

EMPOWERED AID

USING CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING TO MAKE THE DELIVERY OF HUMANITARIAN AID SAFER

Contextualizing Empowered Aid findings to better
mitigate risks of sexual exploitation and abuse

Jordan Results Report
September 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
Next Steps	6
Recommendations	7
BACKGROUND	8
Phase I: Risk Identification and Prioritization	9
Contextualization Workshops and Participatory Group Discussions	9
Findings on Risks of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.....	10
SEA Risk Mitigation Recommendations from Women and Girls.....	13
Phase II: Applying Women and Girls' Recommendations for Reducing SEA Risks to Aid Programming, and Measuring How They Work	14
Safety Audit	14
Household Survey.....	15
Monitoring Findings	15
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS.....	20
RECOMMENDATIONS	21

ACRONYMS

GBV	Gender Based Violence
GWI	Global Women's Institute
IBVs	Incentive-Based Volunteers
PGD	Participatory Group Discussions
PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RtR	Road to Resilience Project
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Hygiene and Sanitation
WVSR	World Vision Syria Response

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

About Empowered Aid

Empowered Aid is a multi-country initiative led by the Global Women's Institute (GWI) at the George Washington University, in partnership with local & international aid actors, as well as affected communities in refugee-hosting countries around the world. It is grounded in participatory action research on risks of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) when accessing aid and seeks to develop humanitarian aid delivery models that reduce power disparities and give those most affected by abuse—women and girls—a sustained voice in how aid is delivered. Empowered Aid has used findings from this action research to adapt the design, implementation, and monitoring of aid delivery in six countries across three regions.

For Empowered Aid's findings, resources, and free online course, visit empoweredaid.gwu.edu.

Applying the Empowered Aid approach in Jordan

This report represents findings from implementing the "Contextualization toolkit" developed by GWI to support aid actors in applying the results of Empowered Aid's participatory action research to their humanitarian programming. It also captures findings from the administration of monitoring tools to capture feelings of safety and risk throughout the distribution process as implemented by World Vision Syria Response in Jordan, in partnership with the Global Women's Institute at the George Washington University.

This report was drafted by Loujine Fattal (GWI Empowered Aid lead consultant for the Middle East), Maha Al Saudi (World Vision Jordan Empowered Aid Project Officer), Mathilde Belli (GWI Empowered Aid Research & Learning consultant), and Alina Potts (GWI Research Scientist and Project Lead). The in-country project team included Maha Al Saudi, Noor El Deeb and Raghad Mansour (World Vision Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning focal points), and recruited data enumerators. Technical oversight, support, training and capacity sharing, and editing were provided by Alina Potts, Loujine Fattal, Mathilde Belli, and Jessie Weber (GWI Research Associate). Administrative and financial oversight and support were provided by Nigusu Zelelke and Joseph Njuki of World Vision US and Heather Holmes and Justin Brown of GWI.

This report represents the collective expertise of the women and girls living in Al Azraq camp who participated in the contextualization of the findings of Empowered Aid in Jordan; for reasons of confidentiality, they are not named but we are proud to share their expertise in this report, as well as insights from refugee men and boys, and from aid recipients consulted during distribution monitoring. Special thanks also go to humanitarian stakeholders who participated in interviews and meetings.

Citation: *The Global Women's Institute and World Vision Syria Response in Jordan (2023). Empowered Aid: Using Contextual Safeguarding to Make the Delivery of Humanitarian Aid Safer: Jordan Results Report. Washington, DC: The George Washington University.*

Empowered Aid is funded by the United States Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Empowered Aid initiative is led by the Global Women's Institute (GWI) in collaboration with humanitarian organizations like World Vision. It seeks to reduce the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) in aid delivery, based on evidence arising from research and implementation in the Middle East, East Africa, and South Asia. Empowered Aid takes a contextual safeguarding approach, recognizing that those most affected by SEA know best the situations, settings, and people that put them at risk of SEA, and the ways in which aid actors can intervene early to reduce these risks. By utilizing participatory assessment and monitoring tools and processes, the approach ensures the voices of crisis-affected women and girls are included in shaping responses. The aim of GWI and World Vision's partnership is to further embed safeguarding in World Vision's programming and partnerships by applying Empowered Aid findings and tools in ongoing humanitarian responses.

This report shares a summary of findings from applying the Empowered Aid approach with Syrian refugees living in Al Azraq camp in Jordan. Empowered Aid uses participatory methods in order to engage women and girls and ensure their active participation in identifying SEA risks related to distributions, as well as risk mitigation measures that can improve safety while accessing aid. First, a series of participatory "contextualization workshops" were conducted with 24 women and girls (15 women, 19 girls) reflecting on research findings from Uganda and Lebanon, and identifying distribution-related SEA risks specific to their context—**recognizing that refugee women and girls are the contextual safeguarding experts**. Participatory group discussions were also held with 40 refugee men and boys (20 men, 20 boys), who shared their expertise around the challenges women and girls face when accessing aid:

- **Traveling to Access Assistance:** Women and girls experience verbal and physical abuse by camp inhabitants while traveling to/from distribution or service points.
- **At Humanitarian Service Points:** Disorganization and chaos at service centers create opportunities for gender-based violence and SEA and prevent girls from accessing education.
- **Accessing Job Opportunities:** Exploitation in exchange for employment is common, with women often coerced into sexual acts.
- **Utilizing medical Services:** Women and girls face sexual, verbal and physical harassment by ambulance drivers.
- **During Shelter Repairs:** Sexual abuse and exploitation by shelter workers demanding personal relationships or phone numbers for prioritizing repairs are frequent.
- **Accessing Food Assistance:** Unsafe food points with poor quality of assistance result in women being obliged sell their coupons at a lower price than what they are worth to buy food at refugee-run local markets or to travel to unsafe areas of the camp where more assistance is available.

"Today, a young man harassed me on my way to this workshop. The Peace Center is about 20 minutes away from me, I always see guys follow me and verbally harass me, I stopped coming, or I come with my friend or group of girls."— Syrian refugee adolescent girl

"NGOs indirectly contribute to SEA. Because the food coupons are distributed and we need cash instead so we can purchase our needed items from anywhere we want, so we sell the coupon, and the dealers exploit us financially and buy it at a lower price than the real one. The one who exploits me financially will exploit me sexually one day."— Syrian refugee woman

"There is a Syrian woman I know who went out of the camp to find a job, the taxi driver tried to harass her, and when she refused, he said: 'You are all (Syrian women) like this. First, you refuse, and when you see the money you accept, don't act innocent.' She got out of the taxi and started crying."—Syrian refugee woman

- **Using WASH facilities:** Limited availability and overcrowding at water points put girls at risk of SEA.
- **Traveling to the Host Community:** Exploitation by taxi drivers and smugglers was reported when women travel to the host community for employment, treatments or to access resources.

