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Whole of Syria

Gender-Based Violence Area of
Responsibility

VOICES

from Syria 2023

Assessment of Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview



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Responsibility

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Foreword

Dear readers,

More than 12 years on, Syrian women and girls continue to grapple with the daily threat of gender-based violence (GBV), which has become increasingly normalised in many communities. Since the onset of the Syria crisis in 2011, UNFPA and the Whole of Syria GBV Area of Responsibility have consistently sought to highlight the escalating risks of GBV in light of the displacement, destabilisation, and the absence of social networks and the rule of law. As Syrians throughout the country prepare for yet another challenging year in 2023, documenting the realities of women and girls becomes increasingly essential.

As of March 2023, Syrians are experiencing one of the darkest years of the crisis, made worse by the devastation wrought during the earthquake that struck the country's north in February. The crisis has entered yet another critical juncture, exacerbated by the cumulative impact of years of instability, worsening economic collapse, large-scale health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and an ongoing cholera epidemic, among other challenges. In the midst of all of this suffering, women and girls are paying the steepest price while demonstrating the greatest resilience.

As in previous years, women and girls in Syria are reporting increased risks of GBV in its various forms, including harassment, intimate partner violence, child and forced marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse, and technology-facilitated GBV. More than a decade of conflict has helped cultivate an environment conducive to violence against women and girls, especially in light of deeply-ingrained patriarchal norms that have only been reinforced over the past decade, undoing years of progress on gender equality and women's rights. With more than 15 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023, these risks are inevitably set to increase.

UNFPA remains committed to ensuring that every woman and girl in Syria feels protected from violence. In addition to working with GBV actors and partners to deliver services designed to prevent and respond to GBV, UNFPA continues to invest in quality research that seeks to identify and deconstruct the various patterns of GBV taking place — efforts that are clearly represented in the Voices from Syria series. Over the years, Voices has not only helped humanitarian actors form a clearer picture of the reality imposed on women and girls in Syria but has also become a global best practice in the gathering of quality data to inform humanitarian responses.

During my visit to Syria immediately following the 2023 earthquake, I heard one message: "We've had enough." People are exhausted and want reconciliation and peace. As the needs in Syria deepen, we will continue and intensify our efforts to document and share knowledge with the humanitarian community in the hope of helping GBV actors to mount stronger, more informed responses. We will also continue to unequivocally champion the rights and well-being of every woman and girl in Syria by amplifying their voices and allowing their insights to shape our programmes.

Sincerely,



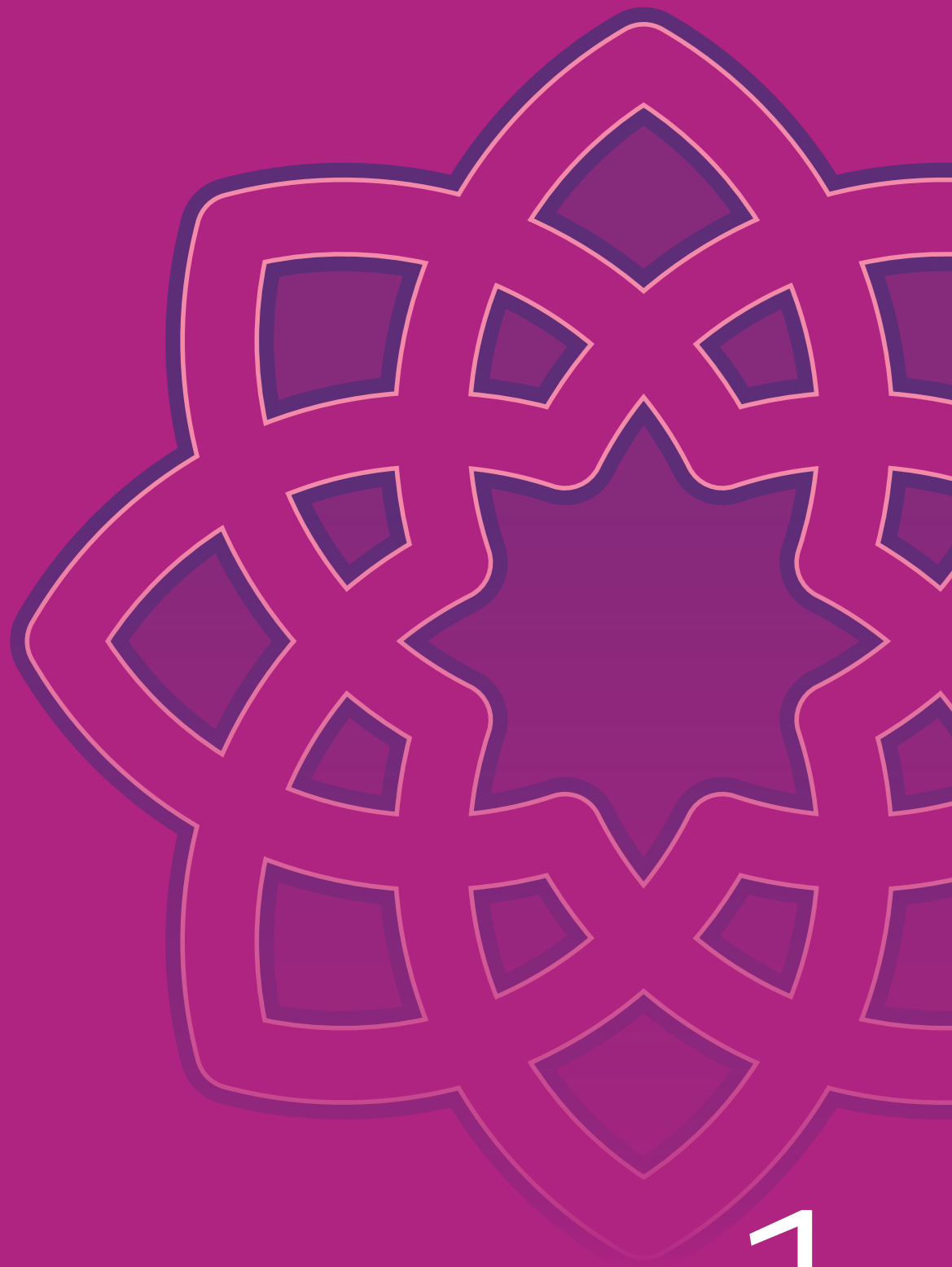
Laila Baker
Regional Director, Arab States

Intended Use of the Report

The primary aim of Voices from Syria is to support the development and implementation of humanitarian programmes to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) across the Whole of Syria (WoS) response. The publication is also intended to be a resource for humanitarian workers' programming within other sectors/clusters – Camp Coordination and Camp Management, Early Recovery and Livelihoods, Education, Food Security, Health, Nutrition, Protection, Child Protection, Mine Action, Shelter and Non-Food Items, Agriculture and Food Security, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) – to better understand the risks of GBV that need to be mitigated throughout their response.

Voices from Syria does not represent prevalence data on GBV. This report should be read with an understanding of the complexities of the context of Syria.

It is important to note that this publication is not intended to present a picture of Syria to the media or provide journalists with information on GBV. Voices from Syria is not to be quoted by – or to – colleagues working in the media. If any journalist is interested in further information on GBV in Syria, they should contact GBV coordinators at WoS level or in the hubs as listed under humanitarianresponse.org



1

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Similar to previous years' reports, gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be a central component of the Syrian humanitarian crisis, and persistently affects the lives of millions of women and girls. In 2022, women and girls throughout Syria were subjected to physical violence (hitting, beating, physical injuring, torture, kidnapping, murder - including "honour" killings and femicide), psychological and emotional violence (verbal abuse, psychological manipulation and abuse), sexual violence (sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, rape), technology-facilitated violence (sexual violence and exploitation, social violence), social violence (stigma and discrimination), as well as forced and early marriage, and denial of rights, resources, opportunities, and services (denial of education, denial of work, movement restrictions). Although mentioned less frequently, women and girls also experienced arrest and detention. These various types of violence were mostly perpetrated by male partners, male family members, and males who were unknown to the women and girls. These forms of violence are also systematically and socially normalised and accepted through patriarchal gender norms, traditions, and institutions that maintain gender inequality.

Women and girls face multiple forms of discrimination and violence based on age, ability, marital status, and displacement status. For example, displaced women and girls experience high rates of sexual violence in camps and at distribution points. They are less likely to have access to income generating opportunities and are exposed to extremely disadvantaged economic conditions. Women and girls with disabilities experience multiple forms of discrimination and stigma in public and face serious barriers to accessing services and resources. Older women suffer gender and age-based restriction of movement, confining them mostly to a domestic environment where they are often exposed to abuse and neglect. Widowed and divorced women and girls experience high rates of sexual violence and exploitation as well as barriers to services. There is no space free of GBV for women and girls, including homes, schools, markets and streets, public transportation, workplaces, camps/shelters, online, and distribution points.

Women and girls continue to face persistent levels of GBV in their everyday lives. The data collected in Syria in 2022 from this group, as well as from men and boys, includes several key findings:

- **Multiple structural factors creating layers of vulnerability**

The continued conflict and humanitarian crisis, the ripple effects of the conflict in Ukraine, a continued economic deterioration, the lasting effects of COVID-19, and the increasing food and water crises are all structural factors which have contributed to, continued, and increased GBV against women and girls in 2022.

- **Perceptions of increased risks of intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence, family violence, forced/early marriage, technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV), sexual violence, and exploitation both in public spaces and in the domestic environment**

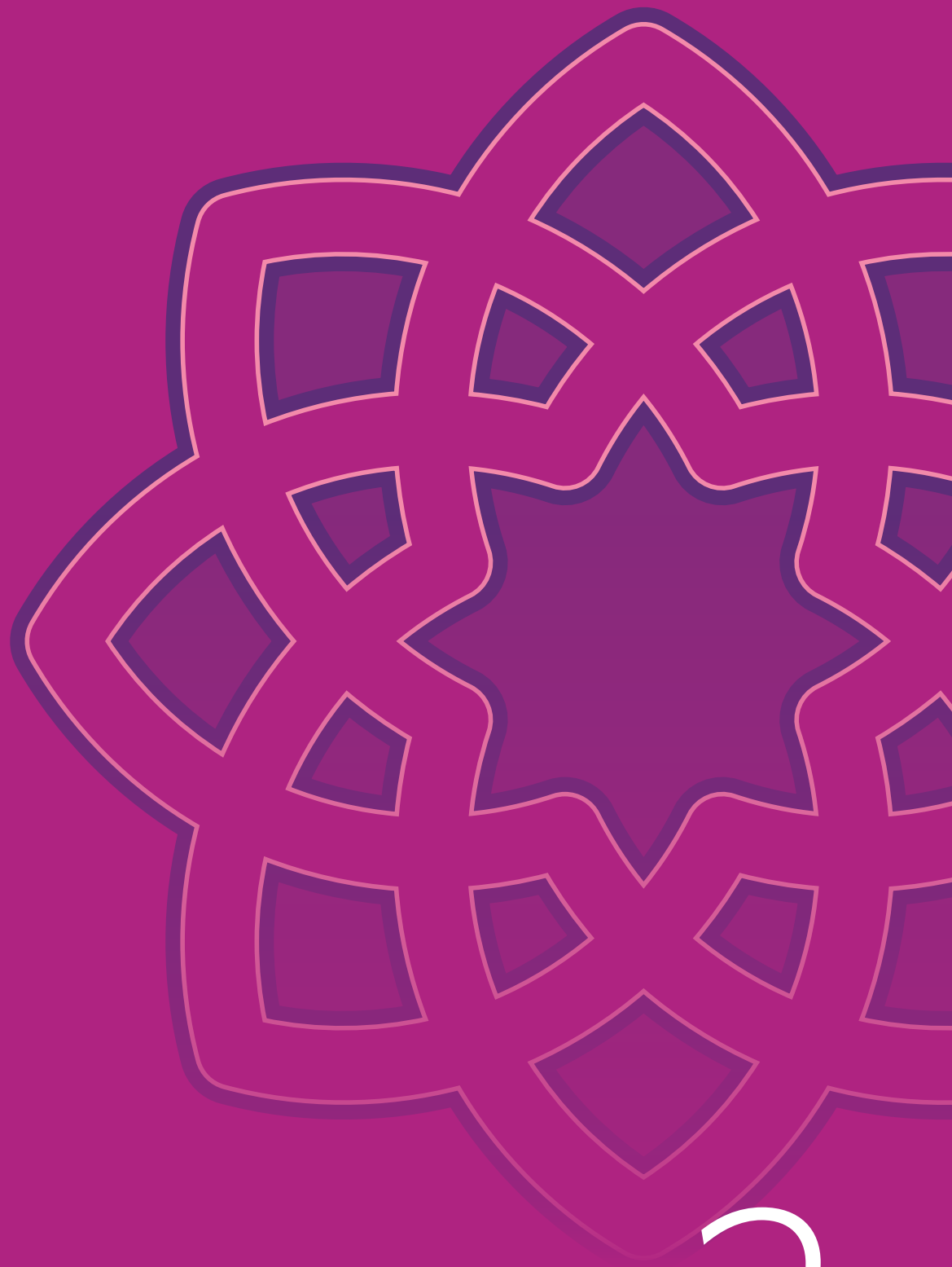
Women and girls consistently shared the effects of economic deterioration and the lack of livelihood opportunities contributing to their risk of domestic violence, early marriage, TFGBV, sexual violence, and exploitation. In addition, they shared that many of these forms of violence were increasing and were linked to levels of poverty, food insecurity, and are ongoing and perpetual since displacement.

- **GBV services are vital and lifesaving for women and girls**

Women and girls as well as GBV experts and service providers shared the vital, lifesaving importance and need for Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) throughout the Whole of Syria (WoS). The impact of these spaces is also clear in women's and girls' recommendations for further, consistent, and increased services.

- **Women's and girls' resilience is still present but depleting**

The effects of the protraction and the multitude of aspects and consequences of the crises, and the continued increase in levels of GBV have no doubt taken their toll on the well-being and resilience of women and girls. Consistently, women and girls, as well as GBV experts, shared that rates of suicide were also increasing amongst this group.



2

Introduction

Introduction

After more than 12 years since the start of the conflict, one of the world's largest and longest humanitarian crisis continues in Syria, affecting the lives of millions. The impact of an ongoing conflict, escalating economic crisis, a water crisis, an unprecedented food crisis, and the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified GBV directed at women and girls. The *Voices from Syria 2023* report highlights the narratives and experiences of this group in Syria to emphasise the realities of GBV in the country. Women and girls have shared that GBV continues to increase in Syria, affecting their coping strategies and depleting their resilience. They call attention to the unprecedented escalation of the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and the resulting effect GBV has had on their lives. This report presents women's and girls' narratives on these effects, their responses and resilience to it, their demand for humanitarian services, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future.

Key Developments in 2022

Continued economic deterioration, heightened food insecurity, and water crisis

The Syrian conflict has decimated critical infrastructure in the country, on top of ever-increasing economic deterioration. Additionally, in 2022, conflicts in other regions such as Ukraine have contributed to further exacerbate economic deterioration and food insecurity, as well as pull funds away from the ongoing Syrian crisis. Humanitarian needs in Syria have reached their highest level in 2022 since the onset of the conflict. In 2023, 15.3 million people in Syria will be in need of humanitarian assistance, an increase of 700,000 from 2022.¹ Displaced persons in Syria struggle to access basic needs and sustainable, dignified livelihoods.

The humanitarian crisis is also compounded by a lack of access to water and increasing levels of food insecurity in the country. Hostilities, in combination with the climate crisis, have created barriers to accessing safe water for millions of people in Syria.² A cholera outbreak in the country further limits water accessibility and threatens the health and well-being of Syrians.³ Food insecurity in Syria has now reached

unprecedented levels. At the time of writing this report, 12 million Syrians are food insecure,⁴ with food prices continuing to increase.⁵ Approximately 5.9 million people, including 3.75 million children (2.2 million girls and 1.55 million boys) and 2.1 million women, are in dire need of nutritional assistance in Syria, an increase from 5.5 million people in 2022.⁶ The cost of a food basket in Syria is higher today than ever before. The ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis have created soaring rates of malnutrition amongst women (especially pregnant and lactating women) and children. As many as 13.9 million Syrians now experience hunger.⁷

These extreme conditions have created an increased inability for many households in Syria to meet their basic needs compared to 2021. For example, the economic crisis has disproportionately affected female-headed households and households with people with disabilities.⁸ On average, 16% of female headed households and 12% of households with people with disabilities were completely unable to meet their basic needs.⁹ Additionally, nearly 60% of households in Syria included women who relied on humanitarian assistance to provide for unmet needs such as food, livelihood assistance, and non-food items.¹⁰

Since 2020, COVID-19 has created an increase in GBV due to movement restrictions and lockdowns. While the peak of the crisis is over, the impact of this increased GBV for those women and girls affected is long lasting. GBV experts have called attention to the effects of the pandemic, including the continued exacerbation of GBV, and the decline in service provision: *"There was an increase of harassment and violence cases during COVID time. There is also a reduction of access to services"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub). The reduction in services has at times created delays and ongoing interruptions of vital services for survivors of GBV: *"Services were delayed in camps as well, with participants sharing that community centres and protection service programmes were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

Continued Insecurity

While continued insecurity in Syria affects all populations, women and children live in constant fear. The conflict continues with multiple international actors, and security concerns continue throughout Syria. Killings of women and "honour killings" persist,

1 OCHA (2023). Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic. December 2022. P.8. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-2023-humanitarian-needs-overview-december-2022>

2 UN Security Council (2022). Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of Security Council resolutions. 16 June 2022. P.3. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/secretary-generals-reports/

3 UNICEF (2022). UNICEF Syria Cholera Response Situation Report for 4 October 2022. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-syria-cholera-response-situation-report-04-october-2022>

4 World Food Programme (2022). WFP Syria Country Brief. July 2022. Available at: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/syrian-arab-republic>

5 World Bank (2022). Syria Economic Monitor: Lost Generation of Syrians. Middle East and North Africa Region. P. xii. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/syria/publication/syria-economic-monitor-spring-2022-lost-generation-of-syrians>

6 HNO (2022)

7 UN Security Council (2022). Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of Security Council resolutions. 16 June 2022. P.1. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/secretary-generals-reports/

8 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

9,10 Ibid.

including in Al-Hol Camp. According to the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian coordinator, the level of violence and insecurity in the Al-Hol camp in North-East Syria (NES), including criminality and attacks against humanitarian workers, continue and are common. In the first 8 months of 2022, 26 people were murdered in Al-Hol Camp, 20 of them women.¹¹ On 18 August, five girls were killed, and another ten girls injured because of a drone strike in the village of Shamuka near the town of Tel Tamer in north-western rural Al-Hasakeh. The strike hit a rehabilitation/education centre hosting girls who were reportedly former recruits of the Kurdish-led Syria Democratic Forces (SDF).¹² Most recently, on 15 November, the bodies of two adolescent girls were found in the annex section of Al-Hol Camp, after they had gone missing on 9 November.¹³ More information is provided on Al-Hol Camp in this report (see sections on Femicide; Shelter and Camp Management; Hopes and Dreams of Women and Girls; Recommendations; Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services; and Al-Hasakeh).

Shifting gender norms, claiming empowerment, and gender backlash

Due to the limited options for households in Syria caused by further economic deterioration, the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and increased water and food insecurity, gender norms have continued to shift. For example, while women often experience a denial of work opportunities as a form of violence, larger social pressures in response to the ongoing crises have challenged gender roles and some forms of violence. This includes a shift in some households, with women taking on the role of breadwinners to assist with providing basic needs for households: *"Men are still in charge, but not as before the crisis. The woman has become stronger than before. She has got used to going out more often, and social roles have changed so that the woman has started working where she couldn't previously, and she even goes out without her husband to perform certain family issues. She is no longer afraid like before"* (Adult woman, Al-Mayadin sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). GBV experts shared how this change in gender roles has increased women's and girls' strategies for coping: *"There was change in gender roles during the crisis, as men are either in the battlefield, abroad or hiding themselves. Women had to become the breadwinner, and this has*

increased their strategies to protect themselves" (GBV expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

However, there have been implications in these changes for women and girls in the form of increased GBV, including economic violence, restrictions of movement, and exploitation at work. This correlation was confirmed by GBV experts: *"Financial violence has increased, which includes deprivation of financial resources, education, job opportunities, salaries of female workers – under the pretext that organisations provide job opportunities for women more than they do for men"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

In general, there is an increase in reported exploitation of women and girls. This included sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) at distribution points (see sections on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and Distributions) and financial exploitation, by their families, employers, landlords, amongst others. GBV experts explained that women and girls were faced with two types of exploitation, mainly: *"The first one is sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers and the second is exploitation by intimate family members or other community members"* (GBV Expert, NES hub).

Also, an expert shared that the increase in child labour for adolescent girls continues to decrease opportunities for this population: *"More children are out of school, but denial of resources and opportunities primarily affects girls. This leads to reduced access to education as they work instead"* (GBV Expert, NES hub). Furthermore, 55% of girls in Syria live in locations where child labour prevents school attendance for girls aged 15-17 and 34% of girls live in locations where this same phenomenon prevents school attendance for girls aged 12-14.¹⁴

This increase of child labour has coincided with an increase in early marriage, IPV and economic exploitation, as shared by GBV experts: *"According to what we see in the field, and also in the Humanitarian Needs Overview, early marriage and IPV is increasing and forcing girls to work. The impact is putting them under pressure"* (GBV Expert, NES hub).

Also, TFGBV has increased on social media sites. Respondents consistently replied that online spaces were a place where women and girls experienced sexual harassment and extortion, which sometimes led to rape.¹⁵ GBV experts also confirmed that this group is continuously exposed to TFGBV: *"Since the beginning of 2022, we have observed that women and girls are continuously exposed to GBV and discriminatory gender dynamics including a new type of violence which is technology related"* (GBV Expert, NES hub).

Experts also shared that there has been an increase in

11 UNOCHA (2022) United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria, Imran Riza, statement on visit to north-east Syria. Damascus 17 August 2022. UNOCHA. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/united-nations-resident-coordinator-and-humanitarian-coordinator-syria-imran-riza-statement-visit-north-east-syria-enar>

12 OHCHR (2022) Flash Report. 18 November 2022. OHCHR Syria Office Monitoring and Reporting Unit.

13 Ibid.

14 Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

15 Sextortion or sexual extortion occurs when an individual has, or claims to have, a sexual image of another person and uses it to coerce a person into doing something they do not want to do (GBV AoR Help Desk: Learning Brief 1: Understanding Technology-Facilitated GBV).

movement restrictions of women and girls in certain areas, in response to insecurity and heightened levels of violence.¹⁶ GBV experts have also noticed these movement restrictions affect women's and girls' ability to access services: *"Women are being locked inside their houses and are not allowed to go out or interact with people or with our mobile teams"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria). Men also shared that they feel challenged by protection services, and the interference this has on their ability to control women's and girls' movement: *"because some men sometimes do not accept the idea of women going to protection centres, which is considered a challenge"* (Adult man, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

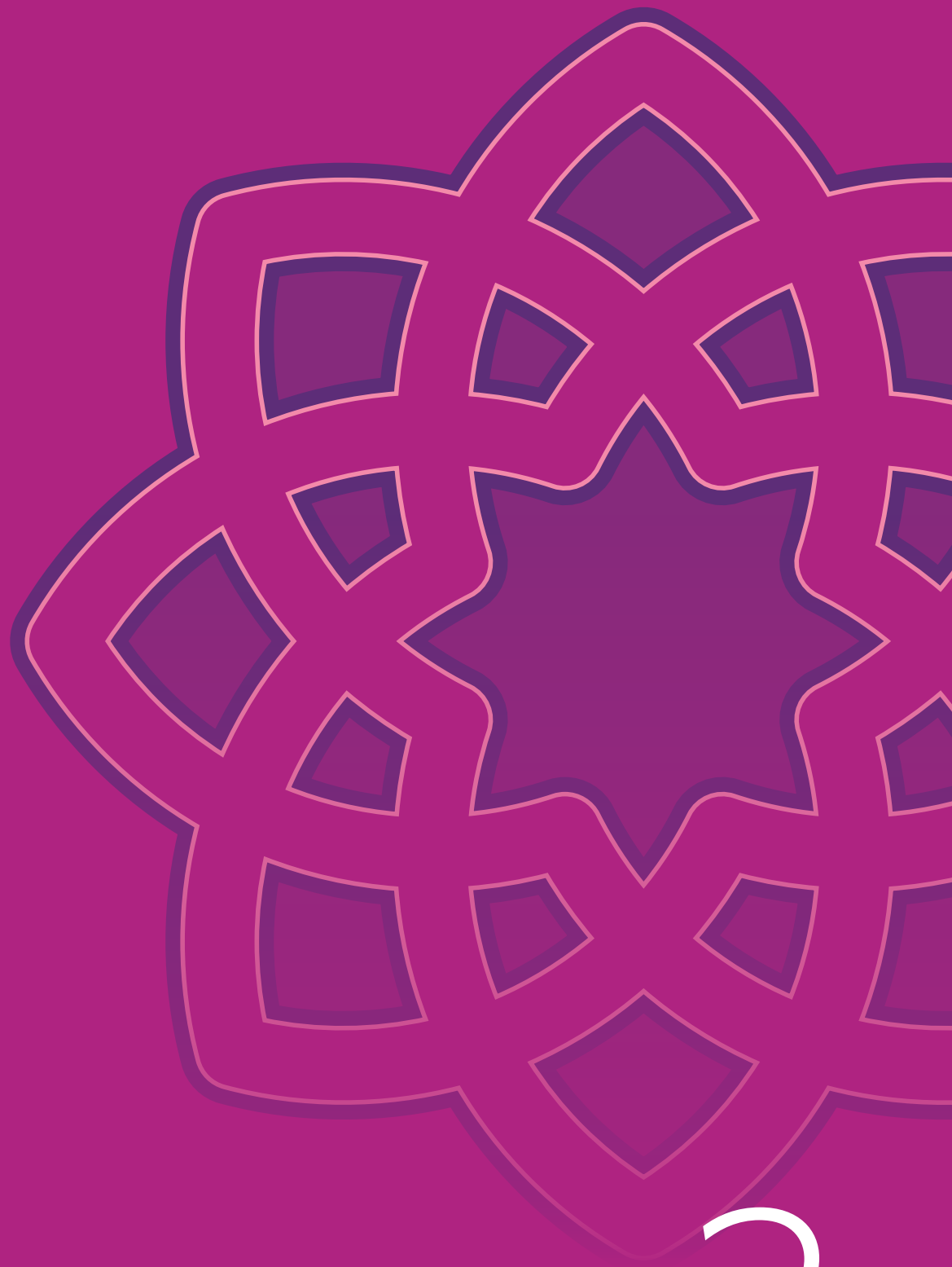
There was an increase in a variety of coping mechanisms in response to these violent trends. GBV experts shared that there has been a growing trend of women and girls asking for specific services, claiming their empowerment, and disclosing instances of violence: *"We notice that women are most resilient and tend to build strength out of their trauma. Girls are requesting classes on self-defence and body combat, which means they are more aware of the risks and more willing to protect themselves"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

Regarding GBV services, women and girls shared often that they attended WGSS, and those that did not have WGSS or GBV services, requested them (see Recommendations section). One GBV expert shared that in the past year, more women and girls were attending WGSS: *"They have come to the safe spaces for years and tell us about losing everything, including family members, but they are still smiling, inviting others to participate, showing solidarity, so they are resilient heroines. I actually feel they are even more resilient; despite what they have gone through"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub). There was also a growing trend of women and girls becoming more comfortable disclosing domestic violence, including a significant increase in widows disclosing incidents in North-West Syria (NWS), mostly due to the awareness raising sessions that have been implemented in the previous year.

Unfortunately, experts also shared the fact that funding for GBV interventions has declined this year, affecting women's and girls' safety and access to these lifesaving services. This may be due to an overall reduction of funding to the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), possibly linked to a diversion of funding from the ongoing crisis in Syria to new humanitarian crises, such as Ukraine. This comes at a critical time, as there is also an increase in suicides amongst women and girls throughout Syria. The use of suicide was commonly mentioned by experts as occurring amongst adolescents without access to services and opportunities: *"Younger women and*

adolescents are more affected by the sense of hopelessness, especially due to the lack of opportunities and services" (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub). (For more information, see sections on Affected Populations and Impact of GBV).

¹⁶ GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub) (2022) GBVIMS Quarterly Report January - March 2022. Pg 1.



3

Feminist Approach and Methodology

The *Voices from Syria 2023* report is an opportunity to centre narratives of women and girls on the GBV that affects their everyday lives. The approach and methodology used to collect and analyse the qualitative data that informs the majority of this report has been developed and refined over the past eight years in order to seize the very critical opportunity to amplify the lived experiences of GBV amongst women and girls in Syria as experts of their own lives. This qualitative focus provides a nuanced, complex, and holistic perspective on violence against women and girls in the WoS. Prioritising and amplifying the narratives of women and girls is based on the feminist understanding that their lived experience is vital knowledge to inform humanitarian advocacy, programming, and interventions. Using these narratives to understand GBV is also based on the feminist perspective that GBV is a part of a larger, complex system of gender norms and unequal power relations that oppress, control, and silence women and girls through violence, while limiting their participation in public spaces and decision making. A feminist intersectional approach to research includes highlighting the narratives of women and girls, while also highlighting the intersections of vulnerable and stigmatised social categories that may create more risks for this group. This analysis also attends to the ways in which discrimination and violence based on gender norms, age, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, displacement status, ability, marital status, and diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), are connected.

Data sources, collection, and analysis

The *Voices from Syria 2023* report presents data collected in the framework of the 2023 humanitarian needs overview. The report is based on the following sources of quantitative and qualitative data:

1. 114 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women, girls, boys, and men; including members of the following groups: girls and boys (aged 12-14 and 15-19), adult women and men (aged 19 to 60), older women (60 and above), women and girls with disabilities and their caregivers, short and long-term internally displaced people (IDPs), and host communities.
2. Programme monitoring data from government-controlled areas.
3. Four FGDs with GBV experts working in the Syrian humanitarian response.
4. Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) data.
5. Protection Needs Assessment.
6. Secondary literature, including reports, studies, and media.

Intersectionality



A tool to understand and analyse how systems of oppression 'intersect' and reinforce each other. It demonstrates how various social categories such as gender norms, age, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, displacement status, ability, marital status, and diverse SOGIESC are connected.

Feminist approach



An analytical approach which focuses on women's and girls' lived experiences as expert knowledge on systemic discrimination and violence against them and advance their struggles for empowerment and equality. This also includes a do-no-harm principle and survivor-centred approach, in line with the GBV guiding principles.¹⁷

17 UNFPA (2015) Minimum Standards for Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. UNFPA. P.xi. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/featured-publication/gbvie-standards#:~:text=UNFPA's%20%2E2%80%9CMinimum%20Standards%20for%20Prevention,multi%2Dsector%20services%20for%20survivors>.

7. Programme data collected through 4Ws and available on the WoS GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) Dashboard.¹⁸

8. GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) quarterly data produced by the Türkiye Cross Border Hub (TXB) GBV Sub-Cluster (SC).

