

MFA THE SYRIAN CRISIS IMPACT ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

INTRODUCTION

Women and girls are often the most at-risk population in crisis settings. Women face an elevated risk of **sexual and gender-based violence**, and gender-specific medical conditions like pregnancy and childbirth, which can become especially deadly without adequate medical care.

Humanitarian assistance largely focuses on immediate needs of the general population. Women's specific needs are either neglected or overlooked due to insufficient assistance or lack of targeted support. Many women in Syria live in overcrowded makeshift shelters with little access to healthcare, clean water, and sanitation such as washing facilities or latrines.

MENSTRUATION

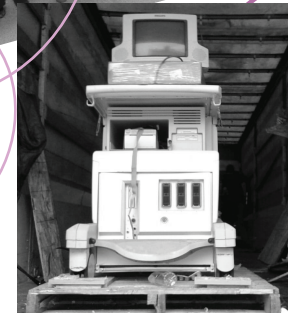
Menstruation can be a **humiliating and dangerous** time for women in camps, as they often lack access to safe, clean toilets and cleaning facilities. Underwear and sanitary items can be hard to come by, forcing women to use unhygienic materials, **like old rags, moss, and pieces of mattress**, which, coupled with lack of clean water and sanitation, poses a high risk of infection.

PRENATAL AND POSTNATAL CARE

Due to the specialized nature of women's medical care, the lack of OB-GYNs and other specialized medical staff compounds the effects of Syria's healthcare crisis on women.

Women face other major obstacles, like accessing prenatal and postnatal care, including lack of ambulances. In hard-to-reach areas, there are no reproductive services at all. For women who do have access to these services, visiting a medical center can be risky. As a result, many pregnant women in Syria are giving birth outside of medical facilities, either out of necessity or by choice, where the risk of infections, complications, and death are considerably higher.

In northern Syria alone, the lack of medical care for women has left **approximately 45,000 pregnant women at risk of complications and death**.



THE STORY OF SAMIRA

The following is a story on a woman named **Samira** who is twenty-eight:

My husband was killed during the fighting and I had to leave my village with my four children. I was five months pregnant and it took me two months to get to this shelter. Throughout my entire journey my children and I were bitterly cold and hungry. When I arrived I went into early labour [sic] in my seventh month. There was no hospital or medical staff nearby so the other women helped me. My baby was born so prematurely and there was no special care to help him survive. He lived just two hours.

Sadly, Samira's story is not unique. Large numbers of women have been forcibly displaced repeatedly in search of safety. Even in cases where there are midwives to help in giving birth, doctors report a lack of the most basic equipment and medicines such as gynecological tables or vacuums for extractions. As Samira's story shows, even where there are functioning hospitals, they may be so distant that hours of travel through hazardous conditions presents extreme risks to both newborns and mothers.

FAMILY PLANNING

Despite the increased dangers of pregnancy, access to family planning options are severely lacking. Studies show that access to family planning has the potential to significantly reduce maternal mortality rates, and that without availability of family planning resources, **maternal mortality rates increase.**

In Syria, there is a considerable need for reproductive healthcare, Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) prevention and testing, and care for treatable issues like Urinary Tract Infections (UTI). Lack of access to reproductive healthcare facilities exacerbates the consequences for female **victims of sexual violence**, who face a greater risk of prolonged trauma without access to critical care, such as reproductive healthcare and STI testing.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP WOMEN

MFA, along with its partner organizations on the ground in Syria, addresses the gap in medical care for women through our **Women's Relief Program**.

MFA supports women's health and wellness through shipments of medicine, medical equipment, hygiene and dignity supplies, sexual wellness and reproductive health items, and other supplies to underserved areas of northern Syria. These supplies support hospitals in Syria, as well as mobile clinics to serve women in hard-to-reach areas.



MULTIFAITH ALLIANCE

The Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees (MFA) is the nation's leading interfaith response to the Syrian refugee crisis. In just two years, MFA has shipped **more than \$125 million** in relief supplies including medicines, hospital equipment, food, clothing, and other supplies to those in desperate need inside Syria and in neighboring refugee camps.

MFA is comprised of more than 100 participating organizations. MFA harnesses the power of faith-based and secular organizations to respond to the Syrian crisis.

Learn more at: multifaithalliance.org