Through participatory voting, refugee women and girls put forward priority recommendations for aid actors to mitigate these risks in programming. The following table summarizes these recommendations:

COMMUNITY-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS TO MITIGATE RISKS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA)	Women	Girls	All Groups
More women aid workers or women's committees involved in aid distribution processes, including food distributions.			X
More supportive ways to move around the camp: better organized roads, additional forms of public transport i.e., buses to all areas of the camp, formal/informal accompanying systems when women and girls collect/receive aid and information sharing on moving in groups.			X
Better lighting and closer WASH points & distribution points to reduce identified SEA risks, such as traveling long or isolated distances.			X
Provide food aid in the form of cash or E-wallet transfers instead of coupons (vouchers) to reduce women's need to illegally sell the coupons, which only allow them to purchase food at the mall, to cover more important needs or to allow them to purchase food at local shops and markets or Village 5, as the mall lacks many basic items and has inflated prices.			X
Provide more job opportunities for women: a lack of job opportunities and nepotism lead to sexual exploitation in exchange for employment.	X		
Make caravans safer by building individual latrines, building protection for windows and doors, and increasing the spaces between each caravan.			X
Build another "shopping mall" as there is currently only one mall in the camp that serves three villages, making it crowded, disorganized, poorly managed, and far from many women and girls.			X
Sessions for community sensitization to GBV / SEA and better knowledge and communication on SEA complaints on reporting mechanisms			X
Information communication/dispute resolution sessions with the host community			X
Prevent misconduct through hiring humanitarian workers with high standards and strong ethics, and ensuring closer supervision of distributors/workers/facilitators/staff at aid distribution points/centers, including filing and following up on complaints.			X
Increase the time difference between girls' & boys' school shifts to more than 30-minute intervals between shifts, as girls reported many boys intentionally go to school earlier to see the girls.		X	
School uniforms for adolescent girls, which are seen as a source of more dignified clothing for girls while traveling to and attending school.			X

Other recommendations put forward but not included in the final prioritization included more **community-based & individual shelter support** to safely construct houses, particularly for vulnerable

groups; **delivering aid at household level by at least two aid workers in mixed-sex or all-women teams**, rather than in mass distributions; and **sex-segregated distribution points** to avoid women and girls being pushed out of line, harassed, or targeted by SEA perpetrators who offer to move them to the front of the line in exchange for their personal contact information so they can visit them later. As seen in the quotes below, this type of exploitation is not limited to the food sector but extends to healthcare, WASH, shelter and other sectors:

“Once, my daughter vomited in the ambulance. When the car arrived, the driver texted me: May God forgive you. I told him: What do you want? He replied: I want to talk to you. I immediately blocked him.” – Syrian refugee woman

“A maintenance employee came and told me: give me your number and I will put your name first on the list.” – Syrian refugee woman

“Some humanitarian workers ask for money or a percentage of the salary so that the woman or girl gets the job, and some of them ask for the phone number to tell us about future job openings but they have other intentions, and things develop into more than just talking on the phone.” – Syrian refugee woman

Empowered Aid, in partnership with World Vision Jordan, implemented three of the recommendations from the women and girls in Al Azraq Camp: increasing the number of female staff in outreach teams; creating accompanying systems to make travel to services safer; and awareness raising and information on SEA and complaints mechanisms. Monitoring activities prior to and after the implementation of these recommendations allowed World Vision to identify the outcome of each recommendation, with positive results.

The increase in female outreach staff in charge of registration resulted in the female’s feeling of safety increasing from 88% to 97%. Similarly, the creation of accompanying systems for girls showed positive impacts, with girls reporting they feel more empowered and safe moving in groups and a majority of women and girls opting for group travel at Timepoint 2 (post-implementation). The information sessions on SEA also showed positive results, with women participating in household surveys identifying awareness raising sessions on SEA and complaints mechanism as the most helpful measure to make women and girls feel safer.

NEXT STEPS

These findings underscore the need to adapt aid delivery systems to more effectively meet the needs of women and girls, in ways that minimize opportunities for exploitation and abuse by aid staff, volunteers, and intermediaries (i.e., transport drivers and vendors). The most important way to do that is to **recognize women and girls as experts in contextual safeguarding and engage them in mechanisms designed to improve aid processes and protect against SEA**. A response to SEA that focuses only on reported incidents misses many opportunities to respond to dangerous situations—which women, girls, and other community-based actors already know well and design strategies for avoiding (i.e., self-organizing to travel in groups). Contextual safeguarding approaches can mitigate and prevent SEA before it occurs, and reduce opportunities for perpetration by those who choose to abuse their power.

As part of this, **senior management and safeguarding leads must take responsibility to reflect on their organization’s role in creating a ‘conducive context’ for abuse**. They must attend to the settings and people who are cause for concern, dig deeper into these concerns, and act on them—including ensuring perpetrators are held to account. Program and monitoring & evaluation staff also have a key

role to play by **transparently monitoring safety and risk at all points in the aid delivery process, and sharing this information among humanitarian actors as well as community structures.** This allows for proactive responses to dangerous situations and contributes to greater accountability in mitigating SEA and other forms of distribution-related GBV, before they occur.

Increased access to GBV services—such as healthcare, psychosocial support, and case management—is essential to encourage help-seeking, regardless of whether a survivor chooses to support. Access to services should not be contingent on reporting abuse, in recognition of the powerful deterrent this can be. Shame and stigma, as well as the threat or fear of losing access to aid, are part of the enabling environment for abuse that silences survivors. On a practical level, many survivors do not know the identity or role of the person exploiting them, only that he says he has power over how much aid they receive, or if they receive any at all. **PSEA systems that prioritize information about the perpetrator's identity over a response to the survivor's other needs may inadvertently minimize reporting** as survivors do not know, or are afraid to share, that level of detail but want help nonetheless.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Continue to co-design safety measures with adolescent girls:** Maintain the accompanying systems for adolescent girls piloted under this project, by supporting them to move in groups when traveling to/from the Peace Center or other aid points in Al Azraq Camp, and conducting regular follow-up and supervision to solicit their feedback and adjust as needed.
2. **Ensure robust presence of female staff/volunteers when providing aid items or services:** At minimum having equal numbers of female and male staff/volunteers. Ensure gender balance in outreach teams by having equal numbers of female and male staff/volunteers throughout the registration process, particularly during the door-to-door visits to aid recipients' caravans. For aid registration exercises targeting women and girls, it is preferable to have all, or most staff/volunteers be female.
3. **Expand accessibility and availability of multiple methods for providing feedback or making complaints:**
 - Train GBV/SEA focal points to receive complaints and feedback during field visits, as the most preferred method for making complaints was found to be face-to-face.
 - Share information on GBV/SEA and complaint mechanisms during registration and outreach processes, including information on sex-segregated access to services, accompaniment systems for adolescent girls, and available in-person complaint mechanisms.
 - Share information on complaint mechanisms using methods understandable by children, the elderly, and people with low literacy (i.e. posters with pictures and symbols).
4. **Conduct sessions for community sensitization on GBV/SEA, response services, and complaints mechanisms,** with females and males (separately) including discussion about the gendered negative psychological, physical, and social impact of these forms of abuse and how to support survivors to access services.
5. **Conduct information sessions with adolescents' caregivers and increase their awareness on available complaint mechanisms,** as some adolescents expressed a preference to share concerns or complaints related to humanitarian/NGO services with their caregivers, rather than directly.