FGDs were conducted by GBV and other protection actors in Syria between July and August 2022. All FGDs were led by a trained facilitator, supported by a notetaker, using a tested qualitative questionnaire developed by WoS GBV coordinators in partnership with the Protection Cluster coordinators (general protection, child protection, and mine action). All facilitators were trained in ethical research best practices, including survivor-centred methods and do-no-harm principles. This includes strict anonymity and protection of data in collection, analysis, and storage. Using GBV and protection staff as facilitators ensured that standards of safety, dignity, and confidentiality were upheld during each discussion. Access to follow-up care and support was facilitated for any FGD participants who might have required it. FGDs were complemented with UNFPA programme monitoring data from government-controlled areas of Syria.

Focus groups were held with adult women (18-60), older women (60+), girls and boys (12-14 and 15-19, and adult men (20-60) in groups of between five and nine participants brought together on the basis of gender, age and, in some cases, disability status. The focus groups were carried out by protection actors and their partners. Of the 114 focus groups, a majority of the groups included displaced persons. In total, 837 persons participated in FGDs. The table below shows the breakdown of research participants according to gender and disability.



114
FGDs



837
participants



83
FGDs with
women and girls,

including



11
FGDs with women and
girls with disabilities
and their carers



31
FGDs with
men and boys

¹⁸ Available at this link: <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiYjFmNmQwNDYtMmRjNi00OGJlLWlxN2UtOWRmOWU1ZTc1ZDVmliwiZC16ljZjOTBmNzA3LTUxYzgtNGY1ZC04MGRiLTBINTA5ZWYxZGE2MCIslmMiOjI9>

Total number of FGDs and of participants, disaggregated by age, sex and disability

Gender/Age Groups	# FGDs	Sum # of Participants
Female - (12-19)	35	254
Persons with Disabilities	5	36
Persons without Disabilities	30	218
Female - (20-60)	39	291
Persons with Disabilities	6	41
Persons without Disabilities	33	250
Female - (60+)	9	69
Male - (12-19)	13	96
Male - (20-60)	18	127
Grand Total	114	837

Notes were taken in Arabic during each FGD and translated into English. The analysis of FGDs and other qualitative data was done using the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA and was based on thematic coding following a pre-agreed coding system developed by GBV and Protection Cluster coordinators. This approach to analysis also allowed for the extraction of all quotes presented in this report and general information as to the gender, age, and location of the person to whom the quote is attributed. Further detailed information about the methods can be found in Annex 1.

In August 2022, four FGDs were also conducted with GBV experts¹⁹ working on the Syrian humanitarian response. As in previous years, the Delphi method²⁰ was used for these discussions to facilitate the emergence of consensus which would accurately represent the current situation in Syria as perceived by practitioners supporting GBV survivors and leading GBV prevention activities.

Quantitative findings of the household MSNA conducted by the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP), REACH and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in collaboration with all humanitarian actors operating in Syria and the community informant

Protection Needs Assessment (PNA) conducted by HNAP were also integrated in this report, providing a helpful triangulation for the qualitative data emerging from FGDs. Quantitative data on GBV service provision and programming in Syria was also derived from WoS GBV AoR dashboard²¹ and compared with available data from previous years. Additionally, GBVIMS quarterly data produced by the TXB GBV SC was also analysed and included in this report.

Finally, a thematic literature review of secondary sources was conducted on themes of women, girls, children, people with diverse SOGIESC, gender norms and violence in the Syrian context. A complete list of these sources can be found in Annex 3. The literature review was conducted using systematic coding, using the same coding system developed for the FGDs to connect the two sources of data in the analysis and provide contextual background to the quotes extracted from the FGDs and programme monitoring activities.

Limitations and challenges

Collecting information in humanitarian contexts is an important, but difficult task, especially when researching sensitive topics such as gender norms and GBV. Security concerns have limited the amount of information that was accessible to research teams and GBV partners in certain areas of the country, therefore there is less data from certain governorates compared to others. Also, there are no persons of disclosed diverse SOGIESC represented in the FGDs, and therefore no specific information from this affected group on their intersectional experiences of GBV.

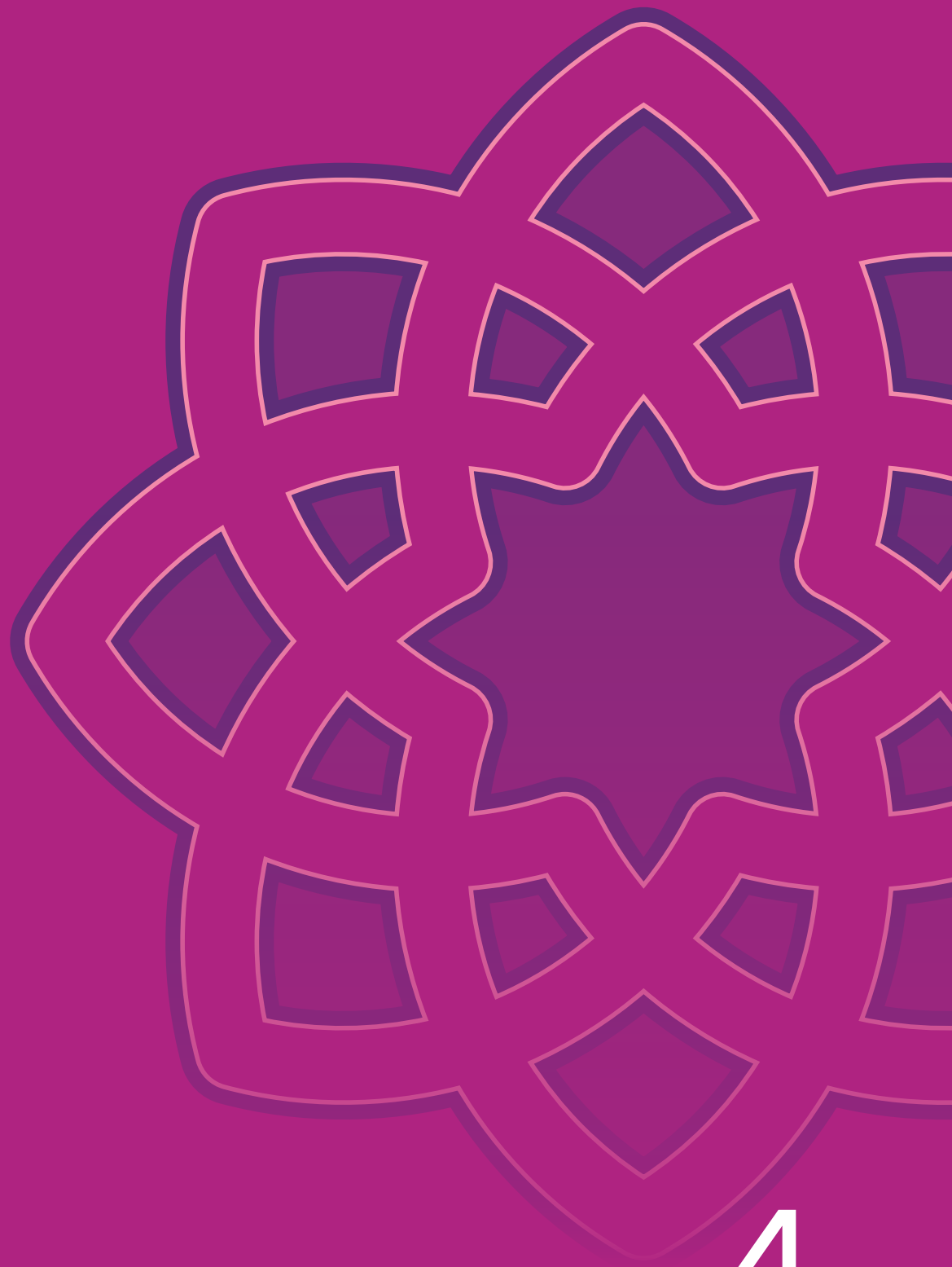
While methods were focused on do-no-harm principles in data collection, the amount of information and disclosure that participants were comfortable sharing may vary and are outside of the facilitators' control. Also, participants' relationships with organisations and facilitators may negatively or positively inform the data collected. For example, it is important to consider the culture around disclosure in general for many participants. There are a multitude of reasons why individuals may not have felt comfortable sharing specific cases and or details of violence, including fear of social or community stigma, which is explored throughout this report. For instance, research teams reported that while adolescent girls found the FGDs gave this group a chance to express their opinions and to engage in dialogue, there was also hesitation amongst this group to disclose GBV experiences due to a fear that confidentiality would be broken (see section on Affected Populations). Facilitators expressed that the time allowed for breaking the ice with participants was not enough, resulting in a challenge gaining the

¹⁹ GBV experts are technical advisors and/or programme managers that have extensive experience working on GBV issues in the context of Syria.

²⁰ The Delphi method presents several statements that participants can agree or disagree with and elaborate on, with the aim of reaching a consensus on the formulation of each statement.

²¹ GBV AoR Whole of Syria (2022) GBV Area of Responsibility Dashboard. Available at :<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieYjFmNmQwNDYtMmRjNi00OGJlLWlxN2U0WRmOWU1ZTc1ZDVmliwidCI6IjZOTBmNzA3LTUxYzgtNGY1ZC04MGRiLTBINTA5ZWYxZGE2MCIsImMiOiJ9>

trust of participants, most especially adolescent girls. Other challenges to carrying out the FGDs included finding a proper confidential space to conduct FGDs, especially in camps and informal settlements. Also, facilitators shared that finding appropriate times that would allow for many women and girls to participate in discussions was challenging due to women and girls working in the agricultural sector. Additionally, due to overly technical FGD guides as well as the cultural normativity of GBV, more time was needed to explain questions to participants and to break down definitions to meet localised understandings of concepts.



4

Gender-Based Violence Trends

The *Voices from Syria 2023* report, as in previous years, describes the state of violence against women and girls in Syria. As seen before, women and girls continue to face severe forms of GBV, inside and outside the home, with 33% of households in 2022 mentioning that women and girls feel unsafe in certain areas, an increase from 19% in 2021 as determined by the MSNA data collection.²² Additionally, women and girls with disabilities, older women, and widows and divorcees were identified as groups vulnerable to GBV.

The new trend of TFGBV introduced in *Voices from Syria 2022* continued to impact women and girls, as well as other existing trends, such as pervasive early marriage and psychological violence. This year demonstrated limiting coping mechanisms for women and girls and fractured resiliency to face GBV.

"In the last two years (2021 and 2022) since COVID and the economic crisis, there has been an increase in GBV" (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Types of violence

"Our society is unjust to women; all its laws and legislation are unfair to them. Women are exposed to all kinds of psychological and physical harm, and their freedoms are restricted" (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence, in various forms, was reported by women and girls in Syria as one of the most frequently discussed daily fears. Many noted an increase in this type of violence, largely due to external contributing factors: *"Then sexual violence intensifies, such as harassment and rape in the street or at work, and of course, all of this has increased during the crisis, and this year is more than last year and the next year will be more again" (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).* GBV experts shared the reasoning for this increase: *"The increase in sexual violence is due to the deteriorating economic situation; increased cost of living; and women being forced to work, which increases the ways in which they can be exploited" (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).*

With sexual violence comes social stigma which can greatly impact women and girls, including risk of physical harm or even death, while limiting their coping mechanisms: *"Sexual violence is present, but carefully and very secretly, because of the fear of execution of both the man and the woman" (Adolescent girl, Hole sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* As a result, many do not disclose or speak about sexual violence: *"There is sexual violence, which has very severe consequences on the recipient. I expect it occurs regularly, but no one speaks*

about it" (Adult woman, Hole sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Many women and girls reported technology-facilitated sexual violence, rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation and abuse as main concerns regarding sexual violence (see section on Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence below).

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

A growing trend in Syria as reported by women, girls and GBV experts was the rise in TFGBV. This more recent type of GBV is a form of sexual violence including exploitation and abuse as well as harassment, often through mobile communications apps: *"There were no technology-related cases in the past, but we have seen increasingly these cases being reported. Most women are supposed to cover their head and you see that their pictures with the head uncovered are shared through social media and then they are blackmailed. There is also sexual harassment, where if women and girls do not accept sexual advances, men and boys threaten to share their pictures on the social media platforms. It's mostly affecting girls as well as young adults" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).* This is also becoming a concern as women and girls increase their use of the internet to earn an income online: *"We have heard more about cyber harassment during this last year in connection to exploitation and abuse, especially as Idlib and Aleppo are economically worse off. Women and girls use technology to earn some money, and often they get entrapped. Young women and girls are mostly affected" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).* In the 2022 MSNA, 25.2% of households who severely limit their school-aged child from learning through an electronic device do so out of fear of online harassment.²³

There is stigma in the culture for women and girls to share photos, particularly photos of them dressed outside of the conservative fashion. Often men and boys obtain pictures of women and girls through communication apps and then blackmail the women and girls, sexually exploiting and abusing them: *"We heard many online exploitation cases especially against young girls, aged fifteen years, because they are ignorant and may share their pictures with men or boys. One girl was coerced into having sexual relations with a man who threatened to share her pictures on social media if she refused" (Older woman, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

Sometimes the perpetrators obtain photos through deceptive means: *"There are fake accounts online where a girl communicates with someone thought to be a girl like her, then she discovers that the person is male and he starts to blackmail her" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).* Other times, perpetrators are taking photos without the person's knowledge and may distort or manipulate

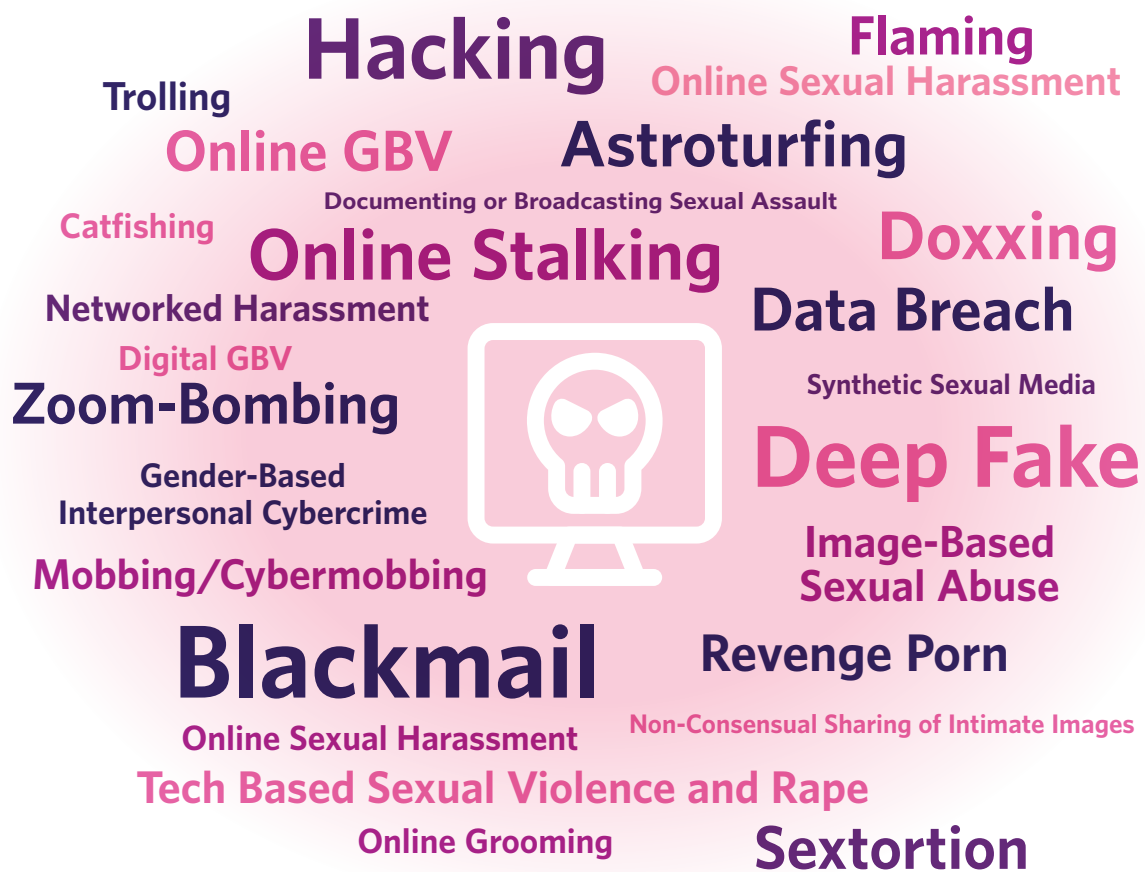
22 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

23 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

the photos to represent the person in a compromising position (see section on Public Spaces): “Violence and injury may happen through the misuse of media and the internet. Girls are photographed in markets, streets and workplaces and then blackmailed by men to do things they want under the threat of exposing them and publishing their pictures” (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

The avenues through which perpetrators are obtaining the photos for the purpose of sexual exploitation has affected women's ability to receive technical assistance such as phone repair: “We are hearing many cases. One woman's mobile phone was hacked and the phone repair man blackmailed her with the pictures he took from the phone. For me, if my mobile broke, I would throw it away and never send it to a repair shop” (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).

Figure 1: Terms associated with Technology-Facilitated GBV²⁴



²⁴ See more information about these terms at: GBV AoR Helpdesk. Learning Brief 1: Understanding technology facilitated GBV. Available at: https://www.sddirect.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/GBVAOR-1_5.PDF

vulnerable groups include displaced women and girls: *“There are cases of rape of girls, sexual violence, especially against displaced persons”* (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Displaced unaccompanied children are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence: *“Due to the war and frequent displacement, unaccompanied children are harassed and raped, whether during migration or flight from their country”* (Older woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).

The root cause of all types of GBV lies in gender inequality and abuse of power. However, women and girls identified contributing factors that enable an environment where they are more exposed to sexual assault and rape, including camp settings, detention centres, and areas with limited lighting: *“Lack of lighting in the camp increased sexual harassment and rape incidents as the camp is not well organised and is overcrowded so these cases have increased, and this leads many families to marry their daughters at 15 years due to their concerns”* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Additionally, workplaces were identified as locations with a risk of sexual assault: *“Sexual abuse of women working on farmland, in stores, or house-cleaning”* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

In Syria there is strong stigma surrounding most types of GBV, but particularly around sexual assault and rape. As such, discussions with women and girls around rape did not include many details and had no mention of marital rape, a concept with little acknowledgement in Syria. However, experts note the increase of marital rape over recent years. This may be a result of an actual increase or could also be a result of more openness of women to disclose their experience of rape by their husbands: *“But we can confirm that these types of GBV have increased over the years. Domestic violence and IPV including physical abuse, marital rape, psychological abuse are the most commonly reported”* (GBV Expert, NES Hub). The sexual abuse by husbands includes forced sexual acts and sexual imagery abuse: *“Men are forcing their wives to watch porn films, after which they are requested to reciprocate what they have seen”* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

Although scarcely reported, sexual violence against men as a form of torture most often reported in detention, has been a feature of the conflict in Syria and is used in order to assert control over a population.²⁵ While it was rare for respondents to share this type of violence, when asked about violence against men, there was evidence that it did occur: *“They are insulted and also raped sometimes”* (Adult woman, Jarablus Sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Sexual Harassment and Exploitation²⁶

“The types of violence from my point of view are sexual or verbal harassment that women may experience at work, in the market or online. Of course it increases when she is divorced or widowed as they are greatly more vulnerable to harassment and exploitation, but men are not subjected to such types of violence” (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Sexual harassment was reported in virtually every possible place that a woman or girl needs to go, from camps to urban settings; in private locations such as workplaces or latrines to public locations such as marketplaces, transportation, and streets; both online and in-person.

Women and girls, despite the age and type of vulnerability, are subjected to sexual harassment. This includes divorced and widowed women: *“Divorced women are heavily subjected to sexual violence. Men believe they can treat them however they want to, and gossip about their honour, reputation, and so these women face harassment”* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate). Children were also highlighted as a vulnerable group: *“Older people harass children such as luring them with money for sexual exploitation”* (Adult woman, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate). The threat of such harassment was cited as reason for limiting women’s and girls’ movements and other denials of opportunities, services, and resources, as discussed later (see section on Denial of Services, Opportunities, Resources and Rights).

Women may be exploited by employers for sexual favours in return for work, with consequences of losing a job or a reduction in wages if they don’t. These harsh economic conditions, and other intersectional factors, such as gender, age, displacement, and marital status, create a vulnerability to exploitation: *“Work is a place that exposes many women, girls, men and boys to violence, as they are exploited financially and sexually. This is especially true for displaced people, because employers know that they need to work and that no matter what they do to them, they are forced to work for a living”* (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

There was a brief mention of an increase in survival sex as a form of sexual exploitation: *“Today we see an increase in sex and prostitution to get money”* (Adult woman, Dar’a sub-district, Dar’a governorate). It is believed that this is largely due to numerous external factors making daily life and survival challenging: *“Because of lack of funding and services, women resort to sexual activities in NES [transactional sex for example],*

25 United Nations (2021). Joint Statement by Muhannad Hadi, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis and Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA Regional Director: International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. United Nations. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/joint-statement-muhannad-hadi-regional-humanitarian-coordinator-syria-1>

26 Sexual harassment is also present in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by humanitarian actors against beneficiaries. This section is in reference to sexual harassment outside of the SEA definition/relationship.

as there is no other option. This is due to the water crisis and lack of food, especially in camps and informal settlements" (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

While SEA is a form of GBV, it refers to acts committed by humanitarian actors against the affected population. Risks of SEA committed by humanitarian actors or actors involved in the provision of aid increase when there is a lack of or limited access to resources and services. For example, *"Many women are sexually abused, not only by humanitarians but also by other people. They request food, they have no money and no choice, and so sexual exploitation happens"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Women and girls shared that SEA is occurring, which was echoed by GBV experts in the field (see section on Distributions). In May/June 2021, 5% of households who said they receive humanitarian assistance reported that they, or members of their households, were asked for some favours in exchange for assistance/services. Out of that group, 9% of the favours were of a romantic or sexual nature.²⁷ GBV experts also confirmed an increase in SEA reporting: *"Sexual exploitation and early marriage rates have also increased during this year"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub). Sometimes the abuse comes in the form of harassment or pressure for interaction: *"I went with my neighbour who is a widow to register for food aid, the employee asked for her phone number, and as soon as she got home, he started texting her and trying to get intimate with her"* (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Other times, beneficiaries have been subject to sexual abuse, including rape, when seeking out assistance and services: *"One of the challenges and fears is sexual harassment in informal camps where women and children are expected to provide favours in exchange for a service"* (Adolescent girl, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate). Some groups of women, including widows and divorced women, face a higher risk of being subjected to SEA: *"However, there are specific concerns for widows, especially in widows' camps, such as movement restrictions, exposure to SEA and not being able to access humanitarian services"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria) (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced).

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



As highlighted in the Secretary-General's 'Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse' (ST/SGB/13/2003), PSEA relates specifically to the responsibilities of humanitarian, development and peacekeeping actors to prevent incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations, NGO, and inter-governments (IGO) personnel, and actors involved in the delivery of aid against the affected population, to set up confidential reporting mechanisms, and to take safe and ethical action as quickly as possible when incidents do occur.

Sexual Abuse



The term 'sexual abuse' means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual Exploitation



The term 'sexual exploitation' means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Some types of forced and/or coerced prostitution can fall under this category.

27 WoS IA PSEA Network (October 2021). Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Syria: SEA and Humanitarian Assistance-Household Perceptions of Favours in Exchange For AID. HNAP.

Physical Violence

Physical violence was one of the types of violence mentioned most by women and girls. Most frequently discussed were physical assaults, but also kidnapping and killings of women and girls, or femicide. However, kidnappings and femicide were often mentioned without providing details of these incidents. Secondary data and input from GBV experts allow for understanding the gender-dynamics at play in kidnappings and femicide, the latter of which are often associated with the misnomer “honour crimes.”

Physical Assault

Women and girls reported facing a high threat of physical violence in various forms. Frequently referenced were physical assaults or “beatings” and experts suggested this type of violence may have increased this year: *“Physical violence has tremendously increased as well”* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub). For GBVIMS data gathering organisations supporting survivors of GBV in NWS, they have recently reported the most common form of GBV disclosed was physical assault (33.19% in quarter four of 2021).²⁸

“Beating” was often mentioned as perpetrated through IPV, specifically husbands assaulting their wives: *“There are many types of violence, for example, the beating of women is widespread. For example, almost every day we hear our neighbour screaming due to the beating she receives from her husband”* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Physical attacks as a part of IPV were sometimes explained away by external factors or victim blaming: *“What provokes the husband and angers him is the external situation, or when women come home late, he may beat, curse and shout insults”* (Adult woman, Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). Physical violence in intimate partner relationships can also severely impact children in the household. This can be especially true in displacement camp settings where whole families are sharing single room tents: *“The most widespread types of violence in the camp are harassment, verbal violence, physical and domestic violence, where husbands beat their wives inside the house in front of their children. This affects the children’s mental state and behaviour”* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

However, physical violence was not only within intimate relationships. There are “beatings” targeting women and children, including both girls and boys. Women and girls reported that this violence is often perpetrated by men within the household, including husbands, fathers, and brothers: *“Beatings by my brother, being told off, ridiculing my appearance.”* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa

governorate). Widowed and divorced women living with family in the household are particularly vulnerable to this type of violence: *“Males imitate the aggressive behaviour and beat their sisters, especially if there is a widowed or divorced woman in the family as they consider her to be a stigma”* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Older women are also experiencing physical abuse: *“We notice that older women are being exposed to physical abuse which wasn’t seen before”* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

In some instances, perpetrators are going to great lengths to commit physical assaults: *“People want to distance themselves from neighbours so they can’t hear the voices of their children and women being beaten”* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). However, this form of violence has become normalised and is considered “acceptable” by many, a trend noted this year: *“In some cases, physical violence has become acceptable to everyone. The participant said that parents have the right to beat girls”* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Additionally, women activists and workers are targeted with physical violence. The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) team recorded: *“...at least 107 incidents of assault and intimidation against women activists and workers, or against centres for women in connection with their activities in northeast and northwest Syria, between March 2021 and March 2022.”*²⁹

Femicide

Homicide in the form of GBV, or femicide, is a dangerous threat for both women and girls. Killings of females by male family members within the household were referenced, both within intimate partner and non-intimate relationships: *“We have heard of murder incidents that so-and-so killed his grandmother or aunt because she had gold and he took her heirlooms”* (Adult woman, Dar’a sub-district, Dar’a governorate). However, murder of women and girls outside of the household also persists: *“A girl was kidnapped, assaulted, and later found dead”* (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate).

Sometimes, femicides fall under the misnomer of “honour crimes” or “honour killings”, where women and girls are killed, usually by a family member, and targeted because of their gender. The Syrian Network of Human Rights from March 2021 until March 2022 recorded 24 cases of femicide: *“...at the hands of their families or partners, most of which were committed under the pretext of ‘honour’ or due to women’s refusal to be forced into marriage or resulting from being subjected to*

28 GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub) (2021) GBVIMS Quarterly Report October - December 2021.

29 Syrian Network for Human Rights (2022). On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria: Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State Lack of Development, Equality, and Security. P. 9. Available at: <https://snhr.org/blog/2022/03/08/57445/>

violence by men.”³⁰ The women may be blamed for the killing: *“For girls and women, this group is denied freedoms, and are blamed for any violence like honour killings”* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). GBV experts believe this type of violence towards women and girls increased in the last year: *“Also, there are more honour killings of single women in Hasakeh and Deir-Ez-Zor”* (GBV Expert, NES Hub). Femicides have been reported in some camp settings, specifically Al-Hol camp in Al-Hasakeh Governorate (see section on Locations, Camps). The complexity of tracking femicide cannot be overstated, as such violence is rarely reported and may even be concealed.

Kidnapping

“My neighbour’s 15-year-old daughter was suffering from a mental disability. She was kidnapped, beaten, and she had her mobile phone stolen, so she couldn’t ask for help nor could she defend herself” (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Women and girls mentioned kidnapping as a dangerous threat they face but little insight was provided as to the motives behind the kidnapping. However, the threat of kidnapping appears to be a constant fear affecting the psyche of women: *“Someone’s daughter was about to be kidnapped, as she was picked up by an older man on the street while she was going to her school, but thanks to the people of the neighbourhood she was rescued. Even when we are in our houses, we are no longer safe, especially women, and we fear for our daughters more than ourselves”* (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

This violence affects all types of women and girls, including those with disabilities (as noted above), women and children, and widowed women: *“Widowed women do not feel safe because of the widespread lack of safety and kidnappings”* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). In general, the threat of kidnapping appears to be great when women simply leave the house and are in public spaces, on streets: *“There is a lot of kidnapping and harassment in empty streets and when it is dark”* (Adult woman with disability, A’zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate). According to the 2022 PNA, 10% of women and girls live in areas where kidnapping/abduction occurs to women (18 years or older), but that the issue is not very common.³¹ However, the seriousness and impact of kidnapping, as well as the perceived threat of kidnapping, were reported as legitimate concerns by women and girls.

Early and Forced Marriage

Early and forced marriage often come with multiple other types of violence, including sexual violence, physical violence, movement restrictions, denial of access to education, and psychological and emotional violence. In Syria, early and forced marriages have become common practice. Sometimes they are negative coping mechanisms responding to years of conflict, displacement, and sexual violence that threatens women and girls.

“The place where I face violence the most is at home. My family always tells me: you are not like the rest of the family girls, because you are not married yet” (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Early Marriage

“We have people that consider the girl to be a spinster if she is 16 years old and is not married” (Adult woman, Dar’a sub-district, Dar’a governorate).

Early marriage was reported frequently as a form of violence faced by adolescent girls in Syria (see section on Adolescent Girls). Early marriage is defined as marriage, either a formal or informal union, before the age of 18. In Syria, it is considered by many as the most common type of violence practiced against adolescent girls, and this is affecting girls even in their early adolescence: *“Girls are forced to marry at an early age, like 13 or 14 years old and even younger”* (Adult woman, Khasham sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

It is true that early marriage can be perpetrated due to cultural customs and traditions with deep roots in patriarchal systems: *“Girls are subjected to violence in communities due to the customs and traditions and remnants of extremist ideology, where they are prevented from leaving the house and sometimes forced into early marriage”* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). But there are also contributing factors that may lead to the practice of early marriage. Parents sometimes use early marriage as a negative coping mechanism to face such factors.

