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SHARING EXPERTISE

Older Persons in Emergencies: Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations for Relief Workers

A Report on a Stakeholders Technical Meeting

Background

Whether across borders or internal, wars and civil strife result in significant internal and regional instabilities, with effects being felt most severely by the vulnerable populations, notably older adults. The increased vulnerability of older adults in emergencies is related to numerous factors including normal challenges such as the burden of chronic disease and disability, and emergency-related factors such as losses to social and physical infrastructure (Wells, 2005). **In the midst of wars and conflicts, the needs of vulnerable older adults are often overlooked. When developing relief and recovery efforts, their needs are simply incorporated into broad**

programs targeting the general adult populations.

Nevertheless, older people are not solely a special group that needs attention; they are also important human resources and can contribute to the welfare of other displaced segments of the population. They have a better understanding of their peers and extensive knowledge of their surroundings as they often hold positions of respect and influence in families and communities (WHO, 2006).

The Syrian Refugees Crisis, that has been affecting Lebanon and neighboring countries for the past two years or so, has become a national priority of utmost urgency given the amplified need for humanitarian aid and basic commodities paralleled with a shortage in resources to ensure appropriate response. Latest figures from UNHCR in Lebanon show that around 19,000 Syrian families of refugees in Lebanon have at least one individual aged above 65 years.

This calls for special attention and immediate action by all concerned stakeholders. There is a need to agree on a joint strategy for approaching the issue of seniors in emergencies from both ends of the spectrum: as a vulnerable group that has special requirements for survival and decent living, and also as assets in the community providing care and support to other



refugees of all ages.

Within this context, the Center for Studies on Ageing, CSA, www.csa.org.lb has organized a technical meeting with the aim of building consensus among stakeholders for a common strategy to address the needs of seniors among Syrian refugees. For this matter, CSA collaborated with the UN agencies, UNFPA, WHO, the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Social Affairs as well as HelpAge International for the realization of this symposium.

Objectives

The stakeholders’ technical meeting spanned over a period of five hours. Its objectives were: as follows:

- To draw attention to seniors in emergency in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis
- To present available data / statistics on older refugees
- To discuss challenges faced in providing aid to older refugees based on experiences in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon
- To discuss opportunities for engaging seniors as active contributors in their own communities
- To draft the essentials of an action plan to address issues related to the seniors among the Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Program

The technical meeting was held at the Gefinor Rotana Hotel on Thursday December 12th 2013.

The program consisted of an opening session and a panel discussion, as below:

Opening Session

Welcome Address - CSA Director Dr Abla Sibai
Address, UNFPA representative Ms Asma Kurdahi
Address, WHO representative Dr Alissar Rady
Older persons in Emergencies by Ms Lydia de Leeuw, Regional Inclusion Program Manager,
HelpAge International/Handicap International (HAI/HI)
Situation of vulnerable refugees in the Syrian crisis: Data from a recent survey in Lebanon and Jordan by Ms Boram Lee, Inclusion & Advocacy Coordinator, HAI/HI
Address by Dr Assaad Khoury, Ministry of Public Health

Coffee Break

Panel discussion: Moderator Dr Salim Adib
Dr Laurie Abi Habib, FHS-University of Balamand
Ms Carol El-Sayed, Head of Community Development Unit, UNHCR
Ms Hessen Sayah, CARITAS
Ms Zeina Mohanna, AMEL
Dr Jamil Youssef, International Medical Corps
Ms Lydia de Leeuw, HelpAge International/Handicap International

Concluding remarks

Dr Salim Adib

Participants

This meeting gathered in excess of 88 representatives from concerned stakeholders, from the UN, selected NGOs, relevant ministries, and engaged academic institutions as well as active media professionals. More specifically, the participants were connected to:

- CSA, UNFPA, WHO, UNHCR, World Bank, Caritas, Handicap International, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Ministries: MOSA, MOH, MOE.
- National Relief Agency, National Commission on Ageing
- Faculties of Health Sciences: AUB, UOB, LU and others
- Media professionals

A bilingual action brief and a policy brief prepared by CSA on “Seniors in Emergencies” were distributed to participants to guide relief efforts in dealing with seniors in emergencies. The Action Brief is being distributed by interested NGOs and bodies across their own Centers and to their own relief workers in the field.

Prepared by the Center for Studies on Ageing, CSA, (Lebanon)



Your health is our concern; we are committed to provide the highest quality of health care services. Fouad Khoury Hospital member of Bikhazi Medical Group is characterized by its patient satisfaction and quality of care. Our expertise is widely spread to cater to the patient’s needs. Our aim is to provide our patients the most appropriate treatments with the state-of-the-art technologies available in a safe and compassionate environment.

صحتكم غايتنا، وحدائتنا الوسيطة، لأن صحتكم همتنا الأول، ولإننا ملتزمين بتقديم أعلى مستوى من الرعاية المركزة. مستشفى فؤاد خوري، عضو شركة بخعازي ماديكال غروب صمم مؤخراً ليتناسب مع إحتياجاتكم الطبية وراحتكم بامتياز، فهو مجهز بأحدث التقنيات والتجهيزات التكنولوجية، وأهم الخبرات المدعمة بفريق متمرس من الأطباء والممرضين. هدفنا تقديم خدمات فريدة ومميزة لتأمين الرعاية الصحية والطبية بجو آمن وسليم في ظل وجود تقنيات متطورة وكفاءات طبية رائدة.