BACKGROUND

The Empowered Aid initiative is led by the Global Women's Institute (GWI) in collaboration with humanitarian organizations like World Vision. It seeks to reduce the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) in aid delivery, based on evidence arising from its participatory action research and implementation in the Middle East, East Africa, and South Asia. Empowered Aid takes a contextual safeguarding approach, recognizing that those most affected by SEA know best the situations, settings, and people that put them at risk of SEA, and the ways in which aid actors can intervene early to reduce these risks. By utilizing participatory assessment and monitoring tools and processes, the approach ensures the voices of crisis-affected women and girls are included in shaping responses. The aim of GWI and World Vision's partnership is to further embed safeguarding in World Vision's programming and partnerships by applying Empowered Aid findings and tools in ongoing humanitarian responses.

In September 2022, GWI in partnership with World Vision began implementing the Empowered Aid approach in Jordan, to scale out the approach piloted in Lebanon, Uganda, and Bangladesh, to World Vision Syria Response (WVSR) Programs. Specifically, implementation occurred in Al Azraq refugee camp in partnership with the Road to Resilience (RtR) project under World Vision Syria Response. Al Azraq camp, which includes 6 villages, was established in 2014 in response to the influx of Syrian refugees and is operated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in conjunction with the Government of Jordan. Today, Al Azraq camp is a home to around 40,000 Syrian refugees and is the second-largest refugee camp in Jordan, located 100km east of the Amman governorate and 90km from the Jordan-Syria border.

RtR aims to create a safe and healthy environment for children and caregivers in Al Azraq refugee camp. The primary objective of the project is to provide educational and psychosocial support to children and their families through the Early Childhood Education Center and Peace Center. The Early Childhood Education Center serves as an educational hub, offering Kindergarten 2 services to the young children in the camp. Meanwhile, the Peace Centre, where the Empowered Aid approach was implemented, is designed to provide a safe and resilient environment for children and young adults in the camp. The Center offers programs targeting different age groups, including an education program (6-8 years), Peace Road (13-15 years), first aid art (9-12 years), Impact Plus (15-17 years), and a psychosocial support program for parents to address emotional or psychological challenges they may be facing, recognizing the crucial role they play in the well-being of the children. The Peace Centre has served over 2,860 children and parents since its inception. The Centre is in Village 2 and has play spaces located in Village 3 that serve the local community, providing an opportunity for children to engage in physical activity and play. The Peace Road (PR) is a life skills intervention aimed at helping adolescents to protect themselves and their peers, treat others with respect, be active citizens and collectively act to improve their communities. Peace Road is grounded in positive youth development and assets building, and builds the capacity of local partners and volunteer facilitators to work with children in an informal setting, supported by parents and other adults in the community. The IMPACT+ Club model is an integrated life skills approach for adolescents, especially the most vulnerable, supporting their transition into adulthood.

PHASE I: RISK IDENTIFICATION & PRIORITIZATION

CONTEXTUALIZATION WORKSHOPS & PARTICIPATORY GROUP DISCUSSIONS

In December 2022, WVSR and GWI conducted a series of participatory “contextualization workshops” with women and girls, and participatory group discussions (PGDs) with men and boys, to contextualize the Empowered Aid research findings on SEA risks and mitigation measures to Al Azraq camp, with special attention to risks that may occur when participating in activities at the WVSR Peace Center. Workshops were conducted with Syrian refugee women and adolescent girls (separately by age group) reflecting on the findings from Lebanon and Uganda, and identifying distribution-related SEA risks specific to their context—recognizing that refugee women and girls are the contextual safeguarding experts. Participatory group discussions were also held with Syrian refugee men and boys (also separately by age group) who shared their expertise around the challenges women and girls face when accessing aid. This contextualization process engages crisis-affected communities in co-creation and capacity sharing to ensure risk mitigation measures reflect local realities and priorities.

Contextualization workshops were conducted using the *Empowered Aid Contextualization Toolkit*. The workshops covered different topics and were divided in 3 sections: core concepts on gender, GBV and SEA; contextualizing risks of SEA; and identifying contextually relevant recommendations to mitigate risks of SEA. It utilized participatory tools like community mapping, open-ended stories, reflection exercises and group work. Participatory group discussions were conducted using the same toolkit and focused on identifying SEA risks using participatory approaches like free listing and an open-ended story.

The contextualization workshops and participatory group discussions (PGDs) were conducted between December 12th-21st in Villages 2 and 6 of Al Azraq camp, where WVSR operates. Contextualization workshops were co-facilitated by the Empowered Aid Project Officer and the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer, while the PGDs were facilitated by the Project Officer. Additionally, four female part-time enumerators were recruited for notetaking during the workshops with women and girls, and one male enumerator was recruited for notetaking during the PGDs with men and boys. The enumerators were all trained on core concepts of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), as well as a training on the data collection tools and note-taking guide before the start of the data collection process.

Ethical Considerations

Written informed consent was obtained from each adult participant at the beginning of the workshop/PGD and from adolescent participants’ caregivers one week beforehand. Participants were reassured that their participation was voluntary and that they were entitled to skip any exercise/question at any time. They were reminded that, as these are group activities, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed and no one would be asked to share personal experiences. However, if they wished to speak to someone privately, they could do so at any time.

Prior to the training, referral pathways for SEA & GBV were checked to ensure information and contact details were up to date, so that information on services could be shared should any participant seek it, and for the staff to be prepared to facilitate a referral should an individual disclosure come up in the group discussions and/or afterwards.

Participants were recruited from two WVSR projects in Al Azraq camp: Road to resilience (RtR) and Solid Waste Management. Outreach to adults was conducted via phone and outreach to adolescents was conducted through home visits. In each call or visit, the Empowered Aid project was explained in addition to the aim of the workshops/PGDs, and consent procedures followed those highlighted in the “Ethical Considerations” box above.

In total, 35 adults (15 women, 20 men) and 39 adolescents (19 girls, 20 boys) participated in two contextualization workshops – one with women and one with girls – and eight participatory group discussions – four with men, and four with boys, for a total of 74 participants across these activities. The average time of each workshop was three hours per day, over three consecutive days, and each PGD lasted approximately 50 minutes. Table 1 shows the total number of participants segregated by sex, age, and location.

Table 1: Total number of participants segregated by sex, age, and location

	No. of Participants	Age of Participants	Location of implementation
Contextualization workshop with women & girls			
# women (+18)	15	19-58 years	Azraq Camp Village 6
# girls (-18)	19	14-17 years	Azraq Camp Village 2
Participatory group discussions			
# of men (18+)	20	23-62 years	Azraq Camp Village 6
# boys (-18)	20	14-17 years	Azraq Camp Village 2

FINDINGS ON RISKS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Participants discussed risks along the different points of the distribution process—from accessing information on available aid and services, to registration/verification exercises, to traveling to and from aid distribution or service delivery points, to being at the point of distribution, and then safely storing the aid received. They also discussed risks in relation to different types of aid.