In Syria, fears of sexual violence and the social stigma associated with it could leave adolescent girls ostracised by their community: *“Girls face early marriage as their parents force them to marry in order to protect them”* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). The dire economic situation in Syria continues, where parents are unable to afford to feed everyone in their household, sometimes turning to early marriage as a way to have fewer household members to feed and have a daughter taken care of by others: *“Girls are often subjected to early marriage so her family can gain money and save on expenses”* (Adult woman, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate). It was felt by some that early marriage was in fact encouraged by the limited

30 Syrian Network for Human Rights (2022). On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria: Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State Lack of Development, Equality, and Security. P. 18. Available at: <https://snhr.org/blog/2022/03/08/57445/>

31 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

existing judiciary systems: *"Because the courts' role is absent and judiciaries encourage marriage with minor girls. As a result, violence increased against girls. Divorce cases have increased due to early marriage"* (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate). This is particularly true in camp settings (see sections on Locations, Camps and GBV in Other Humanitarian Sectors, Camp and Shelter Management) where there are limited options for girls, few educational opportunities, and early marriage can be seen either as the only option for her future or as a way to get an adolescent girl out of a displacement camp: *"Families tend to rely on early marriage as a coping mechanism due to the financial burden. This has a huge impact on girls, especially girls in camp settings, where there are barriers to education"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub). Daughters of divorced and widowed women are more at risk of early marriage as their mothers face higher level of discrimination, vulnerability and risk of GBV (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced): *"My sister's husband is missing, and my sister married their daughters at the age of 13. Their bodies and their behaviours are like children, but our society is ruthless"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). The continuous conflict since 2011 has also contributed to parents' desire to have their daughters looked after: *"My parents forced me to get married at the time of the siege, and I was prevented from continuing my education. I am forbidden from working and leaving the house in general, but my mother convinced my husband to let me come to the safe space"* (Adolescent girl, Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

According to the PNA, 72% of girls live in areas where financial hardship is a reason for early marriage.³² Experts believe: *"some types of violence have been increasing in the last year due to the economic situation, the COVID pandemic, movement restrictions, which are all increasing the economic exploitation of women. Early marriage is also increasing"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Early marriage often marks the end of an adolescent girl's education (see section on Education): *"A girl may get the baccalaureate certificate, but she is prevented from continuing her education because her fate is to marry. She can't practice her hobbies because this is deemed unimportant. Her focus must be solely on her husband and children, but if she has a brother, he has the right to do anything he wants without any concerns"* (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate). Contrarily, early marriage is sometimes employed in case of poor school performance: *"When a girl fails in the ninth grade, her family forces her to marry. I have two friends who got married at the age of 15, one of them was divorced and has a son and the other one is still married"* (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Additionally, some in the community recognise the negative impacts of early marriage: *"Marriage with minor girls causes violence to her and her family because she is not mature enough. Women don't have the right*

to an opinion, even in the number of children they have" (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate). The consequences extend beyond the adolescent in the union to their whole family including any children born to the marriage: *"A girl who got married at an early age, 14 years old, left her new-born baby because she couldn't fulfil her marriage responsibilities"* (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

There are significant challenges to preventing early marriage, particularly from a legal perspective, as Syria is under ruling control from numerous actors depending on the region, and therefore with various judicial bodies (or lack thereof) and rule of law. However, following recommendations from a first Universal Periodic Review (UPRI), the Syrian government amended Article 16 to their laws (for Syrian government-controlled areas) setting the legal age for marriage at 18 for both men and women. However, according to the second UPR (UPRII) in 2022, this does not even fix the *de jure* issue of early marriage as it "...does not necessarily prohibit under-age marriage of girls, since according to Article 18, judges can allow teenage marriage under certain circumstances."³³

Forced Marriage

Forced marriage is a type of violence facing women and girls. This may be decided by her family, usually a male such as her father or brother: *"What I have noticed most, especially in the community where I live, is the authority of the brother over his sisters, especially after the father's death, as he deprives her of all her rights... even that he marries her as soon as possible to someone whom she may not agree with or even accept, and when marriage begins, she enters a new cycle of violence, which is intimate partner violence"* (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). It is done sometimes without regards to her wishes or input: *"She has no role in choosing her husband. Her family accepts the first marriage proposal"* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Sometimes the decision to force a woman or girl into marriage is a result of the dire economic circumstances: *"Nowadays, the father is marrying off his daughter to save on her living costs or to protect her safety"* (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).

Other times, the decision to force a woman into marriage is a result of concern for the social consequences of women's actions and engagements in society that may bring stigma on her. The marriage is an attempt to mitigate that stigma: *"They think it is better to marry her instead of staying at home. If she makes any mistakes, her husband is now responsible for her"* (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate). This is particularly

33 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (2022). Joint submission for the UPR of Syria: 40th session of the UPR Working Group (January – February 2022). WILPF. P.9. Available at: <https://women-now.org>

the case for divorced or widowed women, who are considered socially vulnerable and may experience pressure to re-marry: *"Yes, my daughter was widowed at a young age, and she had a daughter. We forced her to get married to protect her from being stigmatised because we were concerned about the community and what would they say about her"* (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Lastly, some women and girls are forced to marry their perpetrator of sexual violence: *"Girls are forced to marry their perpetrators after rape for example. They are forced into isolation if they refuse. They can't go back to their families if they don't accept the marriage"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria). The alternatives of pursuing justice are sometimes not economically feasible, so families feel they have no other choice than to force a marriage: *"The family may file a suit, but the lawyers' costs are very high, so they force the rapist to marry the girl"* (Adult woman, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).

The refusal of forced marriages can have dangerous consequences, including an "honour" killing of the woman who refuses (See sections on Physical Violence and Femicide).

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

"Women and girls are subjected to all kinds of violence from... restriction of resources and deprivation of their most basic rights in life such as education, work, inheritance, travel" (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Women and girls experience numerous forms of denial of resources, services, opportunities and rights in Syria. Time after time, adult women as well as adolescent girls report movement restrictions, limiting where they can go and what they can do. Women are often deprived of the opportunity to work, and when they are afforded that right, they have limited options as to which jobs are deemed appropriate due to their gender. Economic violence is prevalent within the framework of IPV and other relationships in the family. Violence is sometimes targeted against vulnerable populations such as widows and divorcees, who may lose the right to their children. The most frequent denied opportunity to women and girls reported is the right to education.

Women and girls are primarily targeted with these restrictions, with widows and divorcees experiencing additional vulnerability: *"The deprivation of resources and opportunities is the most common thing that women, girls, widows and divorced women are subjected to"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

In NWS, 26.4% of reported GBV incidents to organisations fell under these types of violence in the

beginning of 2022³⁴, with organisations noting an increase at the end of 2021 as a result of protection concerns from men regarding the risk of sexual harassment of female family members when accessing resources or services.³⁵

Denial of Education

"Even if we want to educate our daughters, we will not be free from society talking and judging, which may compel us to get them out of school and marry them" (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Girls are often deprived of completing their education in Syria for numerous reasons (see section on Education). With years of conflict and displacement, there have been disruptions to many children's and adult's education. As of 2021, at least 2.4 million children (roughly one third of school-aged children) are expected to be out of school.³⁶ However, beyond those disruptions, girls in Syria are often denied the opportunity to complete their education: *"After the war, I was prevented from completing my education and they forced me to marry. It was the beginning of a series of violence, as my husband beats me and deprives me of work. If I were male, they wouldn't deprive me of education"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Some families pull their girls out of school out of fear for their safety due to the threat of sexual harassment and violence, both at school and on the way to school. Due to the deep social stigma surrounding sexual violence in Syria, the consequences of such violence include both the physical and psychological, but also the social consequences that may befall a girl. Therefore, some parents aim to protect their daughters by denying them the ability to go to school: *"I have a young girl who goes to school, but I am afraid for her due to the current situation. There are a lot of girls who are deprived of education because their parents are afraid for them in the street and at school, and from local gossip"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Other times, education is not prioritised for girls as it is not deemed necessary for them in the patriarchal society. Additionally, some girls are denied their education because they are made to work to support their family: *"Even girls aged 12 or 13 years old and above work on farms, harvesting, selling clothing and accessories and makeup in streets, and they are deprived of education because they become adults and it is shameful then to go to school. Many girls are prevented at this age, due to customs and traditions, to leave home except for emergencies and they consider that she would bring shame to her family or be harassed on the streets"* (Adult woman,

34 GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub). (2022). GBVIMS Quarterly Report Q1 January - March 2022. P.1.

35 GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub) (2021) GBVIMS Quarterly Report Q4 October - December 2021. P.5.

36 OCHA (2022). Humanitarian Needs Overview. Syrian Arab Republic. February 2022. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/2022-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-february-2022>

Khasham sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Specifically, girls with disabilities face additional barriers to their education when schools are not equipped to support them: *"Girls with disabilities and younger girls, especially, are exposed to types of violence, such as... deprivation of education due to the lack of schools that are equipped and suitable for people with disabilities"* (Adolescent girl with disability, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Denial of education for girls is linked with early marriage. When girls are married before 18 years old, this often triggers the end of their education: *"One of my relatives was doing well at school but when a suitable person proposed to marry her, her family dropped her out of school and married her off"* (Older woman, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

The consequences of denying girls education are vast and impact whole families and generations: *"I wanted to continue my education, but my father categorically refused that. I felt that I have been deprived of the most important right in my life"* (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Movement Restrictions

"Women are prevented from going out unlike men" (Adult woman, Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Both adult women and girls experience movement restrictions, instituted by male family members in the households, including husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. This restriction takes on different forms, but often involves male members of the household prohibiting women and girls from leaving the house, walking on the streets, attending school, going to work, seeking out services or accessing protection centres, or some other restriction of where they can go and what they can do. Often movement restrictions will be justified due to fear of violence against women and girls in public spaces and the social stigma that comes along with women engaging in public spaces. In 2022, 30% of households reported modifying their daily movement out of fear for their safety.³⁷ It should be noted that the majority of GBV reported is occurring inside the survivor's or perpetrator's homes (see section on Locations, Homes).

Often this restriction is controlled by husbands to wives and fathers to daughters: *"I know a woman whose husband prevents her from leaving the house except once every three months"* (Adolescent girl, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Girls' movements are particularly tracked: *"As for young girls, they are closely monitored and they have no right to an opinion or to defend themselves"* (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). However, additional members of the family (usually male) may also restrict women's

movements, particularly for widows and divorcees: *"Widows are exposed to violence by the family. They should not, according to societal customs and traditions, go out. A woman who does not have a man is like a home without protection"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Widows and divorcees are in fact quite vulnerable to movement restrictions due to the societal stigma and beliefs surrounding them: *"In our societies, women are oppressed in general, and if they are widows or divorced, then injustice here is twice as much due to people talking about them, and they never have mercy on them. Any action you do whether you go out, work, or meet, people will talk about you"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

"Girls and women in the community are subjected to violence and their freedoms are restricted because it is a conservative community and there are strict beliefs, as well as the fact that it is a patriarchal community, where women are subjected to violence in all its forms by men" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Economic Violence

"Women are exposed to violence more than men, especially economic abuse. For example, women receive four times less inheritance than men, and this is known in all families. In addition to economic violence against women by the husband and the family, the man always has the right to do anything" (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Overwhelmingly, men control all financial resources in the society and possess the role of the decision maker in the family. As such, women report men controlling the household income: *"Violence has many types, but the violence that we are experiencing these days is economic violence and deprivation of resources such as depriving a girl of her inheritance right and her right to own anything, in addition to economic violence by her husband, who is the controller in the house"* (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Families often prevent women from working: *"The parents do not allow widows who live with them to work"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). If women are allowed to work, male family members may take their wages: *"Women are deprived of money, especially for those working on farms where their husbands or children take all their wages"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate). GBV experts note an increase of this form of violence in the past year: *"We noticed an increased phenomenon of forcing women to work and preventing them from spending their salaries. This particular type of violence increased this year"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub). Often, it may be the woman's husband who takes her working wages: *"We heard more reports about marital violence, financial violence, violence against female*

37 HNAF Syria (2022). Socioeconomic & Shelter Conditions 2022 Spring Report Series. P.20.

employees, and prevention of women from spending their salaries with the purpose of denigrating them and discrediting their work” (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border hub).

Women and girls also reported frequent denial of their right to their inheritance: *“Most women in our community are deprived of the right to inherit because of customs and traditions. This type of violence applies to all groups whether a girl, a widow, a divorced woman, disabled or an older woman. A man takes his share of inheritance and his sisters’ shares” (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* Widows and divorcees are particularly vulnerable to economic violence (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced).

Denial of Access to Children

“It is different for divorced women because of community’s perception of divorce. They face insults, social stigma, rejection, mockery of their opinions, harassment and denial of their rights and children” (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Widows and divorcees may face the loss of their children or the threat of the loss of their children (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced). The law for areas under the control of the Syrian government regarding custody of children favours male blood relatives: *“...which stipulates that guardianship shifts to the mother only if there is no male relative, and if she meets the conditions of guardianship, competency and the dowry.”*³⁸

Sometimes the threat of depriving a mother of her children is used to control the women’s decisions, particularly around re-marrying: *“Some widows are deprived of their children by the husbands’ family if they get married. Or her family may prevent her from marrying again, claiming that it is shameful to marry more than once. So, the widow must dedicate her time to raising her children and not think about getting married again” (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

Psychological/Emotional Violence

Reported with high frequency by women and girls was psychological violence, also known as emotional or verbal violence. In NWS alone, 28.7% of GBV incidents in the first quarter of 2022 fell under this classification.³⁹ This type of violence may range from delivering insults to psychological pressure to emotional manipulation.

All persons were reported as experiencing this type of violence, although specific groups such as women and girls, people with disabilities, widows and divorcees, and older persons were especially highlighted (see section on Affected Populations): *“My relative has a mental and physical disability. She is bullied by her sibling and her family, and she isolates herself from everyone, and spends all her time on her mobile and the Internet” (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

This type of violence takes place interpersonally in homes, schools, camps, and most other places, as well as at a societal level (see section on Locations). However, in general, women and girls highlighted that emotional violence is often perpetrated by known persons, including husbands: *“Psychological violence is from the people closest to you, even from your family” (Adult woman, A’zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* In some camps, the violence has become normalised: *“They have gotten used to verbal violence in the camp” (Adolescent girl, Hole sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* In schools, the violence may have severe consequences: *“I know a friend of mine who left school because the teacher abused her and bullied her about her name and body shape” (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

Frequently, emotional violence was referenced in terms of IPV, perpetrated by husbands: *“What I have been subjected to most is verbal violence and bad words from my husband, who never wastes any opportunity to insult me. Even if I am over 60, he always says abusive words to me” (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).*

Family Violence and Intimate Partner Violence

IPV and violence from family members was highly reported by women and girls. While some violence was perpetrated by mothers or mothers-in-law, most violence is resulting from males in the household controlling and abusing females: *“Domestic violence that takes place inside houses, from father to mother, from father to children, from the older brother to the mother and sisters, due to customs, traditions, authority, and discrimination between males and females, and the perception that women deserve violence to remain under control. The most affected groups of violence are women, girls, and children” (Adult woman with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Intimate Partner Violence

“Marital rape, beating, domestic battery, enforced silence, livelihood restrictions within the house, threat of divorce” (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate).

38 Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (2022). Joint submission for the UPR of Syria: 40th session of the UPR Working Group (January – February 2022). WILPF. P.9. Available at: <https://women-now.org>

39 GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub) (2022). GBVIMS Quarterly Report Q1 January – March 2022.

IPV may consist of numerous types of violence, including sexual, physical, or psychological violence, restriction of movements or denial of resources, opportunities, services, or rights. IPV is one of the most common types of GBV experienced in Syria. In the beginning of 2022, over half (57.4%) of GBV incidents reported to organisations in NWS were perpetrated by an intimate or former partner.⁴⁰ Experts note a rise in IPV in Syria in recent years: *"We can confirm that these types of GBV have increased over the years; domestic violence and IPV including physical, marital rape, psychological abuse are the most commonly reported"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub). The rise could be due to an increase in IPV due to contributing factors such as a deteriorating economy and lockdowns due to COVID-19 prevention, but they also may just be an increase in reporting as opposed to an actual increase in prevalence. Much of this trend is attributed in the last year to the continual economic deterioration in Syria: *"The crisis affected all people's lives. Women and girls lost social networks/resources and also lost their income, or their family members lost their income, which led to IPV as well as mental health issues"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub). However, despite a potential rise in disclosure, it remains extremely difficult to track IPV given its sensitivity and the tendency to conceal it: *"There are severe difficulties in documenting violations and violence against women in Syria, with one of the most complex and sensitive violations to document being domestic violence because it is very rarely reported; instead, it is concealed, and the crime is falsified."*⁴¹

Blaming survivors in incidents of IPV continues to be present in society, including from women and girls: *"I used to see my father beating my mother. He loves her but she made him angry and women must be smart to avoid a beating"* (Adolescent girl, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Given society's attitude towards IPV, women's options to respond are often limited: *"There is a cycle of violence because women stay at home with the perpetrators in cases of domestic violence. They cannot leave and they cannot report"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria). Many are financially dependent upon their perpetrators and the social stigma behind divorce makes leaving undesirable, especially given the treatment of divorcees in society and the possible consequence of losing one's children through a divorce: *"Some females prefer to be beaten than to seek a divorce; she tolerates violence for her children's sake"* (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Currently there is a normalisation of many types of

GBV, but particularly IPV: *"Women are always asked to tolerate beating and verbal violence because it is normal and occurs in all houses and she has no right to object because it is shameful to do so"* (Adult woman, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate). This normalisation is not accepted by all in society, as many believe IPV is wrong and not normal. However, sometimes this is an attitude adopted by survivors of IPV as a coping mechanism to deal with the abuse they are suffering: *"My husband has the right to beat me if I do not serve him properly"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). It should be noted that a woman in the group responded to this woman to disagree and affirm that it is not her fault. Some of this normalisation was attributed to a lack of accountability within community-based or societal judicial mechanisms: *"With regard to emotional and domestic violence, it has become almost normal for those who are exposed to it, due to the lack of accountability"* (Adolescent girl, Thiban sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

The impact of IPV goes beyond the survivor and may extend to the whole family. Some noted the possibility that children will adopt the aggressive behaviour of their father and perpetuate violence themselves: *"In my opinion, violence increases in homes. If there is domestic violence, children will be violent, boys will abuse their sisters"* (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

“ The violence they experience is never a survivor's fault. ”

Family Violence

Family violence in the form of abuse and control from male family members to women and girls was reported. Often this occurs from the father/husband within a household, carried out on his wife and daughters. But it was strongly noted that adolescent or adult male children in a household were exercising this violence on both their sisters as well as mothers, both in the absence and the presence of a father in the household: *"A teenage girl is exposed to violence by her brother who controls her life. Her father condones his behaviour"* (Adult woman, A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Especially vulnerable to this type of violence are widows and divorcees, sometimes from their own family: *"Boys imitate the aggressive behaviour and beat their sisters,*

40 GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub). (2022). GBVIMS Quarterly Report Q1 January - March 2022.

41 Syrian Network for Human Rights (2022). On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria: Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State Lack of Development, Equality, and Security. P.18. Available at: <https://snhr.org/blog/2022/03/08/57445/>

especially if there is a widow or divorced woman in the family, as they consider her a stigma" (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). They may experience violence from their in-laws, sometimes threatening to take away their children: "My sister is divorced, and she works to raise her children. She suffers greatly from the surrounding society, and she is exposed to exploitation due to her young age. In addition, she is subjected to psychological and emotional violence from the family of her ex-husband, and she's stigmatised by her neighbours" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Violence may also come from her own children: "There are cases where violence occurs against the widow from her children, as her son becomes jealous" (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate). Married women are also at risk of abuse from their husband and his family with whom they may

live: "Daughters-in-law are exploited by their mothers-in-law: some of them treat their daughters-in-law like a maid, and if she objects, she is beaten by her husband and his mother" (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate) (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced).

As discussed in other forms of violence, this control and abuse is often justified by men as a way to protect women from other violence: "Women and girls are exposed to violence more than men, especially verbal and online violence and exploitation. They often keep silent or leave the camp for fear of shame, and this is what prompts men to restrict the movement of their women and girls in home or camp because they want to avoid this" (Adult Man, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate).

Locations

Figure 2: Locations where GBV mostly occurs



Home

Figure 3: Key facts of GBV at home



School

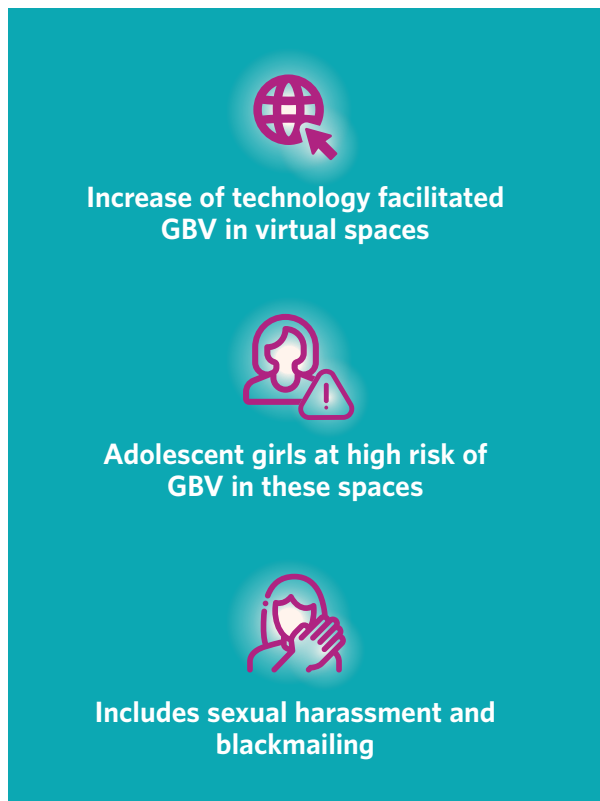
A considerable number of participants shared that violence took place in schools or on the way to and from schools. According to the 2022 MSNA, 8.8% of household respondents reported that women and girls feel unsafe on the way to school, and 1.7% of all respondents reported that girls feel unsafe in or around schools.⁴² Physical and psychological violence from teachers and peers was experienced by all types of children in schools: *"In schools, there is bullying, beating, abuse, verbal violence from student to teacher, teachers' harassment of girls. In schools that have older classes, they harass the younger ones"* (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). As mentioned previously in this report (see section on Denial of Education), respondents frequently relayed that school is a location in which adolescent girls are at risk of experiencing GBV, including psychological and physical violence from fellow students: *"My daughter was also subjected to*

violence at school by locking her in the bathroom, so she became fearful, and her father kept her out of school" (Adult woman, Jurneyeh sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Adolescent girls reported that there were instances of sexual violence, including sexual harassment and rape from teachers, which affected their families' decisions in letting them attend school (see section on Economic Impact). Respondents also disclosed that displaced students faced psychological abuse from peers: *"Displaced children are exposed to discrimination and bullying by the host community children in schools"* (Adolescent boy, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Virtual Spaces

"Yes, we hear many stories of harassment and extortion on social media against women and girls by publishing their private pictures and conversations in exchange for money or in exchange for a sexual relationship. Girls who are under 18 are sexually exploited, because using social media is all they know" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

42 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).



"Yes, every day we hear stories about girls and women being harassed on the phone through pictures, conversations, videos, where they are blackmailed for money or an intimate relationship. Women and girls are increasingly affected by issues of harassment online" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

"Some relationships end with rape. The adolescent girl talks to a person who says that he loves her, and she believes him. She doesn't know that he is trying to drag her into harmful acts and her, and then he blackmails her with pictures. She must return to him many times or he will tell her family" (Adult woman, Khasham sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Camps

Frequently, women and girls shared that camps were unsafe locations (see section on Camp and Shelter Management), and where they experienced sexual violence, including harassment and rape: *"Violence exists everywhere in the camp without exception. Women, girls, and children are the most vulnerable ones. Verbal violence has become part of our lives and we expect it" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh*

governorate). Often, overcrowding, shared spaces, and a lack of lighting was explained by women and girls as contributing to GBV in camp settings: *"Yes, there are factors that increase violence, such as lack of lighting in the streets, family neglect, widespread smoking and drug use, school dropouts, child labour, poverty, lack of privacy in tents and overcrowding" (Adolescent girl, Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate).* Adolescent girls and women also conveyed the pressures upon adolescent girls in camps: *"There is no safe space in the camp so many girls suffer mental, social, and economic pressures" (Adolescent girl, Hazemah sub district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* As mentioned previously (see section on Early Marriage), it was frequently shared that due to threats of sexual violence in camps, as well as conditions of extreme poverty, many families force girls into early marriage as a coping mechanism. Camps were generally more dangerous for all populations, including women and girls with disabilities: *"Violence against persons with disabilities is more widespread within the camp" (Adolescent girl, Areesheh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Additionally, many adolescent girls and women who are widowed or divorced experienced various forms of violence within the widows' camps (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced), including restriction of movement, deprivation of rights and resources including education, SEA, high levels of child labour and early marriage, and a lack of access to protection services due to movement restrictions.

Workplaces

Workplace locations were identified as spaces in which GBV occurs, especially for girls performing child labour. In all, 7.3% of households in Syria indicated that women and girls feel unsafe at work, with 15.4% of households indicating they felt unsafe on the way to work according to the most recent MSNA.⁴³ Sexual and financial exploitation were reported most frequently: *"The workplace is where the worst forms of violence occur, including sexual and financial exploitation" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* Respondents also shared that this type of exploitation was increasing: *"At workplaces there are beatings, humiliation, child labour and exploitation of children and women by forcing them to work for low wages. This violence is increasing due to the economic situation. Employers exploit workers' needs" (Older woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).*

Workplaces in public or outdoor areas posed threats of sexual exploitation to women and girls, including agricultural lands: *"A girl was exposed to sexual exploitation by her employer, as he asked her for a sexual relationship in return for working every day on his farm. The girl agreed because she was the only breadwinner for her family. This shows how women and girls are those who are most exposed*

43 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

to violence in the workplace" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Working women and girls who were displaced, disabled, widowed, or divorced experienced further exploitation, including economic exploitation: "As IDPs, the most common form of violence we were exposed to was prevention from job opportunities and humanitarian assistance. We were also exploited even when we had job opportunities, as wages were very low while employers took advantage of our need to find a job" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Public Spaces

It was clear that public spaces are often places where many women and girls experience violence. For example, 55.9% of households in Syria mentioned that women and girls feel unsafe in markets.⁴⁴ Violence against women and girls in public spaces included psychological, physical, and sexual violence: "Things that increase violence include crowdedness in streets and marketplaces, which lead to sexual harassment" (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Women and girls also reported more sexual harassment in public spaces and shared their concern for this increasing: "We women and girls are always subjected to harassment at work, transportation, in the street, in the market, and this type is more widespread than in recent years" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Women and adolescent girls often disclosed that travelling on streets or modes of transportation were locations where they experienced sexual violence, including harassment and rape: "There is harassment on the roads and transportation, and some young men intentionally go on the bus in order to harass girls on their way to school or when returning home" (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate). In fact, MSNA data shows that 58.9% of Syrian households report that women and girls feel unsafe on public transport.⁴⁵ Those with disabilities, widows and divorced women and girls experienced heightened levels of violence and discrimination in public spaces, including verbal abuse, sexual violence, and exploitation. Women and girls also shared that they experienced a real fear of kidnapping in empty streets, especially when it is dark, and that kidnapping was a concern. As a result of the high levels of violence experienced by women and girls in public spaces, many families responded by restricting their movement, or women and girls self-isolated. This results in a lack of freedom of movement experienced by this group, and the inability to access WGSS, distributions, and other services and aid.

Detention and checkpoints

Women and girls experienced GBV in detention and at checkpoints. For example, MSNA data shows that 54.8% of Syrian households reported that women and girls feel unsafe when crossing checkpoints,⁴⁶ and as mentioned previously

in this report (See section on Sexual Violence), violence against women and girls also occurs in detention. Violence in detention includes sexual violence, including rape, as well as physical violence, including torture, and is experienced by people of all genders: "Men, boys, women and girls who have been detained face [rape, sexual and verbal harassment, abuse and neglect]. While these phenomena are widespread in places of detention, women and girls suffer the most from the impacts of incarceration, such as harassment and rape" (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idleb governorate). People with diverse SOGIESC also experience violence in detention. This population faces arbitrary arrest and detention, and sexual violence by armed actors⁴⁷ (see sections on Sexual Violence and Affected Populations).

Women explained the effects of violence in detention for people of all genders are long lasting, including the specific effects on adolescent girls and women: "All men and women in detention are exposed to the same violence, suicide, psychological ill-health, extreme depression, despair, mental disorders, and family shame. Society views girls and women that have been raped as incapable of starting a new life, marrying and raising a family, and so they resort to suicide, or stay at home and isolate" (Adult woman with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

There are also severe mental health concerns following detention and experiences of sexual violence: "Men and boys, when they return home, suffer from trauma and disorders resulting from psychological stress, anxiety and depression and increased feelings of despair and isolation. Sexual violence results in health, psychological and physical problems" (Adult man, Harim sub-district, Idleb governorate). Additionally, recent studies have reported that children, women and men in detention centres are forced into sexual slavery by armed actors.⁴⁸

Stigma and shame from families and communities after detention also leads to a form of social violence, and in some cases, "honour" killings of women: "When women are released, some of them are disowned by their families, while others are killed out of shame" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Sexual violence and torture experienced in detention is often not disclosed due to these gendered repercussions. According to a GBV expert, the disclosure of these cases is rare: "This is very secret information as survivors fear for retaliation. Because of impunity, women and girls are scared to report" (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

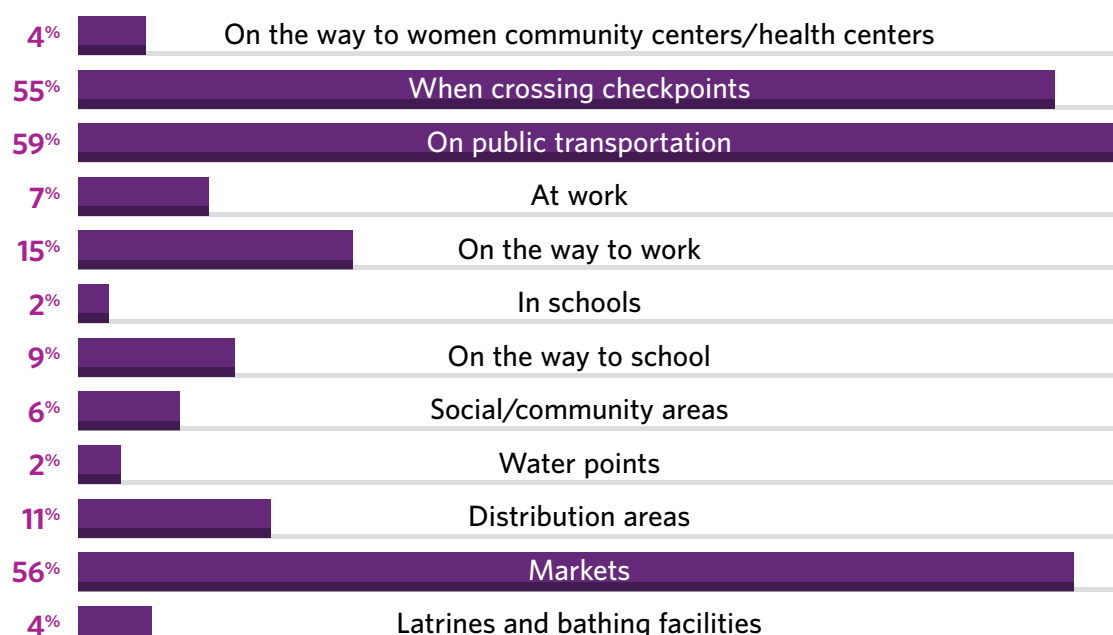
44,45 Ibid.

