



Empowering Female Syrian Refugee Health Workers in Navigating Multiple Vulnerabilities

Above and below: Members of the Working Women support group in Majdal Anjar, Lebanon

Background

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in regions of Lebanon with significant Syrian refugee populations, the informal health workforce, composed mainly of refugees, stepped in to address health worker shortages.

Working with eight female Syrian informal healthcare workers, ReBUILD for Resilience sought to understand and help them improve their working conditions. This poster examines the challenges they face daily and the steps they take to improve their work and personal life conditions.

What we did

- In-depth interviews explored the experiences of female Syrian informal health workers
- Participatory action research (PAR) discussion workshops identified their main challenges
- Co-developed an intervention to improve women's work and life conditions

Working Women Activity

Mobilizing the community	
Development of Working Women bylaws, mission, vision & values	Completed
Recruitment of 200+ women to the Working Women general assembly	Completed
Fundraising to meet costs of Working Women activities	Forthcoming
Partnerships with local NGOs, Women Now (female empowerment group), and MAPS (Syrian refugee support)	Completed
Advocate for female informal workers' rights	
Development of advocacy plan to negotiate with employers and lobby for workers' rights	Completed
Organize negotiation sessions with employers around health workers' rights	Forthcoming
Amplify voices through social media, sharing personal stories and organizing virtual solidarity events	Ongoing
Disseminate the documentary filmed to give a snapshot of their lives as women, refugees & healthcare workers	Ongoing
Leverage collective strength to meet communal needs	
Organize, monitor and supervise network linking potential babysitters with those seeking childcare	Ongoing
Collective purchasing of school furniture, health insurance, and other vital items for the families, securing lower costs	Forthcoming
Enhance a sense of belonging and combat isolation	
Organize family-inclusive outings and picnics to promote support networks	Forthcoming
Organize forums for discussion and sharing experiences	
Address work issues and strategies for empowerment	

What we found

During the first PAR workshop, participants identified vulnerabilities which contribute to their marginalization:

- **Societal gender norms:** The women have **limited mobility** and are subject to heavier workloads and lower wages than men
- **Double burden:** They are expected to solely undertake **household duties** plus their paid activities
- **Legal restrictions:** As refugees, they are limited to **working in the informal sector**, lack health and social protection, and receive insufficient pay
- **Social isolation:** Separation from their extended families and **stigmatization** by the host community
- **Psychosocial status:** Continuous pressure and fear of deportation and an uncertain future for them and their children

During the second PAR workshop, the women prioritized three issues to focus on - **low wages, social isolation and legal status depriving them of citizens' rights**. They proposed the creation of a support group, Working Women, to address these challenges and improve their and their peers' work and life conditions.



Conclusion

This study outlined the empowering journey of female, Syrian, refugee, informal health workers who have formed a support group to improve their work and life conditions. The Working Women initiative fosters solidarity and community mobilization, facilitating collective and cooperative services and effective advocacy. By improving informal workers' conditions, this grassroots movement contributes to a more resilient health system. The success of this initiative underscores the vital role of community-led efforts in addressing inequalities and uplifting marginalized groups.