At the Point of Distribution/Service

At the beginning of the discussions with Syrian women and girls, they reported that all NGOs have safety measures and strict roles to ensure their safety and dignity. After further reflection, some women and girls shared examples of disorganization, chaos, and overcrowding at some services or centers run by (I)NGOs, which opens space for GBV/SEA to be perpetrated against them. Adolescent girls noted that some organizations conduct mixed activities for adolescent girls and boys, leading to these centers gaining a “bad reputation,” which then prevents many girls from attending activities they find interesting and important.

Travelling to access aid/services

Participants in the contextualization workshops and PGDs (women, girls, men, and boys) reported largely traveling by foot to access any aid or services inside Al Azraq camp. Distances in the camp are particularly large, with the camp stretching for some 15 kilometers. There are no taxis, buses, or cars, and the only means of public transportation is bicycles, mainly driven by men living in the camp. Each bicycle has an extra seat that can accommodate a maximum of one or two passengers. Adolescent girls explained that they do not feel safe using bicycles, especially around the mall. They shared many stories of some girls who were physically abused and harassed by bicycle drivers. All adolescent girls (n=19) believe that bicycle drivers offer to drive women and girls home to sexually exploit them.

“Once, a girl and her mother went to the mall, and the bicycle driver was their neighbor. The mother trusted him and told him to take the girl home. He physically harassed her all the way long.”

Contextualization workshop with Syrian girls

All women and girl participants reported being verbally and physically abused by male camp inhabitants when traveling to/from aid distribution or service points, including NGO centers, clinics, schools, hospitals, and the mall. They stressed that no matter how near or far the place is, walking to any area inside the camp exposes them to harassment and abuse. Men and boys who took part in PGDs corroborated this and specifically mentioned that the highest risk happens when women and girls travel to collect food distribution or when they travel to/from the “mall” – an area of the camp where multiple services are provided.

“Today, a young man harassed me on my way to this workshop. The Peace Center is about 20 minutes away from me, I always see guys follow me and verbally harass me, I stopped coming, or I come with my friend or group of girls.”

- Contextualization workshop with Syrian girls

Based on the contextualization workshops and PGDs results, **walking to or from any service areas inside Al Azraq camp, irrespective of the distance, is one of the main risks for SEA and other forms of GBV for women and girls.** Adolescent girls (aged 15-18)

“When I’m in [X] NGO, I don’t feel safe until my teacher comes. The place is mixed gender, there is poor management, and there are boys who look at us from the windows.”

Contextualization workshop with Syrian girls

were identified as especially targeted. Most of the adolescent girls at Al Azraq camp have a fear of being exploited or abused while travelling to access NGO services or school, and fear telling their caregivers as they believe that may lead to them being further deprived of accessing NGO services or education. Unfortunately, many girls have dropped out of school, either voluntarily or at the order of their caregivers, due to feeling unsafe and at risk of GBV.

Shelter, including home visits for repairs or maintenance

Participants reported home visits by humanitarian workers are usually conducted by mixed or all-female teams who are well-organized and respectful. Nevertheless, one woman reported being asked for her number by a humanitarian worker during a visit, in exchange for putting her name first on the maintenance list. In addition, a total of seven women (n=15) and five men (n=20) were aware of exploitation by Syrian shelter workers who demand relationships or phone numbers from women and girls as payment for repairing their shelters. Often, women accept as they have no money. Women and men participants explained that the (I)NGO responsible for maintaining their shelters has a long waiting list and does not respond promptly, leading them to depend on Syrian workers to repair their shelters, which puts some vulnerable women (widows and divorced) at higher risk of being sexually exploited or abused by non-aid actors who fill gaps in the aid system. While these workers are not a formal part of the aid system, they are empowered by this system due to the difficulty of accessing repairs through INGO channels and the limited resources Syrian refugees have at their disposal to manage their shelters or move.

“A maintenance employee came and told me: give me your number and I will put your name first on the list.”

Contextualization workshop with Syrian women

Fulfilling Basic Needs: Food, WASH, and Healthcare

Syrian refugees in Al Azraq camp depend on the food coupons they receive from one of the (I)NGOs to purchase food items. They can redeem these coupons from one mall that currently serves three villages. Therefore, the mall is overcrowded and expensive, items sell out quickly, and essential items

may not be available for months. **As a result, many people in the camp, particularly women (as they typically are the household members receiving the food coupons and purchasing food from the mall) frequently sell the food coupons—despite needing them—in order to have money to buy food from local shops and refugee-run markets.** These coupons are bought by the mall dealers at low prices, which means women and their households are selling them at a loss in respect to the aid they are entitled to receive.

*“NGOs indirectly contribute to SEA. Because the food coupons are distributed and we need cash instead so we can purchase our needed items from anywhere we want, so we sell the coupon, and the dealers exploit us financially and buy it at a lower price than the real one. **The one who exploits me financially will exploit me sexually one day.**”*

Contextualization workshop with Syrian women

“Many women go to Village #5. All items are available there and way cheaper than here. But they go illegally. If something bad happened to them or they were kidnapped, no one will know”

PGD with Syrian men

Many men and women participants (35) reported that some women travel to Al Azraq camp’s Village #5 to purchase food from the mall there, because more items are available often at cheaper prices. Village #5 is the farthest village in Al Azraq camp, and no one is allowed to access it unless they have a legal permit as it is a closed area housing refugees with suspected security concerns (such as suspected affiliation with terrorist organizations, previous crimes, etc.). Consequently, women put themselves at high risk by visiting this prohibited area seeking to fulfil their household’s basic needs.

All participants reported that the **lack of water points and limited hours of availability** (4 hours daily) make the water points overcrowded, which opens a space for SEA to be perpetrated. They explained that adolescent girls, widows, and divorced women face a greater SEA risk from male camp inhabitants at the water points.

“Once I was on at the water point alone, and there were many young men. A young man came behind my back and stood close to me, I felt scared, and then I went home quickly.”

Contextualization workshop with Syrian girls

Women and girls reported SEA and other GBV risks related to sexual, verbal and physical harassment by ambulance drivers when **utilizing medical services**. Ambulance drivers are either humanitarian workers or civil defense officers from the host community and **are only males, which puts women/girls at risk when they use the ambulance cars**. Female participants reported that the ambulance drivers behave inappropriately including staring, throwing papers with their numbers written on them, physical harassment, and/or using their private patient data to text or call them days later.

“Once, my daughter vomited in the ambulance. When the car arrived, the driver texted me: May God forgive you. I told him: What do you want? He replied: I want to talk to you. I immediately blocked him.”

Contextualization workshop with Syrian women

“Some humanitarian workers ask for money or a percentage of the salary so that the woman or girl gets the job, and some of them ask for the phone number to tell us about future job openings but they have other intentions, and things develop into more than just talking on the phone.”

Contextualization workshop with Syrian women

Accessing Employment and Livelihood Opportunities

Refugee women and girls—many of whom have lived in Al Azraq camp for years—reported needing financial support for basic necessities. Restricted from working outside the camp, their only income sources are

incentive-based volunteer roles with aid organizations. Livelihood options, especially for women and girls, are scarce, leading to heightened risks of exploitation. All women and girls discussed high levels of nepotism in recruitment processes, and some women being coerced into sexual actions or otherwise exploited in exchange for employment.