46 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

47 Maydaa, Chayyda, Myrntinen (2020). Impacts of the Syrian Civil war and Displacement on SOGIESC Populations. MOSAIC, Gender Justice & Security Hub. P. 6. Available at: <https://thegenderhub.com/publications/impacts-of-the-syrian-civil-war-and-displacement-on-sogiesc-populations/>

48 Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (2022) Dying a Thousand Times a Day: Sexual Slavery in Syrian Detention. Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights. Available at: <https://legal-sy.org/category/partners-publications/ldhr/>

Figure 4: % of households indicating areas in their community/neighbourhood where women and girls feel unsafe



Data from: Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

Affected populations

This report has highlighted the intersectional social categories (gender, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, displacement status, ability, marital status), and other factors (economic deterioration, COVID-19, ongoing displacement, food insecurity) which converge to create various levels of risk to different types of GBV. Adolescent girls and women, those with disabilities, those who are widowed and divorced, displaced, or older, and people with diverse SOGIESC are all affected by GBV in different ways.

People with diverse SOGIESC

GBV Experienced	Voices	Barriers to Services
Information on people with diverse SOGIESC was not possible during the data collection phase of this report (see section on Methods, Limitations and Challenges). However, diverse SOGIESC persons in Syria are particularly vulnerable to GBV based on their perceived gender and sexual orientation, as well as the current legal mechanisms such as Article 520 of the Syrian penal code which criminalises “carnal knowledge against the order of nature.” ⁴⁹ Violence against this group includes blackmail, extortion, kidnapping, arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual violence by armed actors , and other forms of physical violence and stigma . ⁵⁰	<p><i>“For example, we do not target LGBTQI+. We had some cases, but our staff do not have the technical capacities, in addition to security threats concerning the safety and well-being of our staff” (GBV Expert NES Hub).</i></p> <p><i>“Despite the fact that services are available to everyone without discrimination, the LGBTQI+ community is difficult to target, especially because of the legal framework, so there are no actors providing services to them” (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).</i></p>	GBV experts acknowledged that this group would not be comfortable disclosing to providers their experiences of GBV due to a fear of the repercussions of sharing their diversity, a lack of security, the current legal context, and the lack of trained service providers to adequately respond to this population.

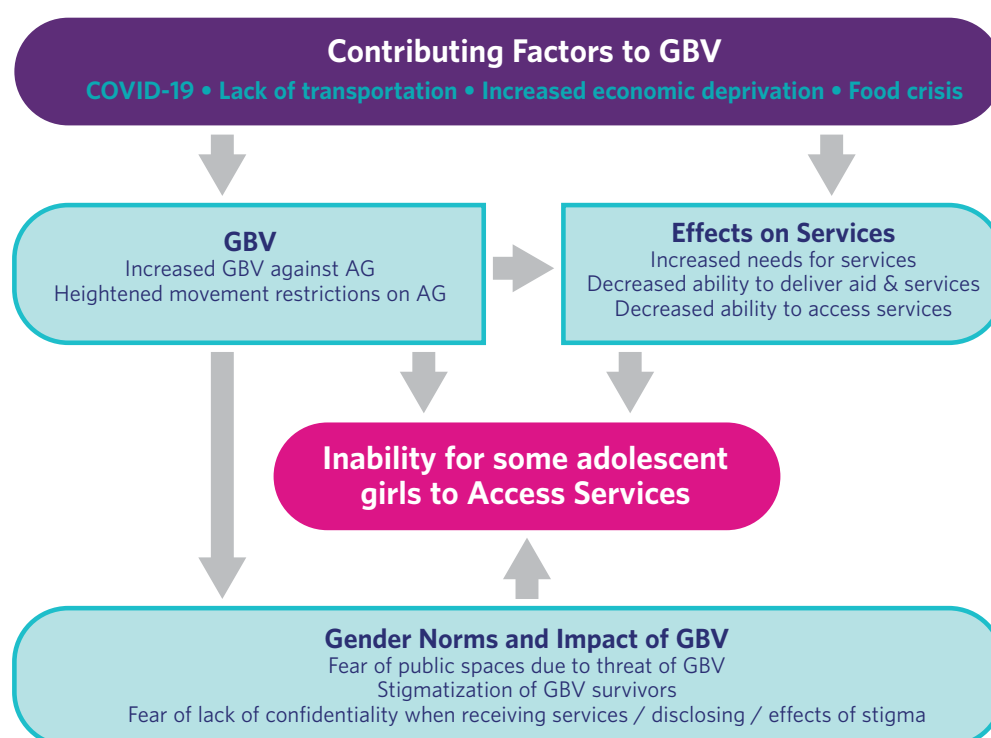
49 Centre for Operational Analysis and Research (2021) LGBTQ+ Syria: Experiences, Challenges and Priorities for the Aid Sector. COAR. P. 13. Available at: <https://coar-global.org/2021/06/22/lgbtq-syria-experiences-challenges-and-priorities-for-the-aid-sector/>

50 Maydaa, Chayyda, Myrtilinen (2020). Impacts of the Syrian Civil war and Displacement on SOGIESC Populations. MOSAIC, Gender Justice & Security Hub. P. 6. Available at: <https://thegenderhub.com/publications/impacts-of-the-syrian-civil-war-and-displacement-on-sogiesc-populations/>

Adolescent Girls

GBV Experienced	Voices	Barriers to Services
<p>Adolescent girls have been dramatically impacted by the ongoing economic crisis and food insecurity and are substantially at risk to GBV due to the intersecting social factors of gender and age. Women, girls, and GBV experts shared increasing reports of early marriage, child labour, sexual violence (including TFGBV, sexual harassment, and SEA), denial of education and resources and family violence.</p> <p>A combination of extreme levels of vulnerability, rising mental stress, and the inability to access services for adolescent girls has led this group to turn to suicide. According to the 2022 MSNA, 28% of girls in households throughout Syria reported signs of distress⁵¹.</p> <p>In addition, this group experiences physical violence, restrictions of movement, and psychological violence.</p>	<p><i>"Adolescent girls in our community are exposed to various forms of violence in a verbal, psychological and physical way because they cannot defend themselves" (Adolescent girl, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"There are concerns due to widespread epidemics and diseases, difficult roads, long distances, delays in receiving services, fear of exploitation, fear that service providers are untrained in the principles of humanitarian work, especially confidentiality, lack of transportation, fear of harassment" (Adolescent girl, Dana sub-district, Idleb governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"As adolescents, they are more vulnerable to violence, including bullying, rape, harassment and child labour. We hear that there are some of them who may commit suicide" (Older woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate).</i></p>	<p>A perceived increase in violence against adolescent girls resulted in fear and heightened movement restrictions, reducing girls' ability to access services. As some violence against adolescent girls is also in public spaces, this adds to the limitation of girls accessing services in these spaces.</p> <p>Societal stigma for GBV survivors and fears of limited confidentiality when seeking services also act as barriers for adolescent girls to seek services.</p>

Figure 5: Barriers to services for Adolescent Girls



51 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

Figure 6: Factors contributing to increase of suicide amongst adolescent girls



Adolescent Girls and Women with Disabilities

GBV Experienced	Voices	Barriers to Services
<p>66% of all internally displaced households in Syria include members with disabilities, with women and girls slightly more likely to have a disability.⁵² Women and girls with disabilities are at significant risk of GBV due to the intersecting discrimination they experience based on gender and ability.</p> <p>Women and girls with disabilities experience heightened levels of violence in the home by family members, including psychological and verbal violence, as well as restrictions of movement and denial of rights and resources.</p> <p>This group experiences heightened levels of social violence due to discrimination against persons with disabilities.</p> <p>Women and girls with disabilities are often denied an education, due to restrictions of movement, and a lack of education facilities and programmes designed to meet their needs.</p> <p>This group also experiences sexual violence, including sexual harassment.</p>	<p><i>"People with mental and physical disabilities, especially women and girls, are exposed to more violence, as they are unable to protect and defend themselves and they are more vulnerable to exploitation" (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"I suffer from paralysis in my hand, and I need electrical stimulation therapy three times per week, but my family does not allow me to go because of the local situation, which makes it difficult for a girl to leave her house" (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"A person with disabilities suffers from medical negligence, shortage of medications and they face various abuses in an ignorant society that is unaware of the suffering of these people and how to support them" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).</i></p>	<p>Social stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities deprive women and girls with disabilities of education, rights and resources.</p> <p>Movements and access to services often depend on accompaniment by a chaperon and transportation, but can also be restricted by the surrounding insecurity.</p> <p>If health services are available, a person with a disability may face discrimination at health facilities or receive inadequate care.</p> <p>Women and girls with disabilities also face extreme barriers to employment, livelihoods, and housing.</p>

52 Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) (2021) Disability and Displacement in Syria: 2021 IDP Report Series. HNAP.

Displaced Adolescent Girls and Women

GBV Experienced	Voices	Barriers to Services
<p>The majority of GBV within Syria occurs against displaced women and girls.⁵³ Consistently, this group reported social violence and discrimination from host communities. Much of the discrimination, as well as difficulties to fulfil basic needs for displaced families has exacerbated domestic violence against women and girls, as well as early marriage, and various forms of exploitation (See Box: <i>Exploitation of Displaced Women and Girls</i> below)</p> <p>Sexual violence is heightened for displaced women and girls, including harassment, SEA, and TFGBV.</p> <p>The levels of sexual violence for adolescent girls and women in camps was often met by male family members with further movement restrictions.</p> <p>Early marriage was also reported as more frequent for displaced adolescent girls due to a lack of livelihood options and an increased fear for displaced girls' safety from sexual violence in camps and shared shelters.</p> <p>The high rates of sexual violence, early marriage, and movement restrictions also contributed to the deprivation of education for displaced adolescent girls.</p>	<p><i>"Violence occurs in all parts of the camp." (Adolescent girl, Hole sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"In our community, beating is widespread, as is inheritance denial and verbal violence. After displacement, sexual violence has occurred a lot, especially in camps and crowded places. This phenomenon has become widespread" (Adult woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"We are deprived of education because the school is far away and there are no sufficient schools in the camp. Our parents justify preventing us from attending school by their concerns about us, and because they believe the girl's fate is to be married" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).</i></p>	<p>Displaced women and girls experience extreme barriers to services, especially due to their location in camps. Movement restrictions, a lack of transportation, documentation, as well as fears of GBV are all barriers to accessing services. Also, displaced women and girls experience heightened amounts of SEA at distribution points, creating barriers to accessing services.</p> <p>Displaced women also experienced heightened barriers to employment as well as access to housing.</p>

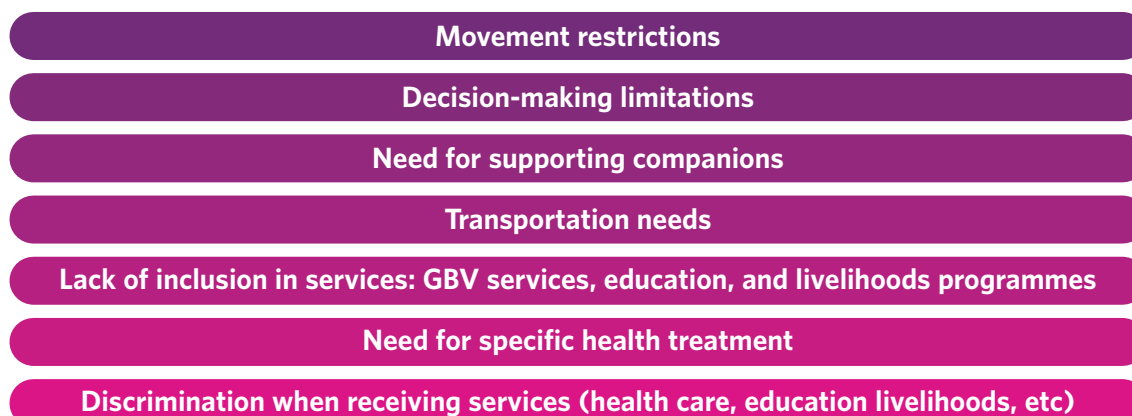
Older Women

GBV Experienced	Voices	Barriers to Services
<p>Age, compounded with gender inequality, creates risk factors for older women. Over half of all older persons in Syria have disabilities, with older women more likely to be disabled.⁵⁴ The types of GBV that older women experience overlaps with the violence directed at women with disabilities</p>	<p><i>"Older people do not have the strength to defend themselves" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"Woman over 60 are not subjected to violence, on the contrary, she is respected, and no one bothers her, she makes decisions, and no one prevents her going out or insults her" (Adult woman, Al-Mayadin sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).</i></p> <p><i>"But the older women have authority and respect in some families due to their age, while in other families her husband or son may swear at her and insult her, especially if she is sick or disabled" (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).</i></p>	<p>Older women experience extreme barriers to services, including movement restrictions, a lack of transportation, a reliance on accompaniment to service providers, a lack of knowledge of services, as well as a lack of inclusion in services, including GBV services. Older women also experience discrimination when accessing health services and are vulnerable to exploitation at distribution points.</p>

53 Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) (2021) Disability and Displacement in Syria: 2021 IDP Report Series. HNAP.

54 Ibid.

Figure 7: barriers to basic needs and services for women and girls with disabilities



Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced

GBV Experienced	Voices	Barriers to Services
<p>Gender norms often place the blame of divorce upon women and/or girls. Due to this heightened blame, divorced women and girls experience compounded stigma and discrimination, creating heightened levels of GBV for these groups, including sexual, physical, psychological, and economic violence, as well as denial of resources and education, and restrictions of their movement.</p> <p>Both groups experience extreme barriers to accessing resources as well as their own children. For example, it was shared that women and girls who are divorced experience discrimination when returning to their families of origin following their divorce, including the denial of basic needs such as food.</p> <p>Additionally, divorced women and girls may experience the denial of access to their children. It was commonplace for many adolescent girls and women to relinquish custody, and or be forced to abandon their children when marrying into a new family, and many unaccompanied minors to have lost a caregiver due to new marriages.</p> <p>Widows and divorcees are particularly vulnerable to economic violence, experiencing control by their families either financially or in terms of their right to work.</p> <p>Widows in “widows camps” experience extreme levels of GBV (see Box: Widows Camps).</p>	<p><i>“Widows and divorced women suffer from stigma and lack of job opportunities. Even the employer exploits them financially and the family prevents them from leaving the house claiming that the community will scorn them” (Adult woman, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate).</i></p> <p><i>“When the harasser knows that you are divorced or widowed, then you are easy prey” (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).</i></p> <p><i>“Widows may be exploited and even sexually harassed by those who look at them as an easy commodity. No one supports them or protects them” (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).</i></p> <p><i>“Divorced women are the most vulnerable group to violence. Some of them are forced to leave their children to allow other men to marry them and cease the gossip about her in the community. Also, she wouldn’t find anyone to help her protect herself or her children if she decided not to marry again and raise her children alone (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).</i></p> <p><i>“Divorced women that return to their family house are deprived of their food share” (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate).</i></p> <p><i>“I am a widow, and my daughter was divorced at a young age. I sometimes work to meet the needs of the family, but she is unable to meet her needs as well, as her brother does not allow her to work or leave the house” (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).</i></p> <p><i>“Barriers are increasing. When a woman divorces, the ex-partner keeps key documents required for accessing services by the woman. Everything is through the husband or male family member. Humanitarian assistance has a long way to go to mainstream GBV issues and so mitigate the risk” (GBV Expert, NES Hub)</i></p>	<p>In general, the stigma associated with being widowed or divorced creates extreme barriers to services for both groups.</p> <p>Specifically for divorced women, a combination of heightened levels of social stigma, as well as the movement restrictions by their families creates substantial barriers for this group to access resources, including education, protection services, WGSS, distributions, employment, and housing.</p>

Specific findings:

Adolescent Girls are Often Divorced:

Women and girls, as well as experts, shared that due to the early age in which adolescent girls are expected to marry, and the rise in early marriages, divorce is increasing. As divorcees, adolescent girls are often placed in more vulnerable positions, because they then carry a stigma and are typically blamed for the divorce: *"Our neighbour's daughter is 14 years old. They married her to a 17-year-old boy. She married just for a month then got divorced and came back to her family. When I ask her to visit me, her parents stop her because she is divorced and can't go out. My parents prevent me from visiting my friend because they claim she will teach me bad things"* (Adolescent girl, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). Despite the increase in divorce, women and girls consistently shared that divorce is considered shameful, and divorced women and girls are stigmatised by their families and society: *"When a woman asks for divorce, the community considers her shameful, and after divorce, she's stigmatised by the community. They say that if she were good, her husband would not have divorced her"* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Widow Camps:

A significant number of divorced and widowed women reside in so called "widows' camps" in NWS. These sites have been reported since 2014, with a total of 42 recorded in Idleb and Aleppo governorates as of 2021.⁵⁵ Currently it is estimated that these sites contain approximately 12,715 women and children.⁵⁶

The designated camps are IDP sites developed and maintained with the idea to separate un-married women from relatives, males, and communities in an attempt to protect them from violence as well as a perceived attempt to protect their "honour". The creation of these camps is based on harmful ideas of gender norms which reinforce stigmatisation of women on account of their marital status. These sites are developed and maintained with the idea that unmarried women create shame for their families, and due to social perceptions and discrimination, they are greatly exposed to violence and therefore need to be separated from community members to reduce interactions and exposure to violence, reinforcing harmful practices and marginalisation.⁵⁷

Moreover, the "widows' camps" have been documented as exacerbating GBV and protection risks for divorced and widowed women and girls, as well as their children, and further stigmatising this group.⁵⁸ Divorced and widowed women and girls experience extreme **restrictions of their movement** by camp managers: *"Widows are currently subjected to psychological and verbal violence, whether in widows' camps or in mixed camps due to social stigma and community opinion, and they are subjected to restrictions on personal freedom by their families and the camp administration"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idleb governorate). Such restrictions are maintained through camp rules, regulations, and monitoring, and have been described as "like being in prison."⁵⁹ Such restrictions are carried out by local authorities who are predominately male.

While it is assumed by IDPs and host communities that women and girls in "widows camps" receive a plethora of services, they are deprived of many protection services. These sites provide shelter and food, however, there are very few protection services available, and access to camps by humanitarian organisations is very limited.⁶⁰ GBV experts confirmed that those living within these camps are unable to access humanitarian services outside of the segregated camps (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

A GBV expert also confirmed that women in these camps experience a deprivation of resources both within the camp, and by families who assume women are receiving support. The expert explained: *"...these women are deprived of financial resources by the families of their husbands, under the pretext that the camp is providing them with housing and assistance"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).

Alarmingly, widows' camps are not safe spaces, and in addition to deprivation of resources, adolescent girls and women experience **harassment, exploitation, and forced and early marriage**.⁶¹ Additionally, separation and isolation in the camps creates compounding vulnerability for women and girls, putting them at higher risk to **SEA**, and mental health issues, including suicidal ideation and attempts.⁶²

In addition to several protection concerns for women, so-called "widow's camps" have also created considerable child protection concerns. This includes the camp requirement that all boys must leave the camps once they turn 13, putting them at risk of child labour, recruitment, early marriage, and other risks.⁶³

55 Protection Cluster (PC), GBV Sub-Cluster (GBV SC) and CP Sub Cluster (CP SC) (2021) Brief on the so-called "Widows Camps" in Northwest Syria.

56, 57 Ibid.

58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63 Ibid.

Figure 8: Consequences of GBV



Impact of GBV and Coping Mechanisms

Women and girls face severe physical, psychological, economic, and social consequences because of the GBV to which they are subjected. While there is noted increase of GBV, likely due to increased reporting of GBV incidents, the most reported coping mechanism employed by women and girls was to do nothing and to remain silent. This new trend demonstrates how resiliency is even further exhausted after more than 12 years of conflict, economic turmoil, and continuous external factors compounding the gendered violence they are threatened to, sometimes daily.

Impact on Women's and Girls' Health

"There is physical violence that affects the victim's health" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Physical consequences of GBV are vast and can be severe or even deadly. Physical and sexual violence can lead to physical injuries, some leading to permanent disabilities: *"A woman experiences violence from her husband and sometimes beatings, and she mentioned that she was beaten by her husband for years, which led to a loss of hearing in one of her ears"* (Adult woman with disability, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate). These injuries can impact women's and girls' ability to live their lives, hold jobs, attend school, leave the house, and act as a caregiver.

Sexual violence can lead to numerous reproductive health consequences, including sexually transmitted infections and forced or unwanted pregnancies: "... survivors might suffer physically from violent sexual abuse, particularly when penetrated by foreign objects. Finally, things such as sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies resulting from sexual violence crimes have medical and psychological effects on the survivors."⁶⁴

Early marriage also leads to child pregnancy which can have serious, long-term consequences on a girl's health: "From the perspective of healthcare providers, many interviewed health workers expressed deep concern about the increasing numbers of child pregnancies amongst adolescent girls. The lack of awareness within communities about the negative impacts of child pregnancy, coupled with the limited availability of qualified human resources in reproductive health and lack of equipment, pose an immense risk to the reproductive health of adolescent girls. This is further exacerbated by COVID-19 where gynaecologists are unable to treat adolescent girls in quarantine rooms due to a lack of personal protective equipment necessary for their work. Gynaecologists also noted that they are performing hysterectomies on women aged 20-25 years due to the high number of caesarean sections performed previously during adolescence."⁶⁵

Lastly, women and girls are killed as a result of GBV, whether intentionally, including "honour killings", or as a result of the health consequences: "*Women and girls in the community are subjected to many types of violence like...physical violence...honour killings, kidnapping and death threats*" (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Psychological Impact

"Silence, sadness and sometimes suicidal thoughts" (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

In 2022, 58.4% of households reported women experiencing signs of self-diagnosed distress, such as being nervous, irritable, worried, sad, hopeless, or experiencing difficulties sleeping or performing everyday life activities; and 27.7% of households reported girls experiencing signs of self-diagnosed distress, such as fear of being alone, nightmares, being nervous, worried, sadness, or hopelessness.⁶⁶ Some reported that women and girls may suffer extreme psychological distress from experiencing GBV. Many resort to crying and isolating themselves: "*They start sleeping a lot so*

that they do not need to confront reality" (Adult woman with disability, A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate). The effect on women's and girls' mental health may also impact feelings surrounding their relationships and community: "*Woman will be affected mentally and hate their community"* (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate). The impact on both their wellbeing and relationships may be especially true in instances of sexual violence that can lead to trauma in women and girls: "Sexual violence crimes frequently have long-lasting, even permanent effects on the survivors' reproductive and sexual health. Negative psychosocial impact may be triggered by sexual relations with their spouses, which can cause rejection, placing a great amount of strain on marriages and sometimes leading to divorce. Some women, especially young girls, might become unable to have sexual relationships ever again due to trauma."⁶⁷

Early marriage, denial of education, and other forms of GBV against adolescent girls result in a loss of their childhood: "*Violence accompanies the girl at different stages of her life in preventing her from playing and going to school as a child and then marrying the first groom that proposed to her family"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

As was determined from findings last year, and mentioned previously in this report (see Introduction and section on Affected Populations), suicide was still found to be an increasing trend impacting women and girls in Syria: "*We are hearing about an escalation of suicide attempts, at Whole of Syria level, and this means that some of the women and girls are taking extreme actions to end their suffering*" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria). With the more-than-a-decade-long conflict and additional factors such as economic deterioration, unstable housing situations, and water crises over the years, there is no evidence to link all suicides to GBV. However, women and girls did report suicide as resulting from violence in some situations: "*Often, I think of suicide when my elder brother beats me*" (Adolescent girl, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Suicide was mentioned as an impact of GBV for women and girls along with death through killing. Experts in the field consistently emphasised suicide as an ever-growing concern: "*The impact is that women and girls are devastated, they are more vulnerable, they are forced to take their children out of school and send them to work, they are traumatised, there is a lot of threat of sexual harassment. They have suicidal thoughts. This made us talk more with the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) colleagues*" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria). However, limited mental health services are available in Syria (see section on GBV Response).

64 Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (2022) Dying a Thousand Times a Day: Sexual Slavery in Syrian Detention. Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights. P.39. Available at: <https://legal-sy.org/category/partners-publications/ldhr/>

65 Plan International (2021) In Harm's Way: Adolescent Girls in Northwest Syria: Survivors of Vulnerability, Inequality and Discrimination. November 2021. Plan International. P.6. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/harms-way-adolescent-girls-northwest-syria-survivors-vulnerability>

66 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

67 Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights (2022) Dying a Thousand Times a Day: Sexual Slavery in Syrian Detention. Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights. P. 39. Available at: <https://legal-sy.org/category/partners-publications/ldhr/>

Economic Impact

When women and girls are denied access to education, the opportunity to work, the use of their own wages, and their inheritance, there is a negative economic impact. Sometimes parents prevent their daughters from going to school so that they will not experience violence on the way to or at school: *"The community is affected as children don't attend school. Parents fear to send them there"* (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). However, denying girls education is violence in and of itself with generational consequences. When girls are denied education, their job opportunities and literacy are limited, affecting the health of both the woman and her family: *"Girls are deprived of education. They drop out of school so they become illiterate. Families want them to become productive, working to provide for their needs"* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). In fact, many women and girls addressed the issue of education in their recommendations (see Recommendations section).

With the deteriorating economic situation in Syria, women that are denied working opportunities, and a job market of inequality in which only certain jobs are considered "suitable" to women, households are missing out on much needed income, with severe consequences. This is of particular concern given that 7.2% of male headed households in Syria are completely unable to meet the basic needs but the number more than doubles for female headed households with 15.7% unable to meet basic needs according to 2022 MSNA.⁶⁸

Social Impact

Stigma for survivors of GBV is severe and can result in more violence as a risk mitigation method. Examples of this include movement restrictions, denying girls education, early and forced marriage, loss of children, and physical and psychological abuse from their family.

As mentioned previously in this report (see section on Forced Marriage), stigma weighs heavily in cases of sexual violence, where limited redress mechanisms can lead to girls being forced to marry their perpetrators. Refusing is not always an option as her family may not accept her and "honour killing" is a potential threat.

Similarly, survivors of IPV have limited options and experience community shame and stigma. A woman who reports or divorces her husband may experience community stigma and can then face further violence from her in-laws (denial of children) or from her family if she returns to them (e.g., brother or father restricting movement, denying opportunity to work, or forcing her to re-marry) (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced). When asked about the impact of violence, adult women

from a respondent group in Al-Hasakeh governorate agreed that men subject women to various types of violence including verbal, physical, and sexual violence and they consider this behaviour as manly and part of the "traditions that give this authority". As a result, due to worry for their children and worry for society's judgement, where women are blamed for the violence they are subjected to, women are not allowed to talk about the violence and are supposed to suffer in silence.

Coping Mechanisms

"The layers of vulnerability are increasing, such as the economic issues, the safety and security escalation or the pandemic. We see escalation of mental health concerns and escalation of suicide attempts and escalation of negative mechanisms. The layers of vulnerability are also affecting coping mechanisms in a very bad way" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).

The most frequently cited coping mechanism for women and girls was to remain silent and do nothing. This was chosen for a few different reasons. Some stated doing nothing as a survival mechanism was to avoid further violence or social stigma: *"As for women and girls, they keep silent when they face sexual violence, and may resort to social isolation fearing scandal or murder, and in some cases, they may resort to protection centres"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idleb governorate). Attempts to seek other resolutions could backfire and result in more violence or being returned to the same situation: *"If the woman leaves her husband's house and returns to her family, they will bring her back to him or even beat her"* (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate). Others shared that they did nothing because they were of the belief that nothing would improve the situation, specifically that the judicial mechanisms could not improve their situation: *"My sister was severely beaten by her husband but she could not report him to the police out of fear for her children. She hoped that he would improve his treatment with her, but he continued to insult her, and she preferred to stay with her children so that he would not deprive her of them, if she filed a judicial complaint against him"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate). Also, seeking medical treatment is not always an option: *"The society monitors them closely and will talk about them, even if they go to the doctor"* (Adolescent girl, A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Lastly, some remained silent out of a feeling of resignation, or acceptance of the violence.

