt

74% of refugees surveyed reported having **no access to cash assistance** during the crisis—digital transactions took more time, and transaction offices were crowded, leading to panic. (CARE Egypt RGA)

Palestine

94% and **70%** faced **business challenges** after the outbreak.

1 in 3 and **0** entrepreneurs had **no access to the internet**

(Source: CARE Palestine WBG RGA)

Turkey

69% of refugees reported **loss of employment** due to the pandemic. (Source: Brookings Institute)

Women in the region are expected to lose +700,000 jobs as a result of COVID-19.²

WOMEN'S ABSENCE IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

The absence of women in policy-making positions during the COVID-19 response has had a direct impact upon the welfare of women and girls in the region.

All MENA ministers of health are men and most response committees to address the pandemic are male-dominated.³

Palestine

>45% of Gaza residents in quarantine centers are female **0** medical & security staff at the centers are female

(Source: CARE Palestine WBG RGA)

Jordan

Workplaces opened about a month before **child care centers were opened**—the government seemed ready to rely on women for childcare until women's rights organizations objected. (Source: Sadaqa)

Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan

Women and adolescents—mainly refugees—reported **needing menstrual supplies**, likely due to stockpiling and severed supply chains. (Source: CARE Iraq, Lebanon & Jordan RGAs)

¹ World Bank.

² UNWomen, “[The Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality in the Arab Region](#).”

³ Wilson Center, “[Women Leaders Needed at the High Table during COVID-19 and Beyond](#)”

* Egypt's RGA is limited to those interacting with CARE operations and cannot be extrapolated to all refugees in the country.