Accessing the Host Community

Nine women and four girls (14 out of 34 participants) reported sexual exploitation from taxi drivers and smugglers (both groups often being members of the host community) when having to access the host community for employment, healthcare treatment, or access to resources such as cement and metal that are illegal in the camp.

“There is a Syrian woman I know who went out of the camp to find a job, the taxi driver tried to harass her, and when she refused, he said: ‘You are all (Syrian women) like this. First, you refuse, and when you see the money you accept, don’t act innocent.’ She got out of the taxi and started crying.”

Contextualization workshop with Syrian women

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WOMEN AND GIRLS

The following prioritized recommendations to mitigate risks of SEA were formulated by women and girls:

COMMUNITY-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS TO MITIGATE RISKS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA)	Women only	Girls only	All Groups
More women aid workers or women’s committees involved in aid distribution processes, including food distributions.			X
More supportive ways to move around the camp: better organized roads, additional forms of public transport i.e., buses to all areas of the camp, formal/informal accompanying systems when women and girls collect/receive aid and information sharing on moving in groups.			X
Better lighting and closer WASH points & distribution points to reduce identified SEA risks, such as traveling long or isolated distances.			X
Provide food aid in the form of cash or E-wallet transfers instead of coupons (vouchers) to reduce women’s need to illegally sell the coupons, which only allow food to be obtained at the mall, to cover more important needs or to allow them to purchase food at local shops and markets or Village 5, as the mall lacks many basic items and has inflated prices.			X
Provide more job opportunities for women: a lack of job opportunities and nepotism lead to sexual exploitation in exchange for employment.	X		
Make caravans safer by building individual latrines, building protection for windows and doors, and increasing the spaces between each caravan.			X
Build another “shopping mall” as there is currently only one mall in the camp that serves three villages, making it crowded, disorganized, poorly managed, and far from many women and girls.			X
Sessions for community sensitization to GBV / SEA and better knowledge and communication on SEA complaints on reporting mechanisms			X
Information communication/dispute resolution sessions with the host community			X

Prevent misconduct through hiring humanitarian workers with high standards and strong ethics , and ensuring closer supervision of distributors/workers/facilitators/staff at aid distribution points/centers , including filing and following up on complaints.			X
Increase the time difference between girls' & boys' school shifts to more than 30-minute intervals between shifts, as girls reported many boys intentionally go to school earlier to see the girls.		X	
School uniforms for adolescent girls , which are seen as a source of more dignified clothing for girls while traveling to and attending school.			X

PHASE II: APPLYING WOMEN & GIRLS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING SEA RISKS TO AID PROGRAMS & MEASURING HOW THEY WORK

World Vision selected several of the recommendations from the “menu” above to implement within their RtR programming at the Peace Center, specifically to the Impact Plus program (targeting adolescents aged 15-18 years old) and Parenting Sessions (targeting caregivers):

- 1) Creating accompanying systems to make travel to services safer, specifically for girls traveling to participate in Peace Center activities,
- 2) Increasing the presence of female staff in outreach teams that conduct home visits to girls' shelters, and
- 3) Sessions for community sensitization on GBV/SEA and better knowledge and communication on SEA complaints and reporting mechanisms.

Peace Center activities were monitored both before and after implementing these recommendations, using monitoring tools adapted from the [Empowered Aid Toolkit for Planning and Monitoring Safer Distributions](#), to capture potential changes attributable to implementing these SEA risk mitigation measures.

SAFETY AUDIT

Empowered Aid and World Vision Jordan teams adapted the safety audit tool from the Empowered Aid [Toolkit for Planning and Monitoring Safer Distributions](#) to monitor different indicators related to safety and risks when accessing a service. The Empowered Aid team trained WVSR staff on how to safely and systematically conduct these safety audits. The safety audit is an observational tool that can be conducted while maintaining social distance and provides a systematic way in which to record structured observations related to access, safety, dignity, and equity, with considerations for persons with special needs.

The tool is a checklist of questions that the staff answer by observing an activity to visually identify potential safety risks associated with the service. Safety Audit data is compiled by answering closed-ended responses (either Yes or No, or Not observed – in case of staff inability to observe the service irrespective of whether it exists or not). The tool also includes notes for observation; for example, all observations should note sex and age breakdowns for staff, volunteers, guards, aid recipients, etc. (See also the [Empowered Aid Safety Audit Tip Sheet](#).)

The safety audit tool can be adapted to a specific activity or sector; in this case, it was adapted to World Vision's child protection program activities. This tool was utilized in Village 2 in Al Azraq Camp

during February, March, and June 2023. Safety audits were conducted for three main educational activities at the Peace Center: Peace Road (targeting children aged 13-15 years), Impact Plus (targeting adolescents aged 15-18 years), and parenting sessions which targets caregivers.

Before applying the recommendations, a total of 34 safety audits were carried out by WVSR staff in village 2 in Al Azraq Camp – 28 observations were done while refugees were registered to access the Peace Center in addition to 6 conducted per gender when aid recipients were enrolled and accessed the Peace Road, Impact Plus, and Parenting sessions services. *After* applying the recommendations, a total of 3 safety audits were carried out by WVSR staff in the same locations. These were conducted only at the time of enrollment and accessing the Impact Plus (females), and Parenting sessions (both genders). No safety audits were conducted during the registration stage as there was no outreach process taking place then, which is why far fewer safety audits were conducted at this timepoint.

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The post-distribution monitoring (PDM) household survey tool from the Empowered Aid [Toolkit for Planning and Monitoring Safer Distributions](#) was reviewed and modified to reflect the SEA risks arising from the contextualization workshops and PGDs, as well as questions about safe access to early child development and education services. (See also the [Empowered Aid Household Survey Tip Sheet](#).) Tool adaptation was undertaken in a participatory workshop between GWI and World Vision in Jordan. GWI then facilitated a data collection training with all team members, focusing on using and practicing the survey tool, and ethical considerations, including informed consent and referral processes.

The team surveyed Syrian refugees eligible to take part in the Impact Plus (adolescents aged 15-18 years) and parenting sessions (caregivers over 18 years), with outreach to 60 respondents of whom 54 were successfully surveyed at two timepoints: *before* and *after* applying the above-mentioned recommendations. Of these, there were 47 matched pairs, meaning the same 47 respondents were interviewed before and after applying the recommendations. Four data enumerators (two females and two males) were employed to collect data in each phase of data collection, with respondents of the same sex. Most interviews were conducted in-person at the Peace Center, either before or after the sessions. Towards the end of the data collection period, a total of 18 surveys were collected through phone interviews due to the participants' inability to travel to the center as they were outside the camp.