To the contrary, many reported that they disclosed the violence to family, friends, a public authority, or another trusted person as a coping strategy: *"They went to their sisters or neighbours"* (Adult woman with disabilities, A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Sometimes women are unable to disclose to family or friends given the stigma behind GBV, therefore they seek out humanitarian organisations: *"Many women fear retaliation of the husband or that the family will talk badly about her among relatives, and this is why women go to safe spaces and talk to the case manager to see if that*

68 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

will help them" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Seeking out GBV organisations has become more popular in recent years, particularly for girls who normally only engage with family in the household due to movement restrictions: "Due to customs and traditions, girls or women in general cannot escape the family network. They are restricted to the family, and if they need help, they go to the older person in the family. In recent times, some go to the community support centre for advice and assistance where there is a safe space for them and full freedom of expression" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). This is also true for divorced women, who, facing much stigma from society, need spaces for support: "Divorced women go to women's support centres because they find confidentiality and privacy and they help them access services in order to provide the necessary support. Sometimes they also resort to trusted friends, but in some cases, they are restricted due to customs and traditions that limit their movement" (Adolescent girl, Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Several women and girls addressed judicial or community-based redress mechanisms as a coping mechanism. Some considered reporting to these authorities as a legitimate option for recourse: *"Upon being exposed to violence, the best place is to resort to the clan sheikh, or to the relevant authorities to reduce the spread of violence" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Others found the authorities as either not present or not useful for addressing GBV: "There is no law, so it is in vain to complain. If anything they fear more violence" (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate). In fact, women and girls recommended addressing judicial and legal gaps as a mitigation to ending GBV (see Recommendations section).*

Concern of social stigma also prevented some women and girls from considering using the judiciary or redress mechanisms: *"Often, there is no recourse to the judiciary or redress mechanisms due to fear of stigma and the community's opinion" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Women and girls with disabilities also face challenges in accessing these types of mechanisms: "For people with disabilities, when they are exposed to violence, they cannot do anything. Sometimes they resort to the authorities, and sometimes they must accept the situation because they are unable to reach the relevant authorities" (Adolescent girl with disabilities, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Some areas also lack functioning judiciary mechanisms: "There are no courts or judiciary in the region, and from the tribal point of view, whoever goes to the judiciary has violated customs and traditions and becomes a social pariah" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). It should be noted that laws in Syria change by area and may be dependent upon which actor controls the area. Therefore, some women and girls report having no laws to protect them from violence, whereas others point to laws as influencing a reduction in violence: "Current laws in our society have contributed to reducing women's vulnerability to violence" (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). Overwhelmingly,*

community "tradition" pressures women and girls to not report to official judiciary mechanisms: "We resort to our family because it is shameful to resort to judiciary" (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Many women and girls spoke of seeking out protection or other relevant services for assistance when coping with GBV: *"As for women, they go to centres that care about women's affairs such as the women's centre and the safe space. They attend awareness sessions that contribute to reducing the spread of violence, as well as confidential consultations in case they are exposed to violence" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). These services are beneficial for and valued by adolescent girls and women and can be lifesaving (See sections on Women and Girls Safe Spaces and Perceived Impact of GBV Services): "Girls are attending awareness sessions within the safe space, psychological support sessions, sessions on GBV such as early marriage and forms of violence, as well as educational courses within the safe space. We feel safe while receiving these services" (Adolescent girl, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia Governorate). To cope with the violence, women and girls will seek out other needed services beyond protection, such as health, legal, shelter, or vocational training: "Divorced women resort to protection and psychological support centres, case management and trying to find job opportunities by attending vocational training sessions in protection centres to help them generate an income and protect themselves against exploitation" (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

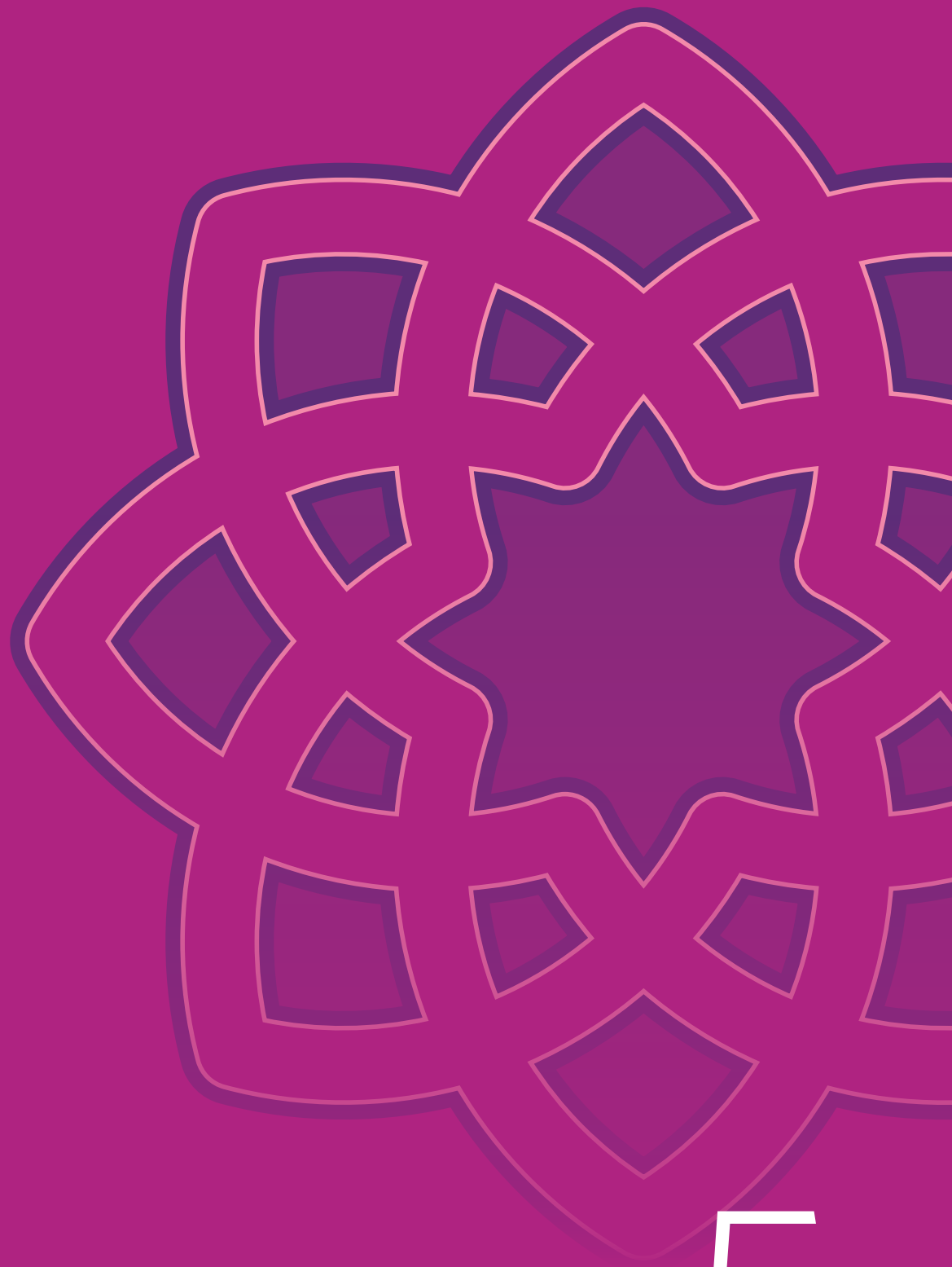
A few mentioned negative coping mechanisms including drug use, dropping out of school, early or forced marriage, movement restrictions, or survival sex that women, girls, and their families employ. Survival sex is just one of many coping strategies women and girls are employing to face current circumstances: *"The dire socioeconomic situation, compounded by COVID-19, has also meant that more communities are turning to harmful strategies to cope, including early and serial marriage, survival sex, and other forms of exploitation."*⁶⁹

In recent years, violence against women and girls has become normalised, and many report communities succumbing to acceptance: *"One of the participants talked about stories of violence by fathers and husbands where physical and verbal violence was practiced and that they consider violence as something normal. They say women should accept it based on the customs and traditions that see women as inferior" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Women and girls continue to demonstrate enormous strength in the face of immense challenges and violence. However, while women and girls still demonstrate

⁶⁹ United Nations (2021). Joint Statement by Muhannad Hadi, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis and Luay Shabaneh, UNFPA Regional Director: International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. United Nations. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/joint-statement-muhannad-hadi-regional-humanitarian-coordinator-syria-1>

resiliency, as is represented by increased reporting and access to WGSS, there are signs that it is waning: *"It is difficult to show resilience after 11 years of crisis and its consequences, the pandemic, the increase in market prices and rent, the whole bad economic situation and the lack of livelihood opportunities and high rates of unemployment. All of this is testing the resilience of women and girls, especially as a whole generation has grown up during this crisis"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria). Some cite the rise in suicide as an indicator of this: *"Suicide is increasing. It's a clear example of resilience decreasing"* (GBV Expert, NES). For signs of hope and resiliency expressed by women and girls, see section on Hopes and Dreams of Women and Girls: Recommendations.



5

Responding to GBV:
Specialised Services

With trends of increasing GBV, an increase in disclosures of IPV, noted trends of early marriage as a coping mechanism, it's no surprise that GBV prevention and response services are of great importance for supporting women and girls (see Recommendations section). Unfortunately, numerous women and girls reported closure of WGSS and services in their areas. This is of great concern as WGSS and GBV response services are lifesaving interventions, operating in circumstances of insecure judicial systems and economic deterioration, all affecting survivors of GBV.

Availability, Quality and Access to Services

Women and Girls Safe Spaces

WGSS were the most referenced type of protection services that women and girls mentioned. Sometimes they were called "protection centres" or "women's centres". This level of awareness is a positive sign, however. Women that were consulted were often those already attending the WGSS or aware of them while others, even more in need, might not be aware of the WGSS: *"There are many protection services for women in general and battered women in particular. If the abused woman is not able to leave the house or does not have some freedom, she will certainly not be able to know about these services, such as psychological support services, recreational activities, or even professional courses that are provided in the centres. If I knew about these services, I would go to the centres because I like to meet new friends. I know that there are services for battered women, but women who can't leave their homes like widows or divorced women will not know about these services"* (Adult woman, As-Sweida Sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Through the WGSS, women were aware of various services they could receive. Some women and girls also recognise the necessity of WGSS given the limitations for receiving social services through public authorities: *"These centres are an urgent need in the region in the absence of a fair judicial authority. Oppressed women and children have a place to feel valued and their opinion is heard, and they feel comfortable"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus Sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

However, it should be noted that while women and girls recognised the positive effects of WGSS services, they identified some limitations. First, there are few WGSS operating and a large service gap in rural areas: *"The existing protection centre is the only one and does not cover the entire region"* (Adolescent girl, Thiban sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). Some WGSS have closed which causes disruption and potential harm for women and girls in the community: *"There were many projects, but they are closed now"* (Adult woman, Afrin Sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Some women and girls underlined

how some WGSS work with limited opening hours, thus only providing safety to women for a few hours each day: *"Do you mean with protection services centre and the nurseries? In fact, there is no legal or political support, not even in the centre because the facilitators protect us for only two hours a day when we attend an activity and support session, which is usually two days a week, then we return home to be exposed to violence again"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Regardless of the limitations, WGSS are often the only place where women and girls can receive protection services, including legal counselling, psychological support, and vocational training.

WGSS can be integrated through other services, specifically health, to act as an easy and somewhat confidential entry point. This enables ease of referrals from women and girls seeing doctors and in need of GBV response services, and vice versa. Some service providers reported adequate funding to sustain or grow their WGSS services, but many organisations face funding challenges and have had to close spaces: *"We have safe spaces, and all of our safe spaces are integrated with health services. They are integrated with health and mental health to make referrals easier. Most of our clients use the health services like reproductive health and MHPSS as entry points. Most of the facilities had to exit and close safe spaces, because of decreased funding"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).

Case Management and Psychosocial Support

Case management for GBV survivors can be provided in WGSS, through some other facilities such as health centres that provide GBV and sexual reproductive health integrated services, or through remote hotlines: *"There are women that go to specialised safe spaces to talk to a case manager"* (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Through case management, survivors of GBV can receive help from an organisation, are informed about all options available to them and are provided with the needed services either directly or by being referred to other services through interagency referral mechanisms: *"Strategies include...women being aware of referral mechanisms. Also, the training of GBV actors; all of them know about the services. When they have cases related to violence, they know how to refer"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Women reported the benefit of this type of support: *"It is different for divorced women by benefiting from psychological support services, case management, working toward empowerment, support and developing their skills"* (Adult woman, Harim Sub-district, Idleb governorate). Often the holistic support of women's and girls' empowerment by WGSS are seen by women and girls as directly supporting survivors of GBV, although there are some groups such as divorced and widowed women that may not be able to access the services: *"Women, girls, divorced women*

and widows have difficulty in reaching the centres due to family pressure, the inferior view of these women by their community, prevention from going out, social stigma and bullying by parents and brothers who impose their control over women” (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idleb Governorate).

In addition to case management, a few women and girls reported psychosocial support (PSS) available for GBV survivors: *“This centre provides a safe space for women where they get psychological support and relief from stress” (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* Some women and girls consider this type of support beneficial: *“The activity I like most is psychological support because it increases our self-confidence and helps us alleviate the difficulties we face” (Adolescent girl, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* Others find it less impactful: *“There is a psychological support service but with no real results” (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).*

However, similar to case management, accessing PSS services can be challenging for all women and girls due to distance, although mobile protection services have proven effective in these instances: *“It is difficult for us to access psychological support centres because they are far from our tents, and the education centre is more than two kilometres from our tent, and it is difficult for us to reach there. The only team that reaches us is the mobile team, which provides psychological support, awareness services and recreational activities” (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Health Services

Comprehensive health services are essential for GBV response, specifically to treat survivors of physical assault and sexual assault, including rape. Clinical management of rape (CMR) requires specific medications (to address health outcomes of rape including pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV transmission), all of which have a small window of time (typically a maximum of 72 hours) to be administered: *“Most of the reported incidents (41%) were received one month or more after the occurrence of incidents. This is critical especially in the case of rape incidents where the response within the first 72 hours is lifesaving. GBVIMS taskforce members highlighted the gaps in awareness raising efforts that specifically address that response window.”⁷⁰*

In past years, health service providers in certain areas have not been able to procure this medication and implement this treatment. A proper response also includes a PSS component and establishment of GBV referral pathways to connect the survivor to any other services if she so wishes. As such, GBV service providers in Syria are collaborating with health service

providers to support this response: *“We are working with the Reproductive Health Working Group to improve access for women and girls to reproductive health services” (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).*

Challenges also exist to supporting survivors of IPV through a health response, including limited medical supplies, treatments, and limited free services or safe access to services: *“I was beaten by my husband for years, which led to a loss of hearing in one of my ears. I went to the hospital and the doctor told me that I needed an operation, and due to the costs, I haven’t had the operation yet. The doctor told me that I need a hearing aid device and I couldn’t get it” (Adult woman with disability, Ariha Sub-district, Idleb governorate).*

Justice and Legal Services

As mentioned previously (see section on Coping Mechanisms), legal services for survivors of GBV are limited in Syria. Efforts have been made by GBV service providers to raise awareness on legal related issues and provide legal consultations when possible: *“In regard to legal counselling, female and male lawyers conduct awareness sessions here in the space” (Adult woman, Hama Sub-district, Hama governorate).* The impact of these awareness sessions is great as awareness on relevant legal issues is otherwise limited: *“There were people who had no idea of self-protection before they came here. They were being misled about their rights. But in legal sessions, they explained to us that some traditional marriages were not official, and that woman should not be deceived” (Adult woman, Hama Sub-district, Hama governorate).*

However, there is also some stigma with going through any official justice system: *“There is also corruption in the law centres. I faced injustice because my ex-husband fled to another country to avoid paying my dues, but the judge forced him to pay, and I had to pay a large amount of it to the lawyer. But when another man asked me to marry him, he found out that I was involved in legal matters, so he changed his mind” (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

Despite the challenges and stigma paired with utilising the judicial system, some recognise the great importance and need for legal services: *“Although the legal services are limited in Syria, especially for women who face violence, protection services provide legal counselling and advice that is extremely important” (Adult woman, As-Sweida Sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).* However, as is with other services, legal services are limited and suffer from closures: *“A community centre provided psychological support, children’s activities, women’s courses and a female lawyer for counselling but it has now been closed” (Adult woman, Damascus Sub-district, Damascus governorate).* Similar to case management services, vulnerable groups such as divorced and widowed women and women with disabilities have difficulties accessing legal services: *“It was also mentioned that divorced women, widowed women, and persons with disabilities are the most vulnerable to*

⁷⁰ GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub) (2021) GBVIMS Quarterly Report Q3 July - September 2021.

neglect, bullying, and violence, and these categories are vulnerable and need support and protection in addition to legal assistance because they live in a rural area that is governed by customs and traditions” (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

GBV Awareness Raising

“Through attending awareness sessions, we got a lot of useful information, especially the legal advice that is provided by the lawyer. Women can access valuable information so even if she can’t protect herself from violence, she can at least learn how to avoid it or know how to respond” (Adult woman, As-Sweida Sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Women and girls report attending GBV related awareness sessions focusing on responding to and preventing GBV, legal issues, and other relevant topics: *“Girls’ awareness courses on how to behave when exposed to violence” (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa Sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* GBV service providers have also been targeting men and boys – an important step of GBV prevention.

As previously mentioned, many women and girls report challenges reaching centres for services, but organisations have had apparent impact by deploying mobile teams to conduct awareness raising in homes: *“We have a lot of mobile teams that carry out home visits and provide important awareness sessions. Protection services are not available, there are no schools for people with disabilities, nor medical services that help them” (Adult woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

Awareness raising has had a ripple effect, where organisations are training their staff on conducting awareness raising on important information and GBV services available with women and girls in communities, who then spread the information and raise awareness with others in the community: *“What helped in this was the training of non-specialists, and conducting awareness sessions, especially about how to access these services, which in turn helped the beneficiaries raise awareness in the community” (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).* This effect is important especially for communities where awareness sessions on GBV are few and far in-between: *“As for sessions on violence, they are available, but very few” (Adult woman, Kisreh Sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Some sessions have also made great strides towards addressing intersectionality, such as gender equality, disability and inclusion: *“We attend the WGSS centre. We like this centre as a special space for women and girls and it treats people with disabilities and other people equally. We lack equality in the community and work to support, strengthen and educate women and girls of our age through awareness-raising sessions, as well as empowering them with professional skills. Attending this centre makes us feel that there is hope of a better future” (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh Sub-district,*

Al-Hasakeh governorate). Many women and girls also suggested extending these awareness raising sessions as a way to mitigate GBV in their communities (see Recommendations section).

Services’ Adaptation to COVID-19

There was seemingly less service provision disruption due to COVID-19 prevention precautions compared to the previous two years. Therefore, fewer adaptations to service provision due to COVID-19 were reported. However, GBV service providers still enacted the recommendations by providing remote service provision when possible: *“Strategies include providing services through the hotlines. When women are affected by violence, they are given a telephone number of the case manager, they can call and access the case manager at any time. Women are aware of referral mechanisms. Also, the training of GBV actors; all of them know about the services. When they have cases related to violence they understand how to refer” (GBV Expert, NES Hub).* Fortunately, some women and girls were aware of the availability of these hotlines when experiencing GBV incidents, useful in the case of COVID-19 lockdowns as well as for women and girls who may not be able to make it to the centres: *“There are mobile phone numbers to communicate with the centre’s protection services if we face an incident” (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).*

Perceived Impact of GBV Services

WGSS are providing lifesaving GBV services and activities, not only in terms of providing GBV case management, but also providing an actual safe space for women and girls in a country of insecurity, gender inequality and discrimination: *“The types of violence are verbal, physical, and sexual violence, but what happened to me was depriving me of education and school, especially after my family heard that one of the teachers was harassing female students, so they prevented me from going to school. Attending the safe space centre was an opportunity for me to live again, as I was thinking of committing suicide due to the stress that my family caused me” (Adolescent girl, Areesh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* One woman considers this support the most important humanitarian service they have received: *“My friends ask me why I am going to the centre and what are the benefits from it. They think that it is just for recreation. On the contrary, the respect and support that I receive in the centre are more important for me than all the leisure activities” (Adult woman with disability, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

Awareness raising on key GBV issues has had a positive impact shifting minds and culture, encouraging parents to avoid negative coping mechanisms like early marriage for their daughters: *“An example of a coping mechanism to avoid violence is when parents want their daughters to*

get married. After attending the activities, they changed their behaviour. When the mother joined the activity, we spoke about the importance of education and the need of supporting her family and girls. The girl was in the group and she also saw the importance of education. The child's education became a priority. She did not get married. They needed money and so they learned the skills to generate an income" (GBV Expert, NES Hub) (See Recommendations section).

While survivors of IPV are never responsible for their abusers' actions, some adolescent girls recognised the impact of attending the safe space as improving their mothers' situation of abuse, potentially because of safety planning and identifying coping mechanisms. An adolescent girl shared: *"When my father practices violence against my mother, she can do nothing, but she takes out her stress on us and beats us"*; another girl in the group responded: *"My mother was acting like this, but after attending the centre, she started to know how to deal with my father, and this eased our problems"* (Adolescent girls, Izra sub-district, Dar'a governorate). Similarly, some women gained skills from WGSS sessions, such as empowerment, awareness, or GBV case management sessions, that they can apply to improve other relationships in their household according to GBV experts in the field, producing a ripple effect of GBV awareness and risk mitigation with their daughters and other female relatives: *"Most of the women are using what they learn in the WGSS to communicate with partners at home. This is helping to evolve their relationship, as in the past they were not even able to speak at home. They are using the skills that they learn in the community and encouraging other women to participate in the WGSS activities. They are able to have better relationships with their daughters and to sit down and talk about menstruation and sexual violence. It is a sign that they can cope better with the violence"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).

In addition to offering support to mothers to improve relationships with their daughters, the safe spaces have also provided tools for adolescent girls to improve relationships with their parents: *"All the girls participate in the activities of the safe space. Some of them are receiving vocational training, others are participating in literacy courses... all the girls indicated that they participated in many awareness sessions, which had a positive role in changing the mechanism of communication with parents and families"* (Facilitator for group of adolescent girls, Izra sub-district, Dar'a governorate).

GBV services, specifically through WGSS, have led to women and girls developing strategies for GBV risk mitigation and targeted long-term GBV prevention through women's and girls' empowerment. This has included vocational training or small grants: *"Yes, all participants attend within the WGSSs. They confirmed that all the activities provided are useful. They include vocational activities that teach us professions through which we can earn a living, and that the focused and structured psychological support and awareness sessions play a big role in increasing our self-confidence. We have learned how to face violence and to work on preparing personal safety*

plans to protect ourselves and ensure that we are reducing exposure to violence. The mentoring project within the organisation offers girls the opportunity for training and development in return for a financial allowance, which helped many women and girls to start small projects and buy raw materials, and others to complete their education" (Facilitator for group of adolescent girls, Dana Sub-District, Idleb Governorate).

These empowering wins for women can also have a ripple effect, changing the mindsets of men in their lives when they see the positive benefits for the family: *"I enrolled in a hairdressing course, and thank God I learned and benefited, and now I am working at home. This helped and made my husband change his view a little, and I am paying my own way"* (Adolescent girl, Izra sub-district, Dar'a governorate).

Barriers to Accessing GBV Services

There were various barriers to accessing GBV services (see section on Affected Populations). The most frequently reported barrier to accessing services and aid was distance and/or lack of transportation: *"The lack of transportation and its high prices prevent a large number of girls and women who live in areas surrounding Hrak"* (Adolescent girl, Izra sub-district, Dar'a governorate). This is particularly true for people with disabilities: *"To support people with disabilities, there needs to be special transportation to access services"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate).

Gender norms and movement restrictions can also limit women and girls from leaving the home to access GBV services: *"The difficulties and challenges we face in accessing them are prevention by fathers, brothers, or husbands, especially if the girl is disabled or divorced"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Even when families may approve of women and girls accessing the services, they may limit the accessibility by setting conditions: *"There are challenges from the family concerning our permission to receive services, as we must finish all our household chores before we are allowed to attend the safe space"* (Older woman, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Lack of awareness of services was also cited as a barrier by women and girls to accessing services. This proves to be a challenge in operating in a context like Syria, where stigma surrounding GBV is so high that seeking out services can be a reason for community judgement. Therefore, there is a constant struggle between keeping services private and confidential while also raising awareness about the services: *"Most of the groups find it hard to learn about the services, because there are no advertisements or people from the safe spaces and organisations to provide information about the services"* (Adult woman with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Of particular relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic, even when service providers had established remote protection services, women and girls could not always access them due to limited technology: *"Some community groups have difficulties accessing remote services due to the lack of personal phones, no electricity and the reliance on solar energy, internet outages and poor connection, while most people can't read and write"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Additional concerns were expressed including lack of civil documentation (due to over a decade of war and displacement), lack of childcare, and no focus on the needs of specific groups (people with disabilities and older women were often highlighted): *"Some groups in the community face difficulties accessing these available services due to the centre's distance, rough roads in winter and the lack of transportation. This is also true where there is only one women's empowerment centre within the camp for women and girls, as this hinders a large number of beneficiaries from accessing the service, due to crowding. There is also a lack of special centres for older persons"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Women and girls also provided several recommendations to address these barriers (see Recommendations section).

Reporting Mechanisms for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

As mentioned previously in the report (see section on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse), with regards to SEA, 29% of women and girls live in areas with harassment occurring for women during access to humanitarian assistance and a minimum of 15% of women and girls live in locations where women receive requests for personal relationships in exchange for, or as a condition of, receiving humanitarian assistance or services⁷¹, but the actual percentage is likely higher in reality. Unfortunately, much of this exploitation and abuse goes unreported: *"SEA continues to be underreported. Across Syria, only 8% of households who were asked for personal relationships reported the experience through an existing complaint mechanism. Concerns about confidentiality were most frequently mentioned as the reason for not reporting (70%), followed by absence or lack of awareness of complaint mechanisms (64%)."*⁷²

Many women and girls report fearing SEA when accessing services/aid or report hearing of SEA cases occurring: *"I am afraid of receiving aid for fear that I will be exposed to sexual exploitation or asked to give money in exchange for aid"* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). Others did not feel this was a fear nor heard of any experiences: *"There are no*

safety concerns, services are free, there is nothing given in exchange for these services" (Adolescent girl, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate). Women and girls report that some specific groups are especially vulnerable to SEA: *"Widows, divorced women and older women are more exposed to exploitation because they are the most vulnerable groups"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate).

Awareness of SEA reporting mechanisms varies greatly. Some groups of women and girls are aware, largely because of targeted awareness campaigns by organisations: *"All the residents of the camp now know how to report an incident of exploitation to which they may be exposed. They gained this knowledge from awareness sessions carried out by international organisations in the camp"* (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). However, there are still many who are not aware of any existing mechanism, including multiple focus groups in which none of the women nor girls present were aware of any SEA reporting mechanisms: *"If I am exposed to a situation, to whom would I report a complaint about this? Who will follow up my complaint or even protect me from the one I complained against?"* (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate). Much of this varies from area to area, dependent upon where organisations can work and what PSEA efforts are in place: *"It's always expected that GBV is happening even if it's not reported. We invested in training other sectors for their staff to be aware and organise age/gender disaggregated lines, for example, during distributions. There were a lot of good efforts. In parallel, SEA awareness was raised with humanitarian actors, to train focal points and to disseminate information on reporting mechanisms, in close coordination with the GBV AoR. There is no specific analysis or feedback exercise we can rely on in terms of the impact of this PSEA awareness raising effort, but I think by comparing the efforts that have been done in this domain, I feel some survivors may have been empowered to report on these incidents, which should enhance the level of services. Still, a lot of work has still to be done"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).

Reporting SEA can come with great risk for the survivor or the person making the complaint (if different from the survivor), especially if the mechanisms are not operating according to adequate standards with respect to confidentiality and data protection: *"When the survivor reaches the point of reporting on SEA that she has been exposed to, this is a good indicator that something is being done to stop this from happening. We need to do more, and this is inspiring to me, and we could do more to measure how the mechanism is effective. I can't deny that reporting such incidents in certain locations would cause threats to survivors' life or the life of a family member. With the lack of funding and the deterioration of services in terms of WASH, non-food items and food, services are not the same in some communities, and not up to standard"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).

⁷¹ Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

⁷² WoS IA PSEA Network (October 2021). Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Syria: SEA and Humanitarian Assistance-Household Perceptions of Favors in Exchange For AID. HNAP. P. 3.

Some stated that they would report to camp managers or authorities if they faced SEA but would still fear denial of assistance as a consequence: *"We only tell the camp*

manager, and we can't tell anyone else because we're afraid we're going to be deprived of our food package" (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate). Others would opt not to report at all out of fear of denial of assistance: "I wouldn't report, as I fear being deprived from assistance" (Older woman, Khasham sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). This is a common, and potentially very real, fear. "When a favour is requested, beneficiaries often perceive assistance as being conditional upon an exchange. For the 9% of households that were asked for favours in the form of personal relationships – 56% of them stated that refusal to provide the favour would have resulted in the denial of the service or assistance."⁷³

Reach of GBV Programming during January – October 2022

During the period January to October 2022, the GBV response was able to reach 1113 communities and neighbourhoods with at least one type of GBV response service for GBV survivors and women and girls at risk of GBV by 129 organisations across WoS, a large increase for the same time period the year before of 799 communities and neighbourhoods (January – October 2021). Despite this progress compared to last year, there is still a large gap in reach of GBV services, particularly to more rural areas as reported by women and girls and GBV experts: "There is an overall shortage of funds for GBV interventions resulting in closure of safe spaces. The impact is that...there are few WGSS according to field team observation. No safe spaces mean no specialised GBV services, and no case management services because we need a safe and confidential environment to do that. We are decreasing access for more vulnerable women and girls to lifesaving interventions. No WGSS means that there is no focus on women and girls. We also eliminate a positive coping mechanism that women rely on from WGSS, removing an opportunity for the empowerment of women and girls. Also, there is a different prioritisation of interventions – for example there is more focus on survivors than empowerment. As a result, IPV, early marriage, domestic violence might therefore increase and the ability to cope with these types of GBV is made harder" (GBV Expert, NES hub).

With 7,319,955 people in need identified in 2022 in WoS for GBV programming, of which roughly 6.8 million are females, GBV programming was able to reach 921,868 people from January to October. This is slightly bigger than the unique number of beneficiaries reached during the same period in 2021 (917,689). The largest group reached was adult women 18 years and older, reaching roughly 526,023 (68% of those reached) followed by girls (aged 12-17) with 128,071 (16% of those reached).

Figure 9: Unique people reached by year

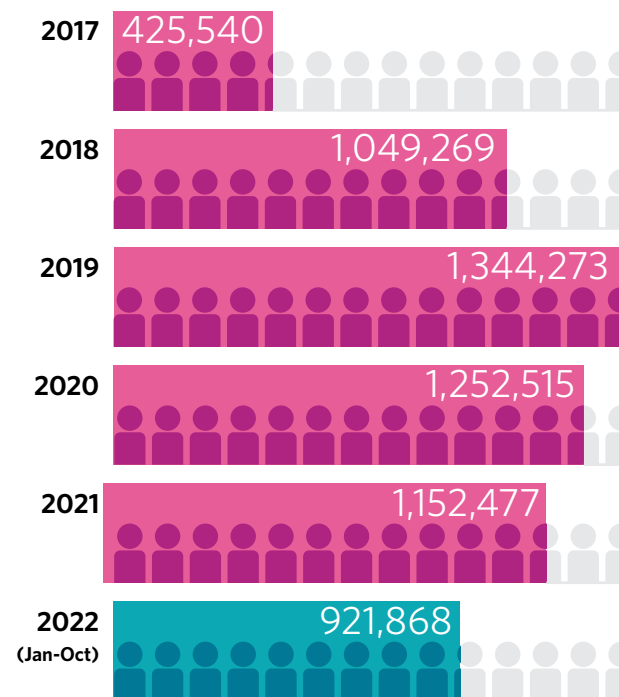
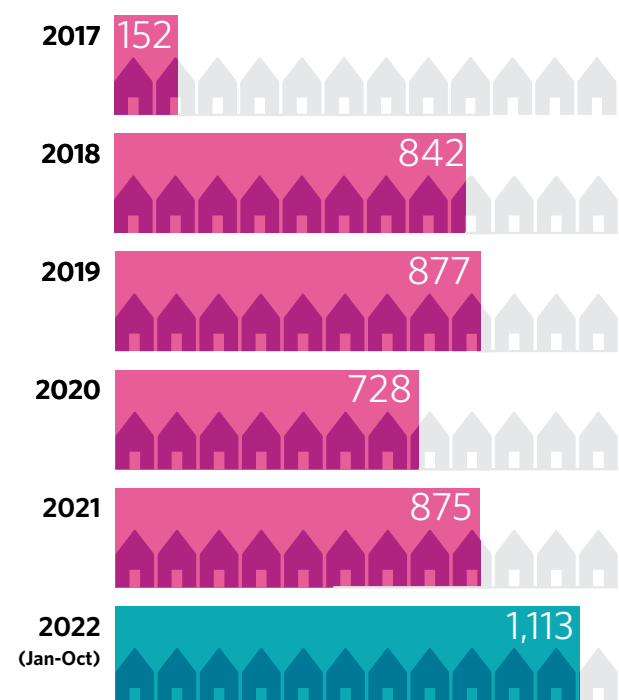
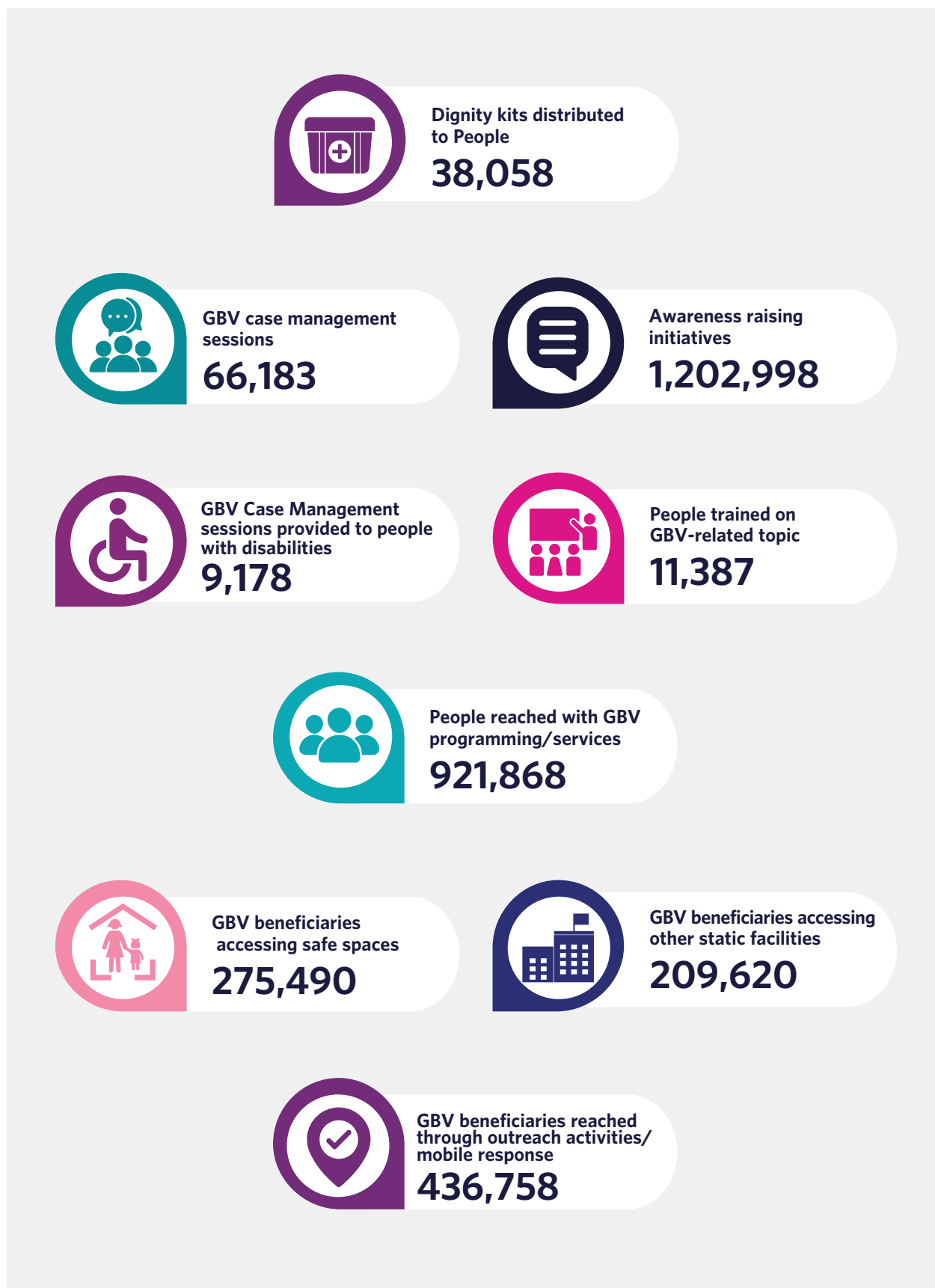


Figure 10: Number of communities and/or neighbourhoods with at least one type of GBV response service offered to GBV survivors and women and girls at risk since 2017



⁷³ WoS IA PSEA Network (October 2021). Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Syria: SEA and Humanitarian Assistance-Household Perceptions of Favours in Exchange For Aid. HNAP. P.3.

Figure 11: Overall achievements of the WoS GBV AoR (Jan - Oct 2022)



Organisations also provided training on GBV related subjects to humanitarian and non-humanitarian workers in WoS. From January to October 2022, 10,405 GBV actors and 982 non-GBV actors were trained.

GBV AoR Achievements

During the course of 2022, the WoS GBV AoR continued to coordinate GBV interventions across the country through three coordination hubs. The TXB GBV SC coordinates GBV interventions in NWS and is composed of 85 member organisations and three active task forces. The Damascus based GBV Sub Sector (SS) coordinates interventions in Government of Syria (GOS) areas, including through the establishment and technical support of five sub-national coordination groups in GOS areas of NES, Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Deir ez Zor. In NES, the GBV sub-working group is part of the NGO Forum coordinated response and, since establishment in 2020, it has gained recognition and capacities, with significant impact on the quality and availability of GBV programming with extended support to GBV services through two newly established task forces.

During 2022, the GBV AoR continued to work towards the three main objectives established at the beginning of the two-year HRP period (2022-2023).

1. Provide quality and lifesaving GBV response services, including case management and PSS, enhance vulnerable groups' access to these services (with a focus on women and girls with disabilities and adolescent girls) and reinforce referral pathways.

Lifesaving services, such as case management and PSS, continued to be provided through multiple approaches. The reduced funding for GBV programming resulted in the disruption of services and closure of some WGSS across Syria. It negatively impacted the capacities of GBV responders to serve survivors and to ensure adequate geographical coverage of lifesaving services. Rural areas and informal IDP settlements are the most affected by lack of GBV services. However, GBV organisations and practitioners keep on enhancing their technical and operational capacities to guarantee high-quality services despite the financial limitations. The GBV AoR across all hubs invested extensively in supporting GBV capacity building, in particular to enhance GBV response services, including legal support, detection of mental health issues, case management, cash and voucher assistance for GBV programming and strengthening referrals to better serve survivors through a multi-sectoral response. More effort has been invested in better understanding the dynamic of TFGBV in the context of the response. The GBV AoR continues to ensure a holistic response addressing all forms of GBV. An integrated approach with mental health, SRH, cash and voucher and early recovery programming has been successfully applied to serve survivors as well as women and girls at risk of GBV. Additionally, the TXB GBV SC continued coordinating the interagency GBV information management system task force and added new partners, with a total of 15 GBV organisations using the GBVIMS in 2022.

2. Enhance strategies to empower women and girls, supporting WGSS (e.g., adolescent girls, divorced and widowed women and girls, women and girls with disabilities and older women) to prevent GBV and to change negative attitudes and beliefs that foster harmful social norms.

Preventing violence from happening in the first place and empowering women and girls continue to be focus areas for GBV actors across Syria. Some services have continuously adapted to the new reality considering how the economic, water and food crises have impacted women and girls and their capacities to live a life free of violence and exploitation. In this framework, prevention and empowering activities play a crucial role to support women and girls' safety and dignity. The TXB GBV SC coordination team developed a database of 39 Women Led Organisations (WLOs) active in NWS and supported them to enhance their participation in GBV coordination and to access partnerships and funding opportunities. Likewise, the NES GBV SWG conducted a mapping of WLOs to support GBV actors in fostering collaboration and enhancing partnerships at a local level ensuring sustainability of GBV interventions.

Prevention and empowerment activities are tailored to the context and take into consideration access-related challenges and the capacities of the organisations. These activities include a vast range of options such as one-off awareness raising activities, including those marking international campaigns (such as the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV), to longer-term prevention programmes, such as structured awareness raising with men, women, boys and girls through direct contact in group sessions; and dedicating male outreach teams to the programmes with men and boys that take place in community venues such as schools, camps and mosques for the TXB hub or in community wellbeing centres for the Syria hub.

Access to WGSS and related empowerment and skills building activities is supporting women and girls to re-create a social network and to become agents of change, especially for peer support. Additionally, a number of TXB GBV SC members have continued to roll out income generating activities with linkages to employment and earning capacity, and with a focus on vulnerable individuals (including those with disabilities). The objective is for women to achieve a level of economic independence, which would contribute to GBV prevention and mitigation.

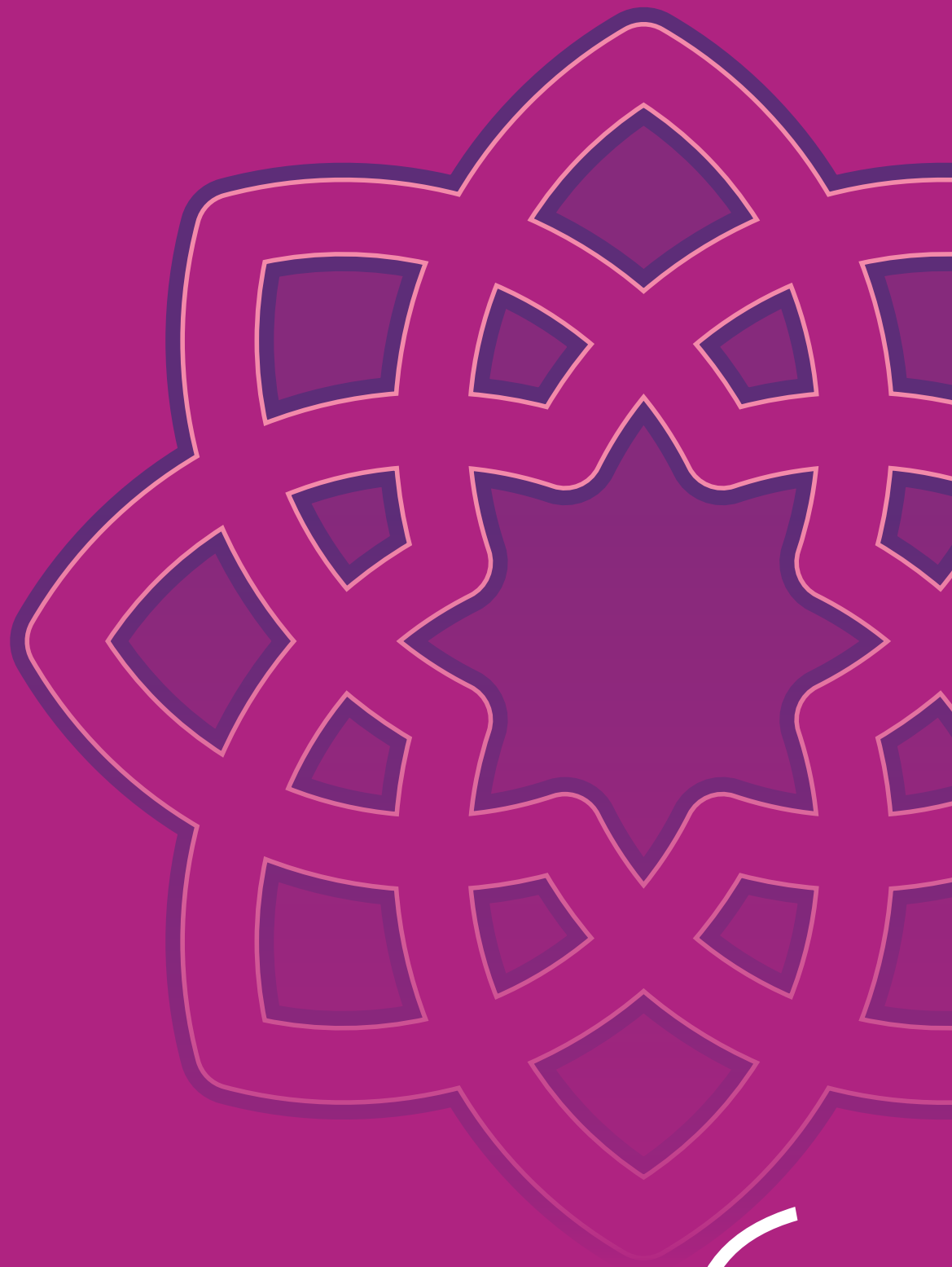
3. Promote GBV risk mitigation into all aspects of the humanitarian response

The GBV AoR continued to work to ensure GBV risk mitigation is understood as a shared responsibility of all humanitarian actors. In this framework, the GBV AoR

continues to work with other sectors and humanitarian leadership to mitigate the risks of GBV across humanitarian sectors' response. Specific intersectoral collaborations with health, nutrition, food security & agriculture (FSA), water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), camp coordination & camp management (CCCM) and education sectors identified specific actions to be put in place to reduce the risk of GBV.

Finally, great emphasis was put in the collaboration with SRH coordination groups, in particular to provide

integrated GBV and SRH services, such as the provision of family planning in WGSS. For example, the TXB GBV SC have formalised an intersectoral GBV-SRH strategy that operationalises an integrated approach of the two sectors on the ground; while the NES GBV SWG works through a dedicated task force to ensure protocols for CMR is contextualised and widely used by medical practitioners. Additionally, a GBV risk mitigation e-learning platform in Arabic was launched during the 16 days of activism, to enhance the capacity building of other sectors.



6

Gender and GBV in Other Humanitarian Sectors

Education

As mentioned previously in this report (see section on Denial of Education) in general, education is currently inaccessible to many children throughout Syria. The continued insecurity, and extreme economic pressures on families have led to the deprivation of education for both girls and boys. The likelihood of attending school is further lessened for displaced and disabled adolescent girls and women (see section on Displaced Adolescent Girls and Women).

"For education in some areas in Deir-Ez-Zor, adolescent girls experience two types of GBV; either they are denied an education due to early marriage or child labour, or they face violence going to school, as in some communities the nearest school is a kilometre or more away, which means exposure to verbal and sexual harassment on the way, given that these areas are not safe" (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Women and girls frequently shared that schools were one of the most common places in which children, especially girls, experience physical and psychological violence, as well as sexual exploitation from teachers (see section on Impact of GBV). Sexual violence in schools was discussed as ranging from verbal harassment to rape: *"There are cases of harassment and rape in most schools, which increased due to the ongoing conflict and the lack of supervision that protects students, so girls are worst affected" (Adult woman, Al-Hassakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

For displaced adolescent girls and boys, especially those in camps, the ability to access an education is exceedingly more difficult. For displaced children, the distance to school alone can be a barrier: *"As middle grade schools are far away, girls are deprived of education due to the distance of schools" (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* Participants identified that a lack of access to education for displaced children often led to child labour: *"Children work because of bad education in the camp, and they aim to learn professions that can secure their future" (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Despite multiple barriers, education was the number one desire of adolescent girls (see section on Hopes and Dreams of Women and Girls: Recommendations). When asked about their hopes and dreams, adolescent girls shared that they were hopeful that *"...education becomes mandatory" (Adolescent girl, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

Child protection

Child labour

All children are exposed to increasing levels of child labour because of the continued economic deterioration and rising food insecurity in Syria. PNA data shows that 55% of girls live in locations where child labour is occurring to girls (15-17) and 94% of girls live in locations where child labour is occurring to boys (15-17).⁷⁴ Displaced households' struggle to access basic needs, including food resources, further escalating the numbers of both girls and boys who are forced to work to assist households: *"There are many child labour cases. Due to poverty, some caregivers are urging their children to work to help them with the family expenses, especially with soaring prices" (Adult man, Janudiyeh sub-district, Idleb governorate).* Child labour is expected of children from the age of ten, especially for displaced children: *"All children in the camp that are over ten or twelve years old work in hard jobs and don't get the full wages, but they have to work" (Older woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* The effects of child labour include deprivation of education and exposure to physical, sexual, and economic violence. There was mention that there were types of child labour that included both boys and girls, including begging, collecting garbage and firewood, working in factories and workshops, as porters, selling water supplies, and agricultural work.

Typically, due to gender roles that require men and boys to be breadwinners, families will push boys into child labour to help meet household basic needs: *"Society encourages the child to work, as the most important thing is to earn money to buy living essentials. They tell the child: 'you've become a man and you must take the place of your father'" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* Boys are commonly employed in dangerous labour at young ages: *"I have a nine-year-old child who started carrying the burden of the family. At the age of 13 he started working by carrying stones. I have six children. Why is it his fault to be the victim and to work in dangerous conditions?" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* Also, child labour exposes boys to various hazards, including physical and psychological violence, sexual violence and exploitation, as well as injuries, and even death.

Due to extreme levels of poverty and food insecurity, especially amongst female headed households, girls are increasingly being pushed into child labour, despite the gender norm that it is "shameful" for girls to work outside the home: *"All children are working these days.*

74 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

But girls should not work, it is shameful to make them work hard anyway" (Adolescent boy, A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Adolescent girls most commonly are working in agricultural lands, begging, collecting waste, peddling, housecleaning, sewing, and finding jobs in markets and stores. Participants often shared that girls were exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation, including rape and harassment in public spaces such as agricultural lands and begging, but were also vulnerable to being exposed to male employers and adolescent boys when working in confined spaces: *"For girls, to work in places exposes them to sexual violence, such as begging, and to work in places where there are many young men such as factories" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* Additionally, girls are at risk of violence during transportation to and from work sites, including sexual violence and exploitation as well as kidnapping.

While many gender norms prefer that girls or women do not work, when a girl is pushed into child labour, she is often exposed to sexual violence, exploitation, and harassment: *"Children are at risk of physical and economic exploitation, while girls are more likely to suffer harassment and sexual and economic exploitation" (Adolescent boy, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* The most common form of labour for girls is in agriculture, which exposes them to the risk to harassment: *"Girls work on farms where they are harassed" (Adolescent girl, Mhambal sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

An increase in adolescent girls being forced into child labour was identified as a trend by GBV experts. Experts shared that girls who were working were exposed to economic violence, including deprivation of wages by a male family member: *"Girls are exploited to work, and they face denial of economic resources and opportunities. They work and the perpetrator, who is usually the partner or a male family member, takes her wages. More children are out of school but denial of resources and opportunities is mainly a problem for girls. This leads to reduced access to education as they work instead" (GBV Expert, NES Hub).*

The most dangerous type of child labour for boys is forced recruitment, which could include boys acting on the battlefield, as snipers, at checkpoints and as drivers: *"Young men are exposed to forced recruitment from 14 to 24 years old, manning the checkpoints, fighting" (Adult man, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* Other dangerous types of child labour included construction or digging tunnels and stone cutting, blacksmithing, mechanical work, smuggling, and the trading of arms. While boys are more frequently joining the armed forces, due to forced recruitment but also to earn a wage, girls will also join in order to access an income. Girls participate in standing at the checkpoints, traffic

police, fighting on the front lines, cooking, and driving cars.

Due to the extreme levels of poverty affecting female headed households, and those within widow's camps (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced), children of widows were often increasingly forced into child labour: *"After the war, many women were widowed, causing many children to take responsibility at a young age" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

The harms of child labour include a deprivation of education for boys and girls, a substantial risk to hazards and injuries but also exposure to various form of violence, including psychological, physical, sexual, and economic.

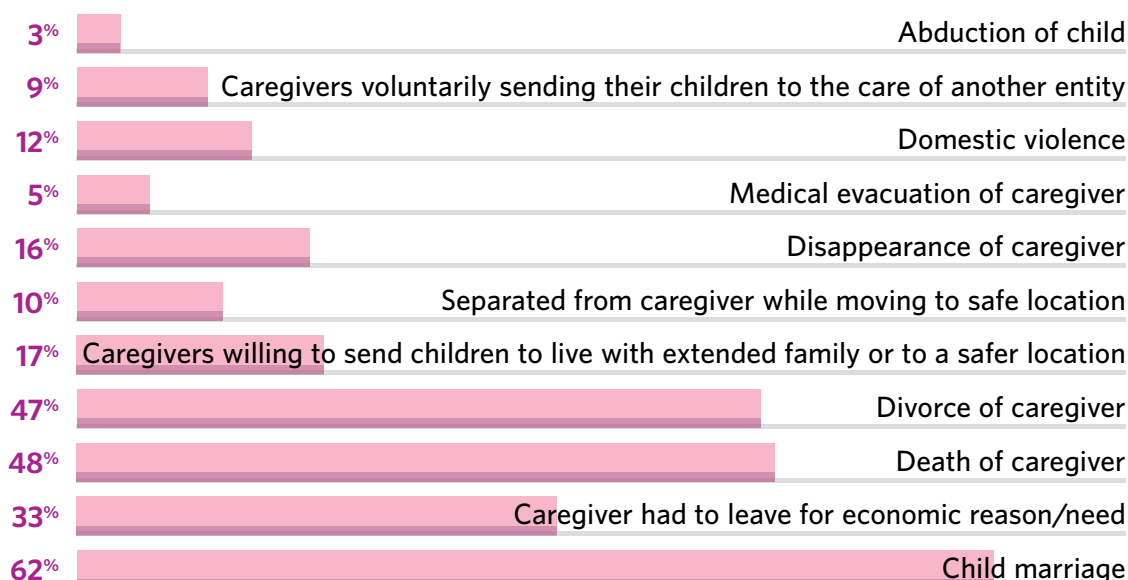
Unaccompanied, separated, and abandoned children

Many children are unaccompanied, separated, and abandoned due to early marriage, or the death, disappearance or detention of a caregiver or parent. Other common reasons include separation during displacement, the divorce or re-marriage of a caregiver, and poverty. Commonly, divorced women who are re-marrying may be forced to abandon their children. Early marriage was the number one reason for family separation for girls,⁷⁵ and one of the most frequent risks amongst adolescent girls who were unaccompanied: *"Girls are deprived of everything just because they are female, and they are exposed to more violence, especially sexual exploitation and forced marriage at a young age" (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

In some cases, unaccompanied girls are fleeing domestic violence and or "honour" killings: *"I know an illiterate family who have a daughter who escaped from the house because her father always abuses her mother. She left her family region and was almost killed by her uncle in the name of protecting her honour" (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* There is also a phenomenon of abandoned infants: *"Recently, we have seen the occurrence of new-born babies being dumped in front of mosques and hospitals due to exploitation, poverty, wars and tribal conflicts" (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).*

75 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

Figure 12: 2022 MSNA: Percentage of girls living in locations where certain events have been identified as a reason for family separation of girls.⁷⁶



A recurrent living situation for unaccompanied minors was homelessness: *"I heard about a group of children working during the day in the vegetable market and sleeping in the entrance of one of the destroyed and abandoned houses, and it seems that they are used to it"* (Adolescent girl, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate). Separated children also commonly lived with relatives, more often grandparents and or their uncles' families. When living with relatives, girls are at risk of GBV. This included early marriage: *"Those most affected of these children are girls, of course, because they are more vulnerable than young men under the age of 18. Young men can work in any profession and meet their needs through their work. As for girls, the families that foster them often marry them off early in order to get rid of the burdens of their care and their expenses"* (Adolescent girl, Samaan Al-Gharbia sub district, Aleppo governorate). Adolescent girls are often at risk of psychological and physical abuse, deprivation of education, and forced child labour when living with relatives: *"Because the neighbour's daughter is separated from her mother, she is beaten by her stepmother and forced to leave school to work at home"* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Adolescent girls also experience sexual violence when living with relatives: *"They are forced to live with their relatives' families, where girls are more vulnerable to violence or other problems, and they become vulnerable to members of the community and are exposed to many forms of violence, harassment and rape and can be married at a young age for financial benefit or so their families can save*

their expenses" (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Some unaccompanied minors may also live in child-headed households, increasing the risk of exposure to social stigma and violence, wherein in some cases the older children have the responsibility of taking care of younger siblings: *"There is one unaccompanied child in the village and she lives with her older sister, and she is looked down by the community and made an outcast. These children are more likely to be subjected to violence"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Participants frequently shared that unaccompanied minors experience social stigma and discrimination: *"Children who are separated from their parents are exposed to beatings and deprived of care, and they are viewed with pity by society as they are controlled by everyone"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

One of the most common risks for unaccompanied minors included forced child labour in order to access basic needs: *"Child labour and work at a young age makes a difference between children who have caregivers and those who don't and have to depend on themselves and work in spite of the risks. The majority are recruited or volunteer for the salary so they can feed themselves"* (Adult woman, Khasham sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). This group was also exposed to exploitation while working: *"They are a vulnerable group and are subjected to physical and sexual abuse and exploitation, with most of these children working in the streets by picking up garbage and collecting scrap metal"* (Adolescent boy, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Unaccompanied adolescent girls were particularly at risk of sexual harassment and abuse from employers: *"Some girls face harassment during their work on farms. They have no income providers, so they must work"* (Older woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Unaccompanied girls are especially exposed to sexual violence and may also resort to survival sex: *"One participant mentioned that they carry bags, collect rubbish and scrap metal, running between cars and public places, which puts them at risk due to traffic, while girls could resort to forbidden work such as sex, and are exposed to harassment and rape from some people"* (Adult man, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

General Protection

Housing, land, and property

Women and girls face a considerable amount of discrimination and GBV regarding housing, land, and property (HLP). 65% of women live in locations where displaced women experience HLP issues and 66% of women live in locations where host community women experience HLP issues.⁷⁷ This discrimination and violence occur largely due to gender norms and customs which exclude women and girls from inheriting HLP: *"Many of our relatives tried to hide all papers and documents and pay bribes to employees, so that we could not benefit from the agricultural land that should be rightfully inherited by all our family members"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Due to norms that prohibit women's ownership, staking a claim to a husband's property was also not an option: *"In our society, in general, ownership is a right that is very rare for a woman to obtain, whether inherited from the family or inheriting any of the husband's property. Both parties are always seeking to deprive her"* (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). In addition to gendered norms which prohibit women and girls from inheriting property, there were no clear legal rules or systems in place to assist their claims: *"The most common issues are preventing women from inheriting and getting their rights, having a dispute among cousins or brothers over a piece of land, and the absence of clear rules"* (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Women and girls also shared the repercussions of attempting to claim inheritance, which included violence and discrimination: *"Women are not allowed to own property and only men get to do so, and if a woman claims her rights, she would be subjected to violence and made an outcast by society"* (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Respondents also shared that family members would use physical violence, including homicide to punish women for claiming inheritance: *"The relatives boycott women or disown them. Sometimes when we try to claim the*

inheritance, a murder could occur" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Boys and men also understood the layers of discrimination and deprivation of rights experienced by women and girls: *"Most of the property after the death of the father is divided between males, while females are deprived of their full right or a large part of it, and now all our property is under the regime forces' control"* (Adolescent boy, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate). When female-headed households were able to rent a property, they also faced exploitation from landlords: *"Most of the rental contracts are short-term in order to control the increase in rent. Most displaced people suffer from this type of exploitation, especially women who are the breadwinners of their families"* (Adult man, Ariha sub-district, Idleb governorate).

Women and girls with disabilities also faced a lack of inheritance due to discrimination by their families, as well as society: *"My husband bought my disabled daughter land so that she would benefit from it in the future but due to people talking to him and telling him that this is wrong, he ended up selling the land and using the money for something else"* (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Also, women and girls are at risk of sexual violence, including exploitation, rape, and kidnapping when searching for a house without male accompaniment, and widows and divorced women or female headed households were extremely vulnerable: *"My sister's husband died, and the houses' rents are very expensive. Someone tried to exploit her. He offered to give her aid but wanted something in exchange"* (Adult woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idleb governorate). Women who were sole breadwinners and had disabled children also struggled to pay rent to landlords and were unable to relocate due to the child's disabilities: *"Every three and four months the rent of houses rises, and we are mothers of disabled children and are forced to endure and stay"* (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate) (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women with Disabilities).

Older women also face physical violence, including homicide over HLP: *"We heard something about the tenant being exposed to violence from the residents. Our neighbour lived alone, and she was old, she was murdered to force her out of the house. A ring was removed from her finger and her body was thrown in the street. But the perpetrators were prosecuted"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Widowed and divorced women were faced with extreme barriers to accessing housing and property, including the inability to inherit HLP due to documentation. An older woman explained: *"Yes, it differs, most of them don't have basic documents such as a husband's death certificate, or a divorce or a family statement for the children, and there is no one to help them to apply for these documents, and they find it difficult to reach the departments that issue them"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idleb governorate).

77 Ibid.

When widows can buy property, they are also faced with family disputes regarding ownership from their former husband's families, due to gender and inheritance: *"I am a widow. After the death of my husband, I bought a piece of land for me and my children, out of my own efforts, and registered it in my name. My husband's family tried to register the land in their name as they were afraid for me to get married, and the land would go to my new husband. Then, I built a house on the land and while the house was being built, they stole the papers from me, but I was able to get them back through an attorney"* (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Divorced women also shared that their former husband's family attempted to control the ownership of property: *"In terms of ownership, a divorced woman's property remains controlled by her ex-husband's family, which claims not to control her, but the truth is otherwise"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Durable solutions and decision-making

Many displaced women and girls shared that they would like to make plans to return to their homes, or relocate, but that there are several obstacles: *"Most women and men plan to return to their homes and areas of origin, but there are many obstacles to this, such as living conditions there, security conditions, etc."* (Adult woman, Areesheh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Respondents also shared that the concern for the safety for women and girls upon return was an obstacle: *"Most families have a fear of returning, especially for women and girls, there is fear for them, and families do not make the journey at the present time with this in mind"* (Adult woman, Ariha sub-district, Idleb governorate).

Another major obstacle to return was financial, including a lack of income and livelihoods: *"Financial situations are the greatest obstacles facing families in planning their future life, which prevent them from moving homes, as the rent of any simple house exceeds 70 thousand pounds or 100 thousand pounds, and they are unable to afford it"* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). Many of the women in camps shared their desperation for leaving due to camp conditions: *"...the only future plan that could absolutely be successful is to get out of the camp and get rid of this situation which is truly frightening and negative for our physical and mental health, and for our children whose future has been lost in the camp"* (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

In addition to financial and livelihood concerns, women and girls also shared that families with men and boys were in fear of forced recruitment upon return: *"The most important reasons for women's inability to return to their homes are that most men are wanted for security or the army, and they cannot return there. The economic situation is very bad, there are no jobs and there is no possibility to find any opportunities there"* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

For women with disabilities, obstacles for returning home included mobility: *"It is very difficult to consider returning home. There is no security or stability. As people with special needs, we face a lot of difficulty if we want to move"* (Adult woman with disability, Ariha sub-district, Idleb governorate). This group also shared they were unable to access the financial resources needed to relocate to a home that is suitable for those with disabilities, and that their former homes were destroyed: *"We lack the capital to carry out a project that secures our daily needs. I cannot return to my homeland because the house is destroyed and uninhabitable"* (Adult woman, Jisr-al-Shugur sub-district, Idleb governorate).