MONITORING FINDINGS

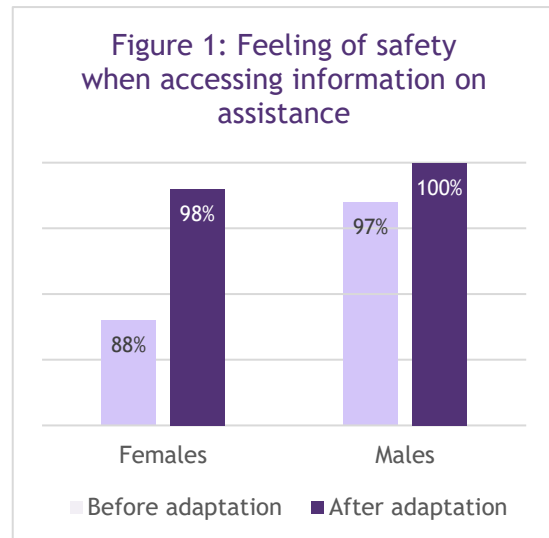
Registration and Communication Mechanisms

The registration process is conducted by the WVSR outreach team, which is based at the WVSR Peace Center. Before beginning any activity, outreach staff conduct door-to-door visits to each caravan inside the targeted area. The visits are conducted twice daily, in the morning and the afternoon. However, the time is not scheduled in advance with aid recipients. During their visits, outreach staff conduct door-to-door visits to all refugees in the targeted area and register interested eligible individuals by sharing information on registration and informing them of upcoming activities verbally.

Safety audit results from Timepoint 1 (before the recommendations were implemented) documented the outreach team consisted of four Syrian incentive-based volunteers (IBVs), 3 males and 1 female, who tended to divide themselves by block to save time. This resulted in interviews not being sex-matched: for example, some female caregivers were interviewed by one male IBV only, and some male caregivers were interviewed by one female IBV. The lack of ensuring door-to-door visits are organized such that the sex of the outreach team member matches the sex of the individual being contacted is a potential SEA risk, as noted in the first phase of contextualization. Following the recommendation, a new female IBV was recruited to improve the gender balance. All team members

were provided with GBV/SEA training by GWI to equip them with the necessary knowledge to identify and flag risks, and provide information on available services and complaints mechanisms; and organized to conduct sex-matched interviews during registration.

The results from the household survey, conducted before and after the implementation of the recommendation, show an **increase in satisfaction and perceived safety following the increase in the number of female aid workers**. Participants' satisfaction with registration increased from 90% before to 98% after the recommendation was implemented. Additionally, both female (+10 percentage points) and male respondents (+3 percentage points) reported feeling safer when accessing information on assistance (see Figure 1).



Accessing the Peace Center

Safety Audit findings at Timepoint 1 showed that most respondents travelled alone to the Peace Center. A few, especially female adolescents and women, traveled with either a relative or a friend of the same gender.

During the contextualization workshops, all women and girl participants reported verbal and physical harassment by camp inhabitants when traveling to/from any aid distribution or service points as a pervasive risk for SEA and other forms of GBV. This included traveling to centers, clinics, schools, hospitals, and the mall. They stressed that no matter how near or far the place is, walking to any area inside the camp exposes them and their peers to harassment and abuse. Therefore, moving alone to and from the Peace Center put female users, especially adolescent girls, at risk of SEA and other forms of GBV.

Based on the recommendation put forward by women and girls to create or support “formal/informal accompanying systems when girls travel to activities and information sharing on moving in groups,” the RtR team conducted an exercise with girls to support their safe travel to the Peace Center. They identified and grouped female users based on their addresses using a map of Village 2. The team shared name lists among those living in the same blocks and designated safe points within each block. They used these to gather at these safe points before moving together as a group to and/or from the Peace Center.



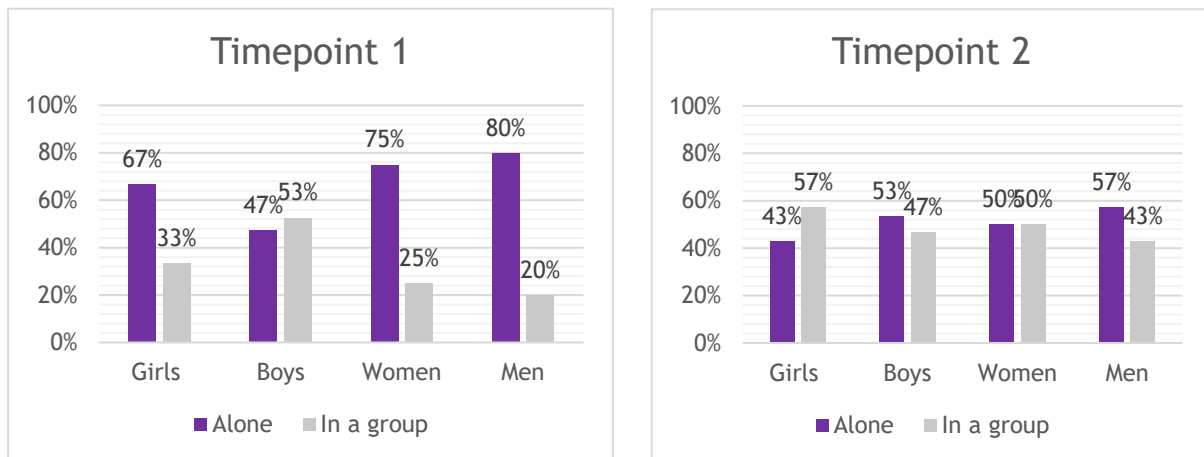
Figure 2: An adolescent girl walks to the identified assembly point while her group members wait for her, before they travel.

As per the household survey results, a distinct shift between Timepoint 1 and Timepoint 2

“I feel way more empowered after moving in groups, I feel safe now when travelling to/from the Peace Center. I wish other NGOs can do the same thing.” - Syrian adolescent girl

becomes evident in participants' experiences related to safety (Figure 3). **The introduction of a group travel system for girls and women led to notable changes in their travel preferences at Timepoint 2, with 57% of girls and 50% of women opting for group travel. These shifts underscore the impact of the group travel system, revealing substantial differences in travel choices and safety perceptions after the accompaniment system was implemented.** Further details are available in our case study and peer-reviewed article in *Child Protection and Practice*.¹

Figure 3: Did you travel to the center alone or in a group? (Timepoint 1 vs Timepoint 2)



Safety at the Peace Center

According to the Safety Audit observations, all Peace Center sessions and activities were conducted in a space defined by concrete walls, with WVSR signage visible, and guarded by male security. The Peace Center area was clean, with no visible trash or potentially dangerous objects. There was a female facilitator who recorded the attendance of female users at the center's entrance. A male facilitator recorded the attendance of male users during the actual session. All sessions observed were sex-segregated with separate sessions for men/boys and women/girls. Female IBVs facilitated women/girls' sessions, while male IBVs facilitated men/boys' sessions. Sessions were not overcrowded, and crowd control measures were not needed nor observed. All facilitators were wearing visibility items (vests) that included the World Vision logo, center name, and job title.



Figure 4: Aid worker wearing visibility item with the agency logo, center name, and title. Including job titles on visibility items can be **protective**, in that literate aid recipients know the person's position. For the same reason, giving branded items out to community members during awareness raising events introduces **SEA risk**.

During the household survey, participants were asked to rate their level of fear when accessing services, in relation to GBV/SEA risks. At Timepoint 1, female and male participants showed similar levels of fear (24%), however based on different reasons. Among the 24% of females who reported feeling fear related to the Peace Center's sessions, 60% cited this was due to priority being given to men at the Center, 20% due to the

¹ Al-Saudi M, Fattal L, Belli M, Weber J, Potts A. (2024). Co-Creating Accompanying Systems to Improve Adolescent Girls' and Women's Access to Services. *Child Protection and Practice* 1:100005, DOI: 10.1016/j.chipro.2024.100005. www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2950193824000056

lack of female staff/volunteers at the Center, and 20% due to the session time/time of day. In comparison, among the 24% of males who reported feeling fear during the Peace Center's sessions, 60% reported being bullied by other male refugees on their way to/from the Center, and 40% reported being physically assaulted by other male refugees on their way to/from the Center.

At Timepoint 2, fear decreased after applying the recommendations from 24% to 16% for females and from 24% to 5% for males. Reasons cited for those still reporting feeling fearful included fears from other refugees unrelated to accessing the Peace Center. **Reasons for feeling fearful that had been reported at Timepoint 1 related to Peace Center operations, such as the lack of female staff/volunteers at the Center or giving priority to men, were not reported at Timepoint 2, showing a positive outcome of implementing these SEA risk recommendations.**

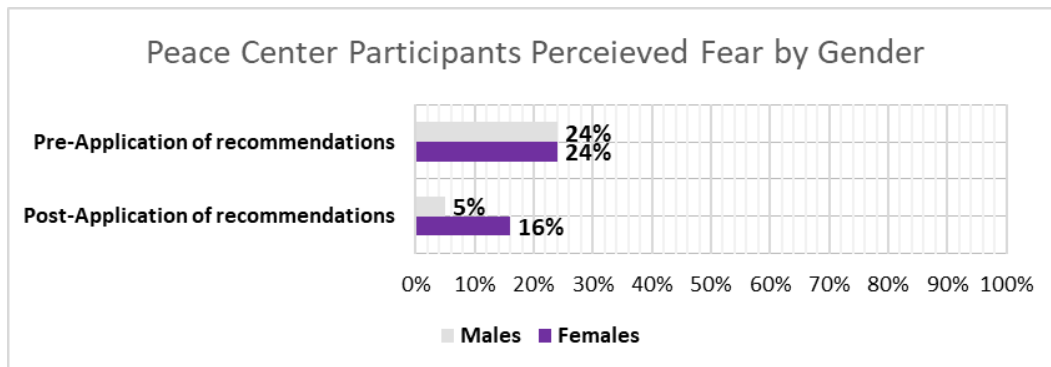


Figure 5: Feelings of Fear by Gender, Before and After Applying the Recommendations

GBV/SEA Risk Mitigation Measures at the Peace Center

Safety Audit findings showed an improvement in terms of observed GBV/SEA risk mitigation measures at the Peace Center after applying the Empowered Aid recommendations. At Timepoint 1, the measures observed included the presence of female staff, sex-segregated sessions, separate shifts for women/girls and men/boys with an hour interval between them, female IBVs facilitating women/girls' sessions and male IBVs facilitating men/boys' sessions, staff wearing visibility items, and the presence of complaint methods with information on available feedback and complaint mechanisms. These measures were also observed after applying the recommendations, along with other new measures such as: accompanying systems when girls travel to/from the Peace Center, active follow-up, visible supervision by senior staff of field staff, and a new female volunteer within the outreach team.

New measures to prevent and mitigate GBV/SEA were applied based on women and girls'

"The PSEA awareness sessions are very important, especially for females. I believe that the sessions helped the females become more aware of how to report the incident and thus defend themselves."

Syrian adolescent boy

"The PSEA paintings are very expressive of our reality, and they helped us feel empowered."

Syrian adolescent girl



Figure 6: A female facilitator conducting a door-to-door session on GBV/SEA to adult female aid recipients.

recommendation, “Sessions for community sensitization on GBV/SEA and better knowledge and communication on SEA complaints and reporting mechanisms.” Peace Center facilitators conducted sex-segregated and door-to-door awareness sessions for all Rtr participants on GBV/SEA concepts, after receiving a training on GBV and SEA. Additionally, PSEA awareness messages and information on WVSR complaint mechanisms were disseminated through weekly WhatsApp messages, posters, and paintings in Al Azraq Camp.

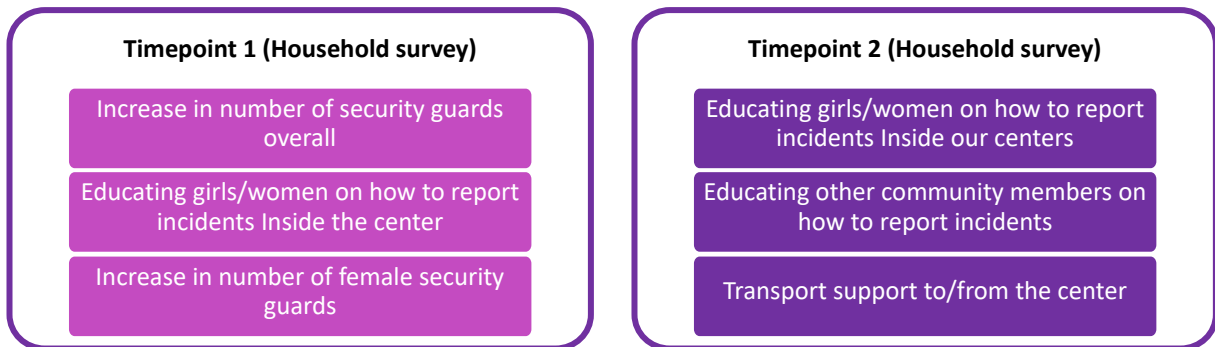


Figure 7: Top Three GBV/SEA Risk Mitigation Measures Suggested by Women and Girls to Feel Safer

After applying the recommendations (Timepoint 2), household survey results demonstrated that most Peace Center users were aware of and able to identify the safety measures applied by the project. Respondents of different ages and genders were aware of the door-to-door PSEA awareness sessions conducted by the project. On the other hand, more females than males noted the transport support, i.e., moving in groups to/from the Center. In addition, 15% of respondents (all females) reported observing other GBV/SEA risk mitigation measures, including PSEA paintings and PSEA messages through WhatsApp, which were part of Empowered Aid recommendations.

Respondents were asked to identify the top three GBV/SEA risk mitigation measures they think would be most helpful to implement and make women and girls feel safer. As shown in Figure 7, when asked at Timepoint 1, women and girls focused on increasing security guards and educating girls and women on how to report incidents. At Timepoint 2, women and girls identified the implemented recommendations as the most helpful and needed GBV/SEA risk mitigation measures. This may indicate that the applied recommendations were helpful in making the women and girls feel safer.

Complaints and Reporting

Safety Audit results noted the suggestion box installed at the Peace Center is visible and easily noticeable, with posters visible above it and in other areas inside the center describing available feedback and complaints mechanisms. The information is written in Arabic, which may be a barrier for users with low literacy to understand its purpose or how to use it. No material was observed specific to feedback and complaints mechanisms specifically for reporting sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).