Women and girls in camps shared that the uncertainty of leaving the camp was a barrier: *"All participants agreed that the main challenges they face in the camp are related to the traditional laws implemented by the camps' authorities and the constraints these place on their daily lives"* (Adult woman, Jurneyeh sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

The majority of participants shared that men were typically the final decision makers when it came to long-term plans. However, many shared that there were exceptions, and that depending on the family, women may participate in decision making to varying degrees. This was more common for women who were earning money for the family: *"The participants mentioned that here things are different to what was mentioned earlier, as the working woman has a bigger and more powerful role in the long-term plans, as she contributes, like the man, to all matters of the house"* (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). When asked about others' roles in decision making, the majority of participants shared that children, older persons, and people with disabilities are typically not included. When asked about permanent solutions, participants identified access to livelihoods and financial assistance: *"Empowerment centres will solve many problems in families, which are caused by poverty, if they secure the financing of small projects for the beneficiaries and help them find their way in a field of work"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Shelter and camp management

Camps pose incredible risks to GBV for women and girls. As mentioned previously (see section on Locations, Camps), women and girls shared that overcrowding, a lack of lighting, shared bathrooms, and disorganisation were the reasons for which sexual violence was increasing in camps. Additionally, 33.5% of female headed households throughout Syria reported a lack of electricity or lighting in their shelter, and 17.9% reported a lack of privacy.⁷⁸

It was frequently mentioned how dangerous overcrowding and the lack of privacy is for adolescent girls. When asked which locations are the most dangerous, adolescent girls shared that camps, and especially tents, were unsafe:

78 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

"Tents are dangerous for girls" (Adolescent girl, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate) "At camps, where we might be harassed by guys and they would follow us, and our tents do not have doors" (Adolescent girl, A'zaz sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

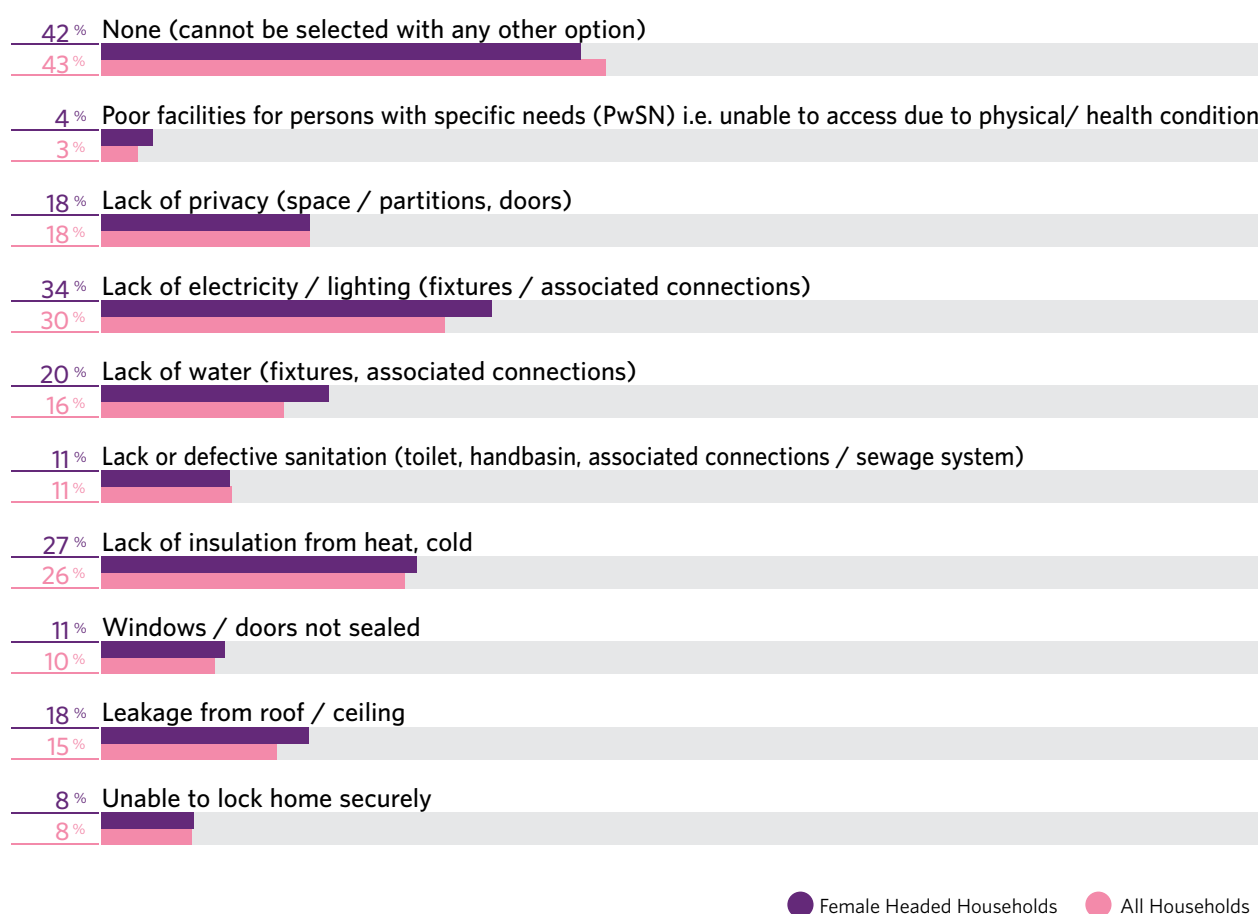
The issue of overcrowding was described as a contributing factor in the increase in GBV, according to men: *"The risk of violence increases if the number of displaced people increases. Informal camps are built with no lighting. People live with non-relatives and there is a lack of financial resources" (Adult man, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).*

Due to these various conditions, as a result, early marriage has increased in camps. GBV experts have confirmed the increase of early marriage and survival sex in in camps: *"Transactional, survival sex is happening in camps and collective centres as well as early marriage. Girls are married earlier due to financial constraints" (GBV Expert, NES Hub).* Exploitation by camp managers was also reported as a reason for GBV.

Importantly, women and girls shared that the lack of access to health services, a main contact point to access GBV services,⁸⁰ was one of the reasons for high rates of violence in the camps: *"One of the beneficiaries said that among the many factors that contribute to increasing the rate of women's exposure to violence is the lack of a suitable infrastructure within the camp, such as health and medical facilities" (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).* Also, GBV experienced in camps was under-reported: *"I see that violence is constantly increasing in the camps and at the moment cases of harassment and rape have increased, but they keep these stories hidden and they do not reveal them" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* Commonly, the lack of a safe space was a cause of concern: *"There is no safe space inside the camp nor health centres or awareness raising" (Adolescent girls, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).*

Women and girls also shared that the inability to leave camps due to movement restrictions deprived women and girls of work, prohibiting their ability to

Figure 13: 2022 MSNA: Percentage of households reporting adequacy issues with their shelter.



⁸⁰ GBV Sub-Cluster Whole of Syria (Türkiye Cross Border Hub) (2021) GBVIMS Quarterly Report July – September 2021.

access a livelihood and permanent solutions: *"As for displaced people, they suffer greatly from violence. They are exposed to physical and sexual exploitation, in addition to deprivation of work and freedom of movement, and they feel trapped in the camps" (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

In addition to security issues in Al-Hol camp, informal camps were also incredibly insecure. For example, women and girls shared information about the extreme conditions: *"There is no safety, they accuse us of being terrorist groups. We face discrimination, murder threats, exploitation of our need to work. The camp's bathrooms are very far away and there are stray dogs, so our girls face violence" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* Also, adolescent girls shared the intensity of the violence due to a lack of authority at an informal camp: *"Violence is widely spread, especially in the displacement camps in Deir-Ez-Zor, because there are displaced persons from different areas, in addition to the fact that the camp is disorganised and there is no security or any other authority that one can resort to upon facing violence" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

GBV experts expressed concern for the level of overcrowding within the Washokani camp in particular: *"...there is violence related to shelter at overcrowded camps at Washokani Camp, one tent per family, forming a root cause for violence" (GBV Expert, NES Hub).* Women in the Washokani camp also shared extreme feelings of vulnerability and insecurity: *"...the circumstances leave us exposed, and the conditions of the camp make us more vulnerable to insecurity than ever before" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Due to the destruction of much of the country's infrastructure from many years of conflict, as well as the impacts from climate change and a recent outbreak of cholera,⁸¹ safe water is not accessible for many throughout Syria⁸² and it is estimated that the country has up to 40% less drinking water today than it did a decade ago.⁸³ Safe and accessible WASH distributions are vital for women and girls to practice sexual and reproductive health, and the lack of access

or means of distribution can affect exposure to GBV. In fact, experts have shared that due to the water crisis as well as a lack of food, some women have resorted to survival sex to access resources (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Despite their definite and critical needs for hygiene supplies, women and girls shared a lack of awareness of distributions, and inconsistent or inadequate supplies: *"We don't hear about the distributions until they have finished, and we haven't received any assistance before, even women's sanitary towels. Only a quarter of women have received supplies only once, and most of the time there's no women's towels distributions" (Adult woman, Al-Mayadin sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).* Older women also reported inadequate supplies: *"Yes for older women, they have not received a financial allowance for hygiene items, and their share of water or food packages hasn't been increased" (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idleb governorate).*

Also, women and girls shared that WASH supplies were not always free, and general disorganisation has created unreliable amounts of supplies: *"Sometimes, while distributing assistance, they do not deliver the assistance until the beneficiary pays for water supplies and WASH collection fees, and sometimes the assistance is reduced in the council because the organisations deliver them to the council, and by that time, part of it has already been stolen. Because there is no supervision over them" (Adolescent girl, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

There were many barriers to accessing bathrooms and toilets for women and girls, those with disabilities, and older persons. This included an inadequate number of bathrooms and toilets for the camp, as well as the distance to and from the bathrooms and toilets: *"There is sanitation distributed randomly and it doesn't cover all the camps' needs. Every five families share one bathroom and one toilet. Families suffer greatly to receive this basic service, causing particular difficulty for older women, women and girls, and people with disabilities, as distances are large" (Adult man, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).*

As mentioned previously in this report, a consistent and alarming concern for women and girls was the risk of sexual violence on their way to the bathrooms (see section on Sexual Violence): *"There are few bathrooms and toilets as every ten families share one bathroom. This causes a great problem for girls, and due to the long distances, we face sexual harassment from boys and feel afraid" (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* This sexual violence also included women and girls with disabilities: *"The most dangerous thing is that they are subjected to harassment at night in the bathrooms, as they are unable to defend themselves or report issues" (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* Due to the barriers to accessing toilets and bathrooms,

81 UNICEF (2022) UNICEF Syria Cholera Response Situation Report. October 2022. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-syria-cholera-response-situation-report-04-october-2022>

82 UN Security Council (2022) Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of Security Council resolutions. 16 June 2022. P.3. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/secretary-generals-reports/

83 UN General Assembly (2022) Human Rights Council 49th session. Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. 8 February 2022. P.4. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/report-coi-syria-march2022>

many women and girls were unable to go to the bathroom on their own: *"The places where most violence occurs, especially cases of harassment, are in the bathrooms, especially at night with the lack of lighting. I never go to bathrooms alone, my mother or one of my siblings accompany me for protection, especially the bathrooms because they are for both men and women"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Women and girls also faced barriers to accessing water distribution points. Due to the risk of sexual violence during their travel to and from the points, women's and girls' movement was restricted by males in the family, and access to water was therefore reliant on male accompaniment. It was also shared that there were barriers to accessing water for older persons: *"The older people find it difficult to fill water from tanks and prefer a water supply system"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Distributions

Food insecurity has increased in Syria in the past year to record levels, including soaring rates of malnutrition for women and children.⁸⁴ Nearly 60% of households headed by women surveyed throughout Syria rely on humanitarian assistance for their unmet nutritional needs.⁸⁵ Despite heightened nutritional needs for women and children, women and girls face considerable barriers to accessing aid. According to MSNA data from 2022, 10.8% of Syrian households reported that women and girls feel unsafe at distribution areas⁸⁶. As mentioned earlier in this report (see section on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse), in May/June 2021, 5% of households that have received humanitarian services this year across Syria reported that they were asked for favours in exchange for assistance, of which 84% were cash requests and 9% SEA.

Women and girls are vulnerable to exploitation during distributions, especially in camps: *"Many displaced women have been harassed or raped when seeking a relief package or a job"* (Older woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate). Worry of sexual harassment or violence while travelling to or receiving aid was common amongst women and girls, including a fear of SEA from aid workers: *"There is a fear of sexual exploitation as a result of providing any assistance or distributing food rations, especially for widows and divorced women"* (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).

Female-headed households in Syria are nine times more likely to be asked for personal relationships in exchange for humanitarian assistance and services compared to male-headed households.⁸⁷ In addition, 23% of female-headed households in Syria shared that behaviours of aid providers were inappropriate when they attempted to access aid.⁸⁸

GBV experts shared the reasons for many women and girls vulnerable for SEA: *"It seems that women and girls are increasingly affected by SEA, especially when there are security issues. In displacement or in case of documentation loss, especially during registration, women are promised support in exchange for sexual favours"* (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria). GBV experts explained that this vulnerability included a lack of access to documents during distributions: *"Girls are increasingly exposed to sexual harassment and abuse, especially when they are displaced and there are concerns about getting their documents, because they lost them during displacement. Replacement of documentation is difficult and exposes them to further vulnerability"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross-Border Hub). According to PNA, approximately 14% of households with women and girls live in locations where lack or loss of civil documentation occurs for girls aged 12 to 17 (see figure 15).

Women and girls who are divorced experience further barriers and *"in most cases divorced women are deprived of aid because they do not have the necessary identification papers like a marriage contract, divorce, or registration entry"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Divorced and widowed girls and women shared that local leaders in charge were also involved in SEA: *"As for distributions, we face many harassment incidents and disputes with those in charge, as many community leaders are exploiting widows and divorced women and asking for their phone numbers in exchange for helping them to receive the aid"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

84 UN Security Council (2022) Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of Security Council resolutions. 16 June 2022. P.3. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un_documents_type/secretary-generals-reports/

85 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

86 Ibid.

87, 99 Ibid.

Figure 14: 2022 PNA: Percentage of women and girls living in locations with harassment to women and girls during humanitarian assistance.⁸⁹

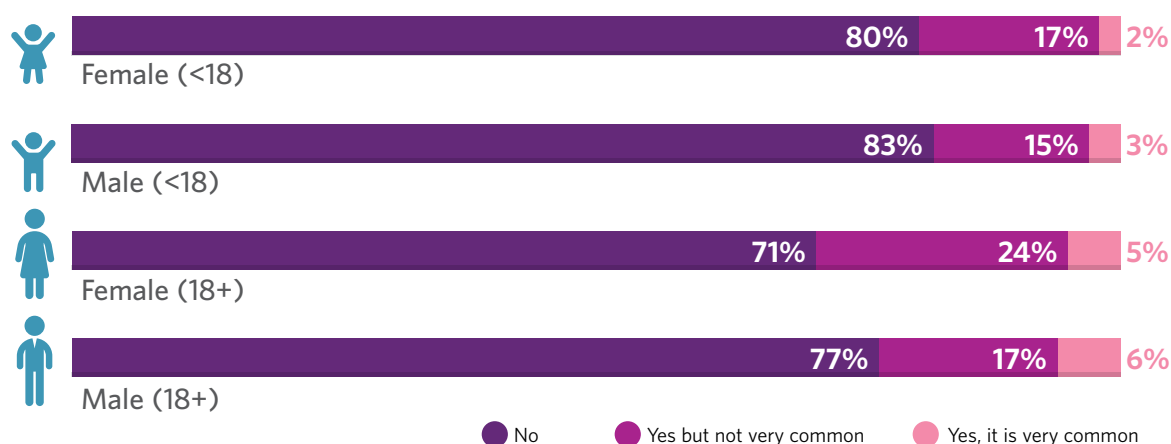
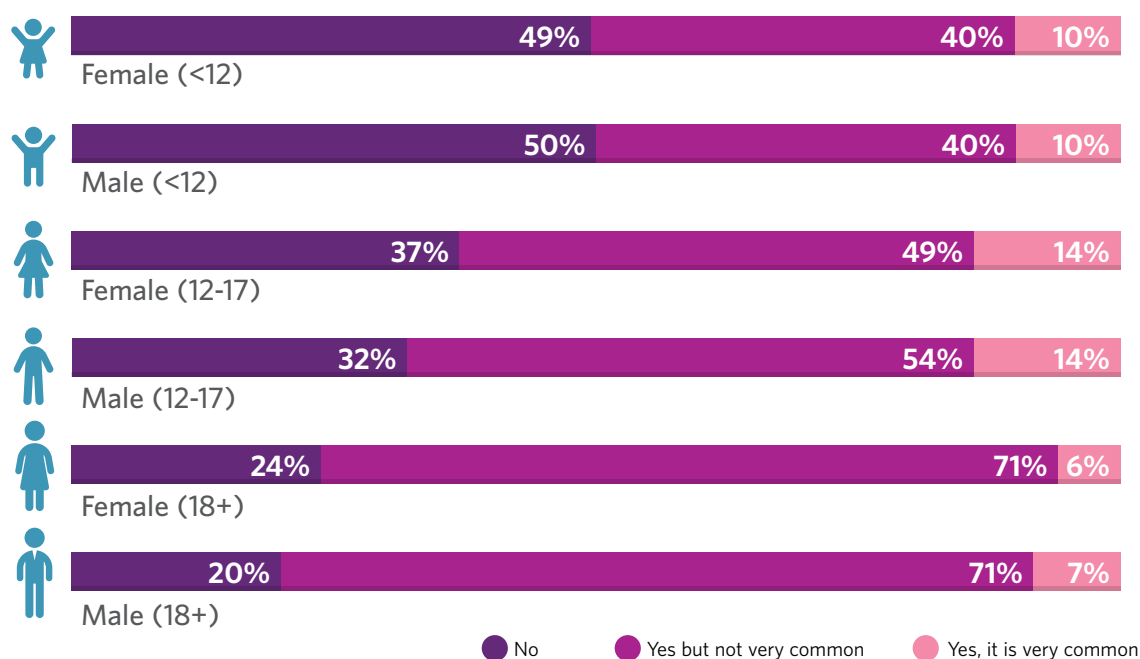


Figure 15: 2022 PNA: Percentage of women and girls living in locations where lack/loss of civil documentation is occurring for women and girls.⁹⁰



Men also shared their concerns regarding women and girls' risk of SEA at distribution points: "Let's be honest, in exchange for services, unethical things happen. I heard about cases of sexual harassment, exploitation or denial of services, in exchange for sex, especially, if the beneficiaries

are widowed or divorced. These cases occur, we can't deny them. Most of the offenders might be people of power, such as camp managers, delegates and many more" (Adult man, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Due to SEA at distribution points, women and girls experience restrictions on their movement without male accompaniment: "The obstacles are that my father

89, 90 Ibid.

was wounded in the war and is receiving treatment in Turkey, and my mother is an older woman who experiences a lot of trouble when receiving aid because there is no male breadwinner nor a means of transportation, and this is the case for most women who receive this assistance in the absence of a male supporter" (Adolescent girl, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate). This included families preventing girls from accessing aid: "Young girls are forbidden from receiving aid because their parents worry about them during the distribution" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Other barriers to distributions:

In general, distribution points were places where women and girls experienced violence: "The most places where violence occurs are the places where aid is distributed such as for gas and bread in the sector and where water is filled" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Financial exploitation was common for women when accessing distributions: "There is financial exploitation as I had to sell the food voucher for less than its price" (Adult woman, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate). Women also reported that harassment occurred at the distribution points, which would then lead to domestic violence in the home: "One participant mentioned that there was a distribution of aid to women a while back, and that there was a large number of men and women present and the distribution was disorganised. There were cases of verbal and physical harassment, and women were scared to tell their husbands about the harassment because they would be subjected to violence in return" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Adolescent girls in Al-Hasakeh governorate shared that restriction of movement, distances to distributions, a lack of transportation, a fear of being kidnapped and harassed, and a lack of safety were the barriers to distributions.

Barriers to distributions for older women included travelling to and from distribution points: "No one helps me in transferring the assistance, and transportation fees are high so sometimes I give the driver some items out of the aid in exchange for driving me" (Older woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Older women also experience financial exploitation during distributions: "The officials at our centre take the assistance provided to us and use our personal information to obtain services" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). In addition to this exploitation, it was reported that older women may be robbed of their aid: "With regards to the distributions, the older people are not given any special treatment despite their situation, and they also get harassed and robbed during the distributions and are exploited in return for receiving aid" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Displaced women and girls also struggle with gaining the necessary documentation to access distributions: "There are obstacles in accessing services and distributing them like the loss of official documents for some families. There are many unregistered children so they can't receive

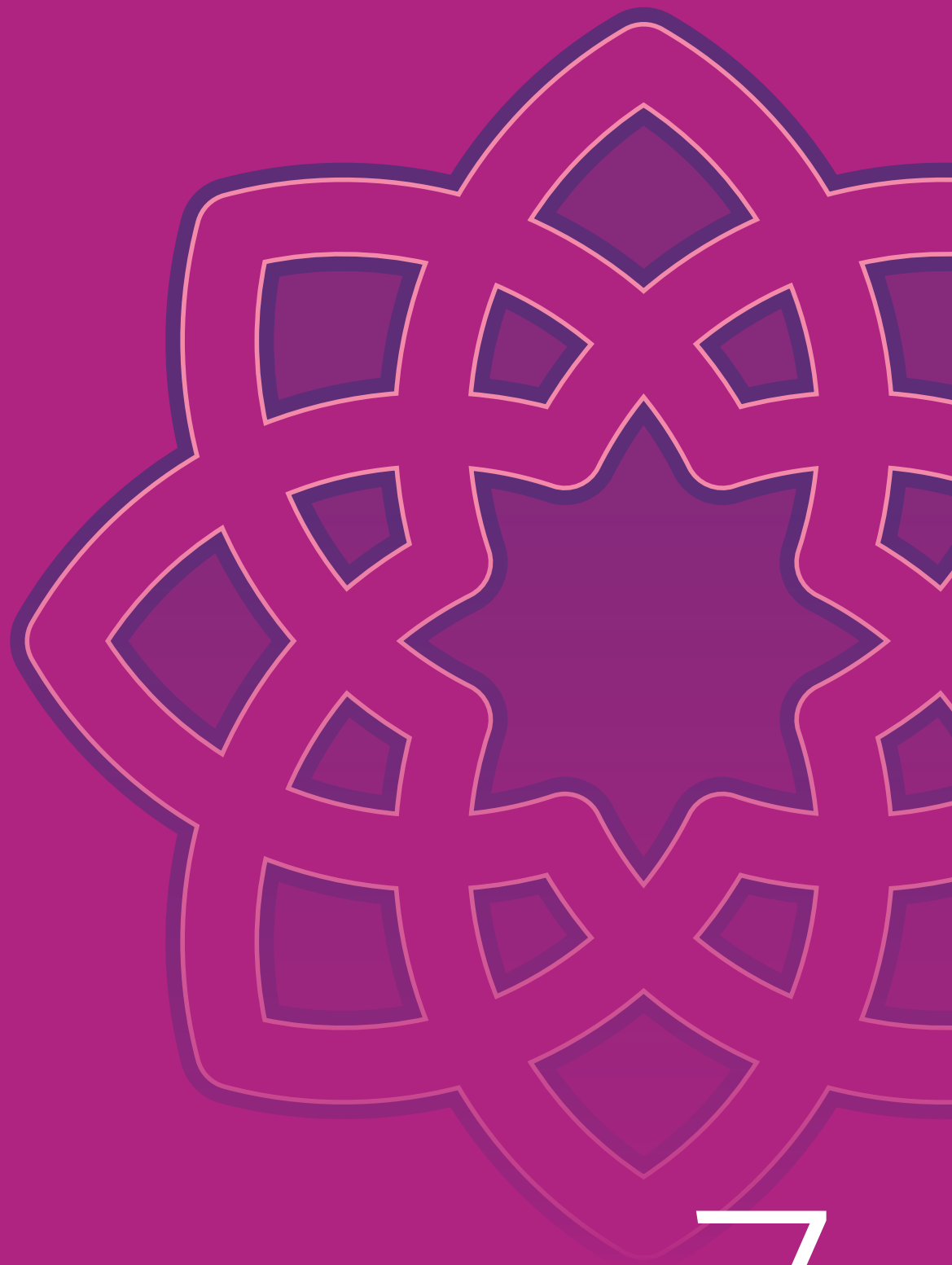
food as they are distributed according to names in the family book" (Adult man, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

When attempts were made to serve vulnerable groups, the efforts became disorganised: "The older people, divorced women and people with disabilities are the groups who receive the least amount of aid, as the distribution takes place in distant points from the tents they live in, and the distribution is sometimes disorganised due to the lack of a clear distribution mechanism in relation to the quantities that are distributed or the target groups" (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Several participants explained that favouritism was an issue when accessing distributions: "The assistance is scarce and distributions are not fairly done. Some people get it and some people don't. This reality causes problems" (Adolescent girl, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate). This included humanitarian workers keeping aid for themselves and their families: "The distribution agents are trying to deprive the deserving of distributions and favour their relatives and they take the aid that should be distributed and give it to their own families" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Additionally, respondents shared that there was corruption in distribution processes, as well as disorganisation, inconsistency, and bribery.

Insufficient aid supplies were also a concern, including food distributions: "Food distributions, if received, are not enough for the needs of families to the extent that we must split them into small portions" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). 73% of female-headed households shared that the quantity of all or some of their humanitarian assistance was not sufficient, and 58% of female-headed households shared that the quality of this assistance or service was not sufficient.⁹¹ The inconsistency of aid was also due to a high need from residents in communities: "Organisations have distributed assistances such as food packages and hygiene kits, but the quantity is insufficient. There are many families that were deprived of obtaining help. There is also a great pressure from the residents of the local community to obtain aid" (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). It was shared that delays or insufficient levels of distributions had the tendency to provoke violence and exploitation out of desperation: "The delayed assistance is a major reason for violence in all its forms. Violence exists whether there were distributions or not, and many women in the camp became used to the forms of violence to which they are exposed. The most important thing for them is to secure the necessary requirements for themselves and their children" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

91 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).



7

Hopes and dreams of women and girls:
Recommendations

GBV in almost all aspects has increased in Syria. In some respects, women's and girls' efforts to create new strategies and coping mechanisms have been met with backlash. Understandably, women and girls responded to this reality with concerns for the continued increase of violence, and their vulnerability: *"It may increase this year due to the lack of security, and the indiscriminate spread of weapons and the large number of disputes between clans, discrimination between IDPs and residents, poverty, and lack of resources. Women became more vulnerable to violence"* (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). With good reason, women responded with fear about the future: *"Crimes have increased dramatically in our society in recent years, and this makes all members of society feel afraid and insecure"* (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

However, despite these conditions and concerns, women and girls also continue to show resilience and hope. This includes women finding their voice and defending their rights: *"I kept silent for a long time for my daughters' sake and endured a lot, but then I said no. I was divorced and defended my rights and those of my daughters. I am stronger now, but I was weak 10 years ago because I wanted to raise my daughter, so I kept silent. But now I am stronger, I am ready to take care of my two daughters, and I can manage this responsibility"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). There is also increasing evidence of women exercising their right to attend services despite pushback: *"I am a widowed woman and my brother asked me to stop coming to the centre but me and my daughter confronted him and asked him to give me and my children food, this is where he became silent and left me alone"* (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Experts shared examples of resilience: *"Resilience has increased, especially for women who received services. Many success stories prove this, such as widows who started small projects and completed their education despite their circumstances"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross-Border Hub).

Experts also revealed that the amount of knowledge amongst women and girls has increased, due to GBV awareness sessions, peer sessions, structured psychosocial sessions, and other activities, highlighting how crucial these services are for women and girls, and the possibility for change with service provision. One expert highlighted the profound effects of these services, and what they tell us about the desires of women and girls: *"This means that they want to heal, have knowledge, and learn new skills"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub).

Women and girls continue to have insightful aspirations for their lives, as well as recommendations for service providers and humanitarian staff on how to help them achieve their hopes and dreams.

Recommendations

1. Provide and support women and girls with educational opportunities

When discussing their hopes and dreams, many women and girls shared their goals regarding education: *"People around my father gossiped when they saw me going to the institute. He wanted to prevent me from studying for a baccalaureate, so I told him I would not destroy my future and I asked him if he had confidence in me and he said yes. So, we agreed to let me continue my education and ignore others' gossip"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). Displaced women also shared their desire for education and the barriers in their way: *"I need education and schools. I tried to go to schools and study with students but couldn't as I have no documents and couldn't get any. How can I get to the stage I want? I can't afford private lessons and want to provide for and raise my daughters myself, but I was deprived of charitable aid because I had to abandon my daughters"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).

Girls also focused on the need to access education in order to obtain basic needs, and to prevent violence: *"If you can change one thing for girls under the age of 18 in community, it is to prevent early marriage and a return to education"* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). This included addressing child labour: *"Child labour must be officially addressed. Stop this exploitation and provide a decent life and schools for better education"* (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Persistently, women and girls shared the need and priority for education, as well as a desire for things to return to a certain normality: *"We cannot neglect our children's right to education, because I lost my husband and I do not want to lose my children, in addition to the fact that education support is not permanent and when the support ends, the quality of education declines or education stops. Therefore, I wish the war would stop, and education would be continued, and every person would return to his town and live with dignity"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Adolescent girls and women shared their desires for the inclusion of **women and girls with disabilities in education programmes:** *"The focus should be provided on integrating girls with disabilities in schools and education centres to better empower them, know and defend their rights, as this group is the most physically and sexually exploited by the community"* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

2. Continue and expand WGSS and other GBV Services

Women shared the importance of the continuity of GBV services, in order to do no harm: *"The lack of continuity of services and the closure of some centres without an alternative causes harm"* (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).