Figure 8: A suggestion box. Monitoring results highlighted drawbacks including literacy, and fear of reprisal if seen placing a paper inside. For most women and men surveyed, their preferred complaint mechanism was being able to speak face-to-face with someone of the same gender.

In the household survey, participants were asked to identify their preferred mechanism for sharing concerns or complaints about WVSR projects. At Timepoint 1, the top three complaint methods for female respondents were face-to-face with World Vision staff (84%), suggestion boxes (64%), and the WVSR hotline number (40%). Males preferred speaking face-to-face with World Vision staff (48%), the WVSR hotline (34%), and suggestion boxes (14%).

At Timepoint 2, raising complaints face-to-face with World Vision staff remained the preferred method for both female (75%) and male (32%) respondents. Using the WVSR hotline number was found to be the second preferred method for females (56%) while both the WVSR hotline number and suggestion boxes were the second preference for males (23% each). The third-most preferred method for females was suggestion boxes (31%), and for males it was referring to community leaders/representatives (9%). It is worth noting that 18% of males (mostly adolescents) preferred other methods, such as telling their caregivers or going directly to the Community Police.

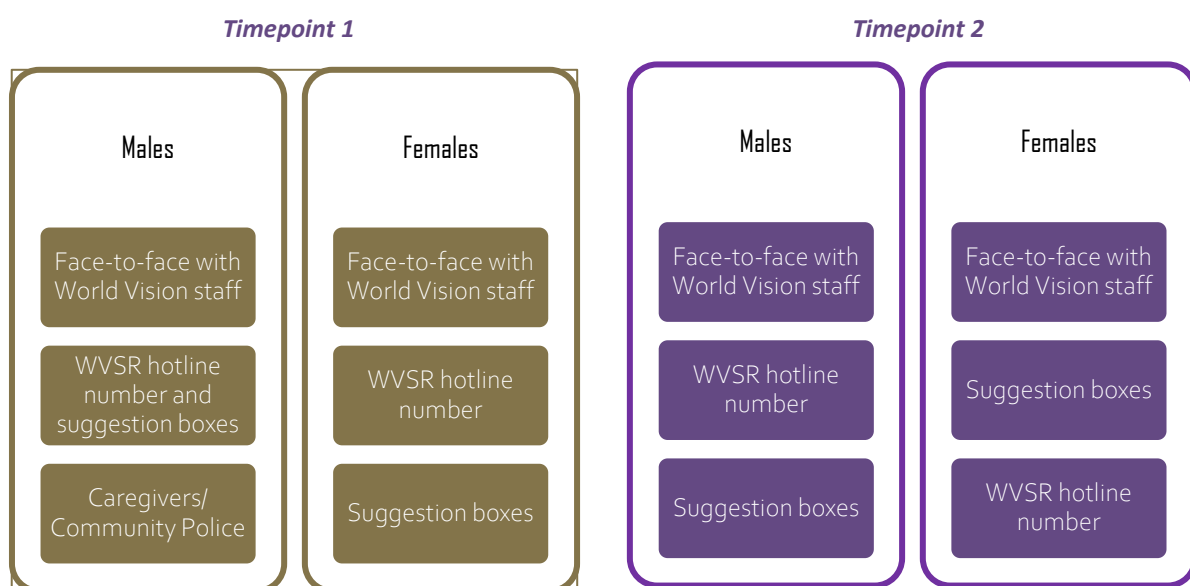


Figure 9: Concerns and Complaints Related to the WVSR Projects per gender at Timepoint 1 vs Timepoint 2

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Aid delivery systems must be adapted to meet women and girls' needs more fully, in ways that minimize opportunities for exploitation and abuse by aid as well as non-aid actors.

The most important way to do that is to recognize women and girls as experts in contextual safeguarding and actively engage them in mechanisms designed to improve aid processes and protect against SEA. A response to SEA that focuses only on reports related to specific persons misses many opportunities to respond to dangerous situations, which women, girls, and other community-based actors already know well and design their own strategies for avoiding (such as self-organizing to travel in groups). In addition to bringing better accountability to perpetrators, there is also an urgent need for 'contextual safeguarding' approaches to mitigate and prevent SEA.

Humanitarian aid stakeholders must also **increase access to GBV services—such as healthcare, psychosocial support, and case management—while ensuring access to such services is not contingent on reporting specific instances of abuse, in recognition of the powerful deterrent this can be.** Shame and stigma, as well as the threat or fear of losing access to the aid they so desperately need, are part of the enabling environment for abuse that silences survivors.

On a practical level, many women and girls described situations in which they do not know the exact identity or role of the person exploiting them, only that he is telling them he has power over how much aid they receive, or if they receive any at all. PSEA systems that prioritize information about the perpetrator's identity over a response to the survivor's other needs may inadvertently minimize reporting as survivors do not know, or are afraid to share, that level of detail but want help nonetheless.

Specifically, senior management and safeguarding leads must take responsibility to reflect on their organization's role in creating a 'conducive context' for abuse. They must attend to the settings and people who represent 'causes for concern,' dig deeper into these concerns, and act on them. They must also ensure perpetrators are held to account.

Program and monitoring & evaluation staff also have a key role to play, as transparently monitoring safety and risk at all points in the aid delivery process, and sharing this information among humanitarian actors as well as community structures, allows for proactive responses to dangerous situations and contributes to greater accountability in mitigating SEA (and other forms of distribution-related GBV) before they occur.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Continue to co-design safety measures with adolescent girls:** Maintain the accompanying systems for adolescent girls piloted under this project, by supporting them to move in groups when traveling to/from the Peace Center or other aid points in Al Azraq Camp, and conducting regular follow-up and supervision to solicit their feedback and adjust as needed.
2. **Ensure robust presence of female staff/volunteers when providing aid items or services:** At minimum having equal numbers of female and male staff/volunteers. Ensure gender balance in outreach teams by having equal numbers of female and male staff/volunteers throughout the registration process, particularly during the door-to-door visits to aid recipients' caravans. For aid registration exercises targeting women and girls, it is preferable to have all, or most staff/volunteers be female.
3. **Expand accessibility and availability of multiple methods for providing feedback or making complaints:**
 - Train GBV/SEA focal points to receive complaints and feedback during field visits, as the most preferred method for making complaints was found to be face-to-face.
 - Share information on GBV/SEA and complaint mechanisms during registration and outreach processes, including information on sex-segregated access to services, accompaniment systems for adolescent girls, and available in-person complaint mechanisms.
 - Share information on complaint mechanisms using methods understandable by children, the elderly, and people with low literacy (i.e. posters with pictures and symbols).
4. **Conduct sessions for community sensitization on GBV/SEA, response services, and complaints mechanisms,** with females and males (separately) including discussion about the gendered negative psychological, physical, and social impact of these forms of abuse and how to support survivors to access services.
5. **Conduct information sessions with adolescents' caregivers and increase their awareness on available complaint mechanisms,** as some adolescents expressed a preference to share concerns or complaints related to humanitarian/NGO services with their caregivers, rather than directly.