Many women and girls persistently expressed a desire for WGSS services: *"Safe spaces for women and children where they can spend time and ease violence pressures" (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* This included WGSS that target all women and girls including older women, people with disabilities, and widows and divorced women: *"Support should be provided to women aged 60 years and over, PWDs, widows and divorced women, and girls by providing safe spaces and livelihood programmes" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* Also, women and girls recommended increasing the number of WGSS: *"Increase the number of protection centres because there are only few of them in the Al-Hasakeh local community" (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Additionally, women and girls consistently mentioned the need to provide transportation to support women and girls, persons with disabilities people with disabilities and older women to attend WGSS, and for all women and girls to be able to reach these spaces safely. Access to WGSS is clearly considered a GBV risk mitigation measure. Participants mentioned that they experienced the closure of several WGSS and programmes due to COVID-19, as well as funding issues: *"Many community centres have suspended their programmes since the pandemic" (Adult woman, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Women and girls consistently shared the importance of **PSS** and advocated for further development of this service provided in WGSS various regions: *"We hope to have adolescents' psychological support centres, and to be in rural regions so that they can access them and to provide transportation there" (Adult woman with disability, Tall Kalakh sub-district, Homs governorate).* Specialised GBV services for survivors are also on demand and should continue and, where possible, be expanded: *"Securing specialised centres for abused women, and spaces dedicated to providing advice to adolescent girls, and special programmes for the purpose of psychological relief" (Adolescent girl, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

Women and girls also provided recommendations on the services needed within camps: *"Camps must have services to mitigate violence" (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate).* Many displaced women and girls requested WGSS within the camps as a potential solution to violence: *"We want safe spaces for women and children" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* The need for dedicated spaces for girls within the camps, including spaces to learn and play was also shared: *"There is no child safe space in the camp so they are deprived of education and recreation so they may play with hazardous items which threaten their life" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* And young girls suggested safe housing within camps that would prevent violence: *"Providing adequate shelter that keeps girls safe" (Adolescent girl, Mhambal sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

Women and girls with disabilities also made several critical suggestions for providing services and

general support to this group: *"Buildings should be constructed and staff recruited as per the needs that meet the different types of disabilities. In addition to providing them with disability support tools. Even the older people need some special tools to support them, such as certain types of chairs" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Women and girls had great insight and suggestions for disseminating information more inclusively about protection services: *"Protection programming needs efficient marketing to inform the community about available services. This would help volunteers and mobile teams reach women in need more effectively" (Adult woman, Al-Mayadin sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).* **This included disseminating information in a format that was accessible to all:** *"Associations often use social media and Facebook to post advertisements, without taking into account that the Internet is not available in all regions and that not everyone has a smart phone, in addition to the fact that some groups are unable to use phones such as the older people and people with disabilities" (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).* Specific methods were scrutinised, and alternatives were suggested in order to reach a wider audience: *"Try printing and distributing brochures in schools, universities, municipalities and masjids, especially in the rural areas, in addition to placing advertisements in the streets. If you distribute brochures in schools our children will inform us" (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).*

3. Provide and support women and girls with livelihood opportunities and financial assistance

Access to livelihoods programmes was a priority for women and girls: *"Please extend the amount of training provided and increase the tools, especially in sewing" (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

It was suggested to prioritise **women and girls with disabilities to participate in vocational trainings:** *"We need vocational training centres for people with disabilities. These centres should be separate for males and females, while companions should be found for them and transportation provided" (Adult woman with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).* It was clear that this group desired **access to livelihoods** and greater independence, with the help of service providers: *"I suggest that psychological support and vocational education should be crowned with financial support and equipment that will help us become productive and financially independent" (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

It was also proposed to provide permanent financial assistance to mitigate violence: *"If they pay assistance permanently, exploitation and violence would be reduced" (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

4. Provide community focused violence prevention and changing gender norms interventions

Women and girls had important insight on the critical need to provide awareness raising to shift gender norms: *"Customs, traditions, and ignorance played a major role in the spread of violence in general. Therefore, awareness should be raised about the importance of this topic (Adult woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate). This included the sensitisation of parents of girls to challenge norms: "We seek to open a discussion with our parents about early marriage risks and the need to continue education" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). Girls also shared their insight into the need for holistic approaches to ending violence: "For me, the solution is to raise awareness of social ties in the community and the root causes of family relations, and how to resort to legitimate authorities and access to psychological support" (Adolescent girl, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

Women and girls specifically addressed the necessity to include men and boys directly in awareness raising efforts: *"...change begins when men start acknowledging women's role in all aspects of life, and when husbands become more responsible towards their domestic duties and keep an open mind to their wives' opinions and treat them like a partner instead of subjecting them to violence" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). This included awareness sessions that target and include boys: "Teenagers need to be empowered and taught a vocation in addition to increasing the awareness sessions for both genders to make them more knowledgeable of their rights and responsibilities, in addition to learning how to respect women and give them their rights" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). In addition to offering more awareness raising sessions, home visits were also encouraged to include men and vulnerable groups: "Intensifying women's awareness sessions through home visits in the region, providing awareness sessions to men and the community and targeting vulnerable groups" (Adult woman, Khasham sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Awareness raising sessions on gender norms and religion were suggested by women and girls: this included awareness raising for those of all ages and genders on the topic: *"We believe that religious awareness sessions should be carried out on the dangers of discrimination and taught that it is not a part of Islam." (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Women and girls also recommended education and awareness sessions on the abuse of older women: "Older people are sometimes dealt with badly by their sons and daughters, and they use verbal violence against them, and this violence may be reduced through social awareness sessions" (Adult woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).*

5. Support human rights, freedom of choice and empowerment for women and girls

Women and girls expressed goals for achieving empowerment, including acquiring an education in order to defend their rights: *"I want to learn and continue my education so that I can help divorced women to support and defend their rights" (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). Girls also expressed a desire to pursue their education, to achieve gender justice: "I wish to continue my education to become a judge and defend woman's rights" (Adolescent girl, Jabl Saman sub district, Aleppo governorate). Girls also stated their career goals and their desires to have the power to support other women: "I wish to work for a humanitarian organisation to be able to support woman by providing jobs. The strong woman who can work and have an income stands out from a non-working woman" (Adolescent girl, Jabl Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate).*

Adolescent girls also shared their enthusiasm for creating change, and shared specific actions they take in their communities: *"Yes, we attend the WGSS Centre. We like this centre as a special space for women and girls and it creates equality between people with disabilities and other people. We lack equality in the community, so we work to support, strengthen and educate women and girls of our age through awareness-raising sessions, as well as empowering them with professional skills. Attending this centre makes us feel that there is hope of a better future" (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Women and girls shared the need to provide awareness raising sessions to educate the public on their rights, including those with disabilities: *"I would like external awareness sessions that are in the interest of women to double their strength and increase their abilities. We do not feel that we are treated as a respected human being and that rights and opinions outside of these comfortable and safe spaces" (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). This included recommendations that would change the decision-making powers of women: "Women must be given the right to find solutions that meet their whole needs, such as choosing housing near a school so that girls have opportunity to go to learn, or in a safe area or where the displaced are accepted" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

6. Create, make use of, and expand legal mechanisms and policies in order to end GBV

Adolescent girls shared thoughts on the importance of justice and the law in ending GBV: *"To reduce violence by spreading culture of legality" (Adolescent girl, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). This included legal advocacy: "Advocate for the oppressed groups and mobilise the role of law and the state" (Adolescent girl, Al-*

Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Women and girls spoke to the need for functioning, accountable justice systems in Syria: *"As well as enforcing and applying laws that prevent and criminalise violence against women and girls"* (Adolescent girl with disability, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

The group also brought attention to the need to **implement and develop laws** which directly criminalise GBV in various forms. This included addressing the issue that vulnerable groups were not protected by the law: *"There are no organisations or foundations that support these groups, nor a law that prevents exploitation"* (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate). During the discussions with women and girls, the development of laws to address the issue of child labour was proposed: *"Legislation of more stringent laws to hold child labour acts accountable"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). The development of laws to protect older women was also suggested: *"We, the older people, sometimes may be exposed to violence so there must be laws that protect us"* (Older woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).

It is important to note that while the government of Syria creates and modifies Syrian law, the various groups controlling other regions of Syria can create their own law for their regions. Therefore, women and girls, families, communities, and organisations are left to advocate to various authorities for legal changes that can affect the rights and improve the lives of women and girls. Additionally, even when laws and judicial mechanisms exist *de jure*, there are no guarantees that they will be implemented or effective *de facto*. Therefore, advocacy must continue to see that both laws are created to support the prevention of and response to GBV as well as that communities are aware of these laws and that they are implemented by the authorities.

Women and girls also requested access to legal and financial services for vulnerable groups: *"Providing legal counselling, financial support for people with disabilities and women"* (Adult woman, Jurneyeh sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

7. Mitigate GBV and SEA risks across humanitarian Sectors

Provide a Safe and Inclusive Humanitarian Aid Environment

First and foremost, women and adolescent girls recommended the need for consultation with at-risk groups in the development of safe and inclusive humanitarian aid programmes: *"Consulting adolescents according to their needs to design humanitarian programmes for the whole community"* (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).

Adolescent girls had several recommendations to address inequity and risk in distribution processes,

including providing safe processes and access for vulnerable populations, such as segregated distributions: *"To have a place dedicated to receiving relief, or delivering services or distributions to their tents, to vary distribution points and be organised by categories: women and girls, men and boys, older people, and people with disabilities"* (Adolescent girl, Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate).

When asked about facilitating more equitable distribution processes for vulnerable groups, women and girls suggested paying attention to the gender of staff as well as prioritising vulnerable groups: *"To give them priority in distribution, to designate distribution places and female staff"* (Older woman, Khasham sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). One of the most common recommendations was to provide various service formats and transportation to vulnerable groups in order to ensure access to distributions, and was shared repeatedly: *"Provide transportation, have teams in the field to visit them and reception centres for this group"* (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). This included assistance for older women and people with disabilities: *"Having mobile teams targeting women over the age of 60 and people with disabilities"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). Additionally, increasing distributions points was also suggested by many as well as designating specific days for distributions: *"As for proposals for obtaining a better distribution or receipt, I recommend designating a day for distribution to each neighbourhood"* (Adolescent girl, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Camps in general were considered unsafe for women and girls and created high risks for this group to GBV. Recommendations for mitigating GBV against women and girls included basic infrastructure changes in camps. For example, women and girls shared that a lack of lighting was a considerable risk factor for GBV in camps (see section on Locations, Camps), and hence providing adequate lighting in camps would substantially reduce the risk for women and girls. Due to the level of violence caused by shared hygiene facilities, the need for accessible and safe bathrooms, toilets, shelter, and access to water were a top priority for women and girls. This included providing lockable bathrooms: *"For example, in Al-Hol we received complaints on WASH facilities and the lack of locks. You are in the toilet and a man comes in. So, women and girls don't even want to use the facilities"* (GBV Expert, NES Hub). Additionally, more bathrooms, as well as water tanks were a priority for women: *"Providing bathrooms, a water tank beside every tent, to fairly deliver our needs"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Implement Accountability and Complaint Mechanisms

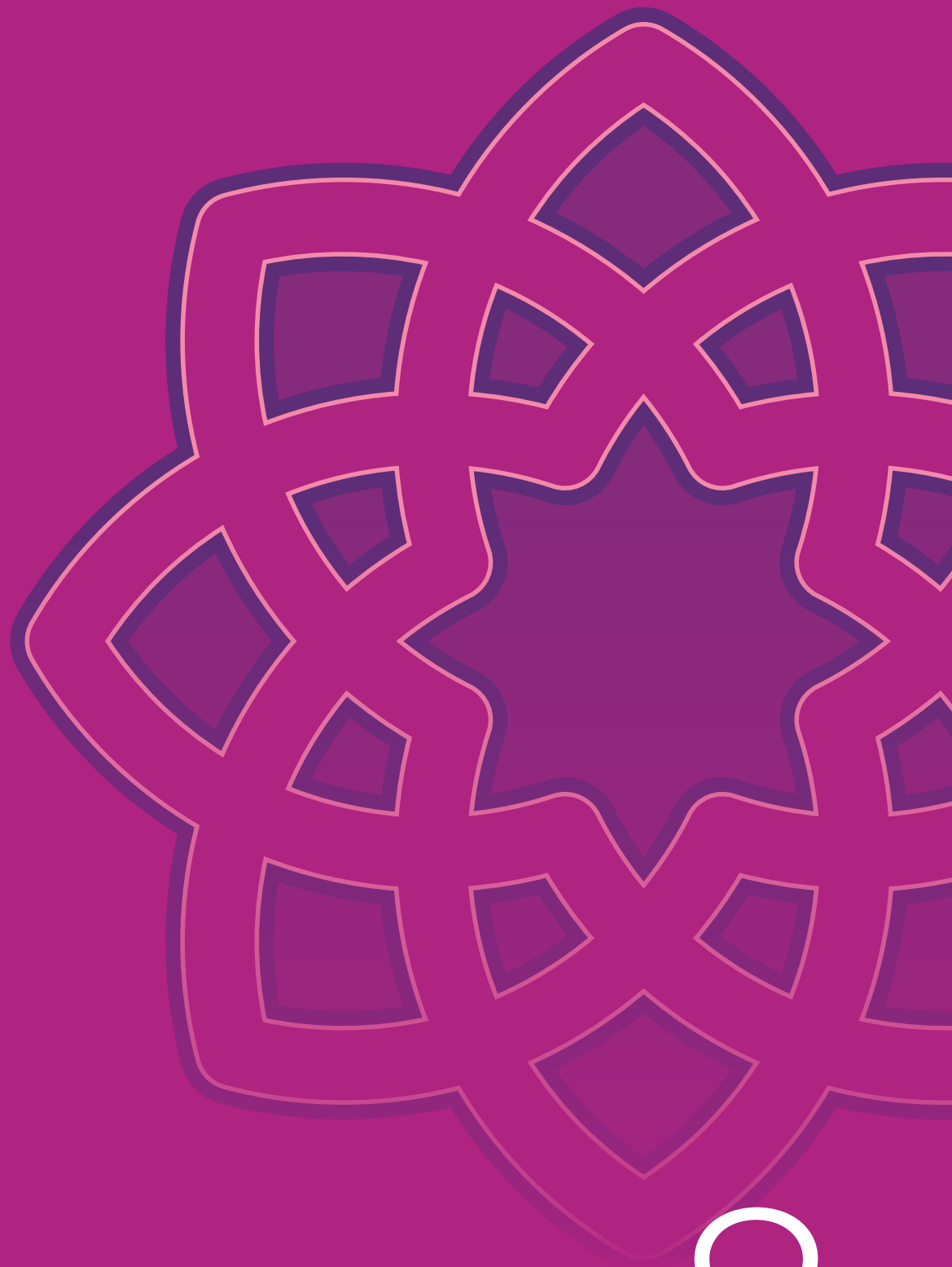
Accountability for those who exploit vulnerable populations was also a priority for women and girls.

Several shared that they were aware of complaint mechanisms, and understood the process, however, there was substantial fear of complaining due to stigma, losing one's aid, or the lack of accountability: *"We are aware of how to report, but nobody holds the corrupt people accountable. This stops us from reporting as we are tired of them not holding the corrupt accountable"* (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Additionally, this group recommended the establishment of mechanisms in order to hold workers and local leaders accountable for exploitation: *"When the employee of the local council exploits the beneficiaries, the employee must be dismissed or the assistance be delivered to the houses by the police with compensation for the affected people. There is no consultation process for people about the distribution mechanism. There is no such thing at all"* (Adolescent girl, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

As mentioned in the main findings, reporting SEA is complicated and is not always a viable option for women and girls. Much SEA goes un-reported due to "concerns about confidentiality" (70%) or lack of awareness of complaint mechanisms (64%)⁹². Sometimes, women are reluctant to report SEA when it occurs because they fear retaliation, losing access to assistance, and stigmatisation in the community. Documentation of SEA directed at women and girls has been difficult: *"Women are being exploited for every service and we are afraid to report"* (Adult woman, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate). Sadly, complaint mechanisms and disclosure are an issue for these groups as they are not only afraid of losing their access to distributions but have little faith that justice will be served: *"If it occurs, she can complain and report it, but she doesn't know how to act. Even if she does, she remains silent because she thinks they won't believe her"* (Adolescent girl, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

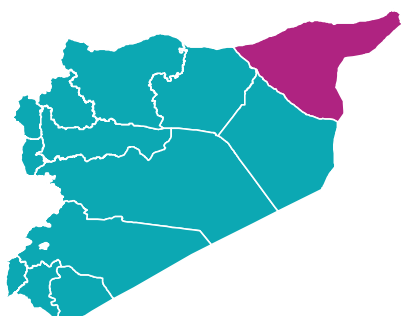
92 WoS IA PSEA Network (October 2021). Protection From Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Syria: SEA and Humanitarian Assistance-Household Perceptions of Favors in Exchange For AID. HNAP. P. 3.



8

Governorate Analysis

Al-Hasakeh



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal: verbal abuse, neglect, and emotional abuse at interpersonal and community levels; in camps and outside of camps; especially vulnerable to this are divorced and widowed women, women, and girls
- Physical violence: in the house, schools, camps and non-camps; against women and children; concerns of homicide
- Early and forced marriage
- Sexual violence: harassment, assault, rape, TFGBV
- Denial of rights, freedoms, and resources:
- Neglect and general deprivation to resources frequently mentioned
- Economic violence by exploitation in the workplace, men's control of women's earnings or inheritances
- Denial of education
- Discrimination & Inequality of treatment

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ nothing
- Seek protection services
- Family or other support
- Seek justice
- Suicide as impact of violence

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Lack of awareness of services
- Safety concerns

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

"The types of violence are economic violence, deprivation of work and education, taking inheritance and taking a view according to the customs and traditions of the community, being beaten by parents or the husband, swearing, insults, exposure to kidnap, rape, sexual assault, harassment, and forced marriage" (Adult woman with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hassakeh governorate).

Denial of opportunities, services, resources, and rights was one of the most frequently cited concerns by women and girls. As is across Syria, denial of education is a primary form of GBV towards adolescent girls and young women: *"I wanted to continue my education, but my father categorically refused that. I felt that I have been deprived from the most important right in my life" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hassakeh Governorate).* Movement restrictions are another concern, specifically for widows and divorcees: *"As for widows, they are subjected to deprivation, and lack of freedom whether by being forbidden from leaving the house or even to speak" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hassakeh governorate).* In the 2022 PNA, 97% of children in Al-Hasakeh governorate live in locations where early marriage is occurring to girls aged 15 to 17 years old, however 94% of children reside in areas where it is not very common.⁹³

Sexual violence, including harassment, assault, exploitation, and rape were highly cited by women and girls as concerns. Technology-facilitated sexual violence appeared rather well known by women and girls: *"Yes, every day we hear a story about girls and women being harassed on the phone through pictures, conversations, videos, where they are blackmailed for money or an intimate relationship. Women and girls are more affected by issues of harassment online" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hassakeh governorate).* Sexual exploitation was mentioned, with additional vulnerability for displaced persons: *"As for displaced people, they suffer greatly from violence. They are exposed to physical and sexual exploitation, in addition to deprivation of work and freedom of movement, and they feel trapped in the camps" (Adolescent girl with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district,*

93 Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

Al-Hasakeh governorate). Less frequently mentioned was forced pregnancy, as a result of marital rape: "Another participant mentioned that they are forced to get pregnant and have children due to the pressure from their husbands on this matter. Girls are also deprived from education and forced into early marriage" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). It was also reported that rape is occurring, including in schools and camps: "...where there have been incidents of rape in schools, and refugee camps" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Physical violence was also regularly reported by women and girls, primarily physical assault but also mentions of homicide and "honour" killings: *"My neighbour's adolescent daughter was suffering from a mental disability. She was kidnapped, beaten, and she was later found dead" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). Often physical violence was mentioned in association with IPV, or domestic violence: "Domestic violence that takes place inside houses, from father to mother, from father to children, from the older brother to the mother and sisters. This is due to customs, traditions, authority, and discrimination between males and females. It is believed that a woman deserves violence to keep her under control. The most affected groups of violence are women, girls and children" (Adult woman with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). The dynamics of IPV are clearly based in a patriarchal belief of gender inequality and the devaluation of women and girls: "My daughter was exposed to physical and psychological violence by her husband, and she was eventually divorced, because she didn't give birth to baby boys" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

Similar as to across all of Syria, many women and girls report doing nothing or remaining silent when experiencing GBV incidents: *"Most of what women do is to keep silent and surrender, because any rebellion, controversy or rejection may expose them to greater violence and cause problems that are difficult to solve" (Adult woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Others may resort to family or friends or to humanitarian organisations, but not always the judiciary mechanisms due to the stigma and risk associated with doing so, including death: *"Few women resort to the judiciary because they get afraid of being punished, which in most cases is being killed or disowned. Instead, they turn to their relatives and the elders of the family. They also started to refer to community centres after they were established by organisations, which provide protection services such as psychological support. They also resort to women's shelters established by the Autonomous Administration" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh*

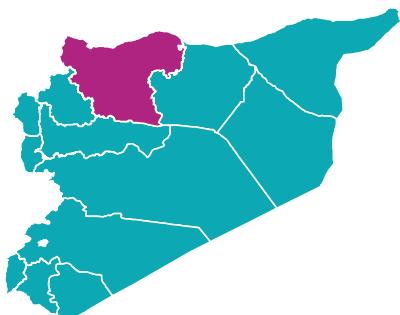
governorate). In addition to homicide, suicide was reported as an outcome of the violence in Al-Hasakeh: "There are people who can't tolerate violence, and thus either commit suicide or escape from the place where they are exposed to violence" (Older woman, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Many women and girls though reported seeking out aid or services, specifically protection related services, that provide them with the necessary tools to help them cope: *"People who are exposed to violence rarely resort to the judiciary and ask support from the family and elders because they are vulnerable. But they resort to protection centres in order to receive awareness sessions and individual sessions that enable them to learn new ways and means to reduce violence, fear of the community and exposure to more violence" (Adult woman with disability, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate). However, women and girls reported barriers to accessing services, particularly lacking transportation to services or the distance to the service, lack of awareness of services, and safety concerns surrounding accessing services: "We don't visit the safe spaces. We hope that such spaces will increase in the community because there are only few in Al-Hasakeh and most of them are located in the camps" (Adolescent girl, Al-Hasakeh sub-district, Al-Hasakeh governorate).*

Providing services in certain locations, Al-Hol Camp specifically, can be very dangerous, which likewise reduces the safety in accessing these services: *"Multiple safety and security incidents occurred in Al-Hol camp during the reporting period, including against humanitarian workers. An attack on 10 May on an INGO centre prompted the suspension of all humanitarian activities."*⁹⁴

94 United Nations Security Council (16 June 2022). *Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolutions 2139.* (Page 2).

Aleppo



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence (focus on children in school, women and girls)
- Physical violence (focus on beating, particularly related to domestic violence)
- Early and forced marriage
- Sexual violence (including rape and sexual harassment)
- TFGBV
- Discrimination/Inequality (gender, against person with disabilities, and widows/divorcees)
- Denial of rights (education, inheritance, freedom of movement)
- Mentions of kidnapping, women particularly but also children

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ nothing
- Family or other support
- Seeking justice
- Suicide as impact of violence

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Lack of awareness of services

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Women and girls in Aleppo governorate report experiencing family violence, especially IPV, physical violence, sexual violence, denial of education and psychological violence as main concerns: *"Our society is unjust to women, all its laws and legislation are unfair to them. Women are exposed to all kinds of psychological and physical harm and restricted of freedom"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Women and girls also report experiencing domestic violence, particularly IPV, including physical, emotional, and economic violence: *"Domestic violence is more towards the girls, the widows, and the divorced women, and the majority of men control their wives because men provide them with money"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate). The intergenerational impact of domestic violence was called out: *"When the father beats the mother the child will learn aggressive behaviour, and he imitates the father"* (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Women and girls' lives are at risk as they face physical assault and homicide: *"They are exposed to being beaten and even occasionally killed"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Kidnapping and disappearance of women and children, some of which are not reported due to societal stigma, was also mentioned: *"There is kidnapping of women"* (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Sexual violence, including harassment, assault and rape are threatening women and girls, and some believe this type of violence is increasing: *"I see that violence is constantly increasing in the camps, and at the moment, cases of harassment and rape have increased, but they keep these stories hidden and they do not reveal them"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). In particular, TFGBV was reported: *"Currently, there are cases of threatening and blackmailing through the internet. There are groups for this, even against children through the internet, with the threat of defamation or scandal in exchange for money or sex"* (Adult man, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Women and girls are the primary target groups for this violence, but some groups are extra vulnerable including widows and divorcees and people with disabilities: *"Widows may be exploited and even sexually harassed by those who look at them as an easy commodity. No one supports them or protects them"* (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Adolescent girls are also exposed to early marriage, especially in the face of the economic crisis: *"Girl's face violence because they are forced to participate in providing money for the family. They are deprived of education and work for low wages, and they face beating by their employer or psychological or verbal violence. They are often subjected to early marriage so that their family receives"*

money and saves on her expense" (Adult woman, Jebel Saman sub-district, Aleppo governorate). According to the 2022 PNA, 85% of children live in locations where early marriage is occurring to girls aged 15 to 17 years old, with 53% of children residing in areas where it is very common⁹⁵.

Frequently reported was a denial of education for various reasons, including logistical (such as lack of transportation), security, and cultural gender norms (such as movement restrictions placed upon women and girls): "Most of our daughters have been deprived of education because of the distance of schools and the customs and traditions that fill the minds of parents or brothers, although they use the excuse that there is no safety in our region" (Adult woman with disabilities, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Even when parents desire to educate their girls, they face challenges including the stigma against the girls and their families: "Even if we want to educate our daughters, we will not be free from the society talking and judging, which may compel us to get them out of school and marry them" (Adult woman with disability, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

As with all other governorates, psychological and emotional violence is highly discussed, coming from the family as well as community members and strangers, with specific targets of women and girls and people with disabilities: "Psychological violence is from the closest people to you, even from your family" (Adult woman, Atareb sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

Marriage status, ability and gender are risk factors for experiencing GBV. As noted above, inside camps in the Aleppo governorate, women and girls feel that violence may be increasing, specifically sexual violence. Also, as noted above, "widows' camps" in Aleppo contain their own specific forms of violence (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced).

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

With regards to mental health, 99.8% of households surveyed in Aleppo governorate reported that a member of their household experienced self-diagnosed signs of distress, the highest of any governorate. The highest group affected are adult women (99.4% of households) and girls (69.4%).⁹⁶

The most frequently mentioned coping mechanism deployed by women and girls in the face of violence was "to do nothing" or to remain silent. This was for a variety of reasons, one of which is the perpetrators are often family members so it is felt there is little that can be done: "The girl cries because she can't do anything because they are her family" (Adolescent girls, Atareb sub-

district, Aleppo governorate). Some noted the danger of more violence as a response to doing anything in the face of violence, which is especially true for the displaced: "The displaced use silence and surrender, because nowadays there are weapons around, and it can lead to bigger problems and killing" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo Governorate). Lastly, many felt there is shame brought to the survivor of violence by society with low likelihood of any justice occurring if a woman reports, especially in the case of rape: "There is no desire to resort to the judiciary, especially by parents whose daughters are subjected to sexual violence and rape. In fact, only 1% of the cases make it to court for a number of reasons, the first of which is fear of shame" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo Governorate). As a result, many women and girls reported that they could disclose to a family member or other person for support during an incident of violence, including parents, children, sisters, neighbours, grandparents, or notables in the regions, as often such incidents would be handled internally within the family or the tribe: "We resort to family because it is shameful to resort to the judiciary" (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Additionally, there is limited judicial recourse, and fear of reprisal to recourse, that prevents survivors from taking action: "There is no law, so it is in vain to complain. If anything they fear more violence" (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

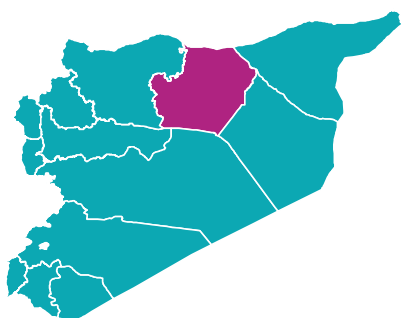
Women and girls reported the option of accessing protection related services or other aid as a way to cope with GBV. Some found the support for GBV response services useful: "They may suggest solutions for her problems and having someone to listen to you eases stress" (Adult woman, Afrin sub-district, Aleppo governorate). Some noted though that aid was not accessible to all, specifically divorced and widowed women, as well as older women: "Divorced women are deprived of most of the aid even though they are subjected to many types of violence. They are expected to face this violence and stay strong" (Adult woman, Jarablus sub-district, Aleppo governorate). A few reported seeking out justice through community-based or judicial mechanisms, sometimes through the family, although others noted that this was not a possibility for some: "Sometimes they resort to the police or judiciary to solve it" (Adult woman, Al-bab sub-district, Aleppo governorate).

As seen across Syria, GBV experts in Aleppo noted the rise in suicides, especially among adolescents: "Suicide cases increased, especially among adolescents" (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub). However, the rates of suicide were reported as rising amongst women as well, but sometimes related to external factors such as the economic crisis and losing husbands to migration: "In addition to the migration of husbands, women were left behind to take responsibility of their families at a time of great trouble and this also increased the rate of suicide cases" (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border Hub).

⁹⁵ Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

⁹⁶ Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

Ar-Raqqa



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Denial of rights, including denial to education, denial to work, economic violence and struggles to face the current economic situation affecting people greatly, and movement restriction
- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence due to fear of violence from war, the stress of the current context, or insults, and psychological pressure from parents, husband, community
- Physical violence: generally beating, by husbands, parents
- Sexual violence: harassment and rape
- TFGBV
- Early and forced marriage
- Exploitation, especially due to people's need to work so exploitation by employers (both sexually as well as working in unsafe working conditions or withholding wages)

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Family or other support
- Seek GBV Services

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Safety concerns
- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Lack of awareness of services

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

"Women and girls are subjected to all kinds of violence from psychological, physical, sexual, verbal and emotional violence, deprivation of resources and deprivation of their most basic rights in life such as deprivation of education, work, inheritance, travel, exposure to early marriage and rape. Sometimes these cases are frequent in informal camps due to the living situation" (Adolescent girls, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Women and girls in Ar-Raqqa describe denial of their rights and freedoms. This includes economic violence when women and girls are denied the right to their inheritance: *"Most women in our community are deprived of the right to inherit because of customs and traditions. This type of violence applies to all groups whether a girl, a widow, a divorced woman, a disabled, or an elderly woman. A man can take his share in inheritance and his sisters' shares" (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* Economic violence is also acted out on women who are denied the opportunity to work, or when they do work, having their wages controlled by a male family member, often their husband: *"...in Raqqa... there is denial of education and resources for women. Women go to work and partners take their salaries" (GBV Expert, NES hub).*

Adolescent girls experience denial of their right and freedoms through numerous modalities, including denial to education and work as well as forced marriage: *"Adolescent girls cannot object and their opinions are not considered. They have no right to education, work, nor the right to choose a husband" (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* In the 2022 PNA, Ar-Raqqa governorate reported that 92% of girls live in locations where child labour prevents school attendance for girls aged 15 to 17 years old (with 50% of girls living in locations where it is very common) and 72% of girls live in locations where child labour prevents school attendance for girls aged 12-14 years old (32% of girls living in areas where it is very common).⁹⁷ Adolescent girls are also restricted by their parents in terms of clothing: *"Cruelty from parents, not allowing them their choice of clothes and forcing a particular costume" (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* Denial of rights and freedoms is often perpetrated by male members of the household including fathers, husbands, and brothers towards wives, daughters, and sisters: *"The men prevent their wives from going out of the house or to work. They deprive them of the simplest rights. Women are beaten and divorced. Children are deprived of their rights too." (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).* In the 2022 PNA, Ar-Raqqa governorate had 84% of women and girls living in locations where movement restrictions are in place for both girls (under

97 Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

18 years) and women (18 years or older).⁹⁸ These forms of violence are considered by some to be the most prevalent in the area: *"The deprivation of resources and opportunities is the most common thing that women, girls, widows and divorced women are subjected to"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). In the 2022 MSNA, Ar-Raqqa was the governorate with the highest number of households (12.1%) reporting that community perception of being a woman, young female, or pregnant is a main barrier for household members to access the labour market.

Sexual violence, including harassment and rape, are concerns for women and girls in the Ar-Raqqa governorate. In camp settings, a lack of lighting is considered as a contributing factor to the perceived increase of sexual violence: *"...a lack of lighting in the camp increased sexual harassment and rape incidents as the camp is not organised and has high population density so these cases have increased, and this leads many families to marry their daughters at 15 years old, due to their concerns"* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Women and girls also cited TFGBV as a concern: *"What I noticed most often in my surroundings is online violence, through which women and adolescent girls are exploited, since the internet has become available to everyone"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Early and forced marriage are inflicted upon women and adolescent girls, often exposing them to more violence including IPV: *"After the war, I was prevented from completing my education and they forced me to marry. It was the beginning of a series of violence, as my husband beats me and deprives me of work. If I were a man, they wouldn't deprive me of an education"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). In the 2022 PNA, 84% of children live in locations where early marriage is occurring for girls aged 15 to 17 years old.⁹⁹ Also, women and girls are experiencing physical assault in intimate partner relationships, including in early marriages: *"The most common type of violence against women in our community is physical violence, which is beating. I was beaten severely by my husband and stayed in the hospital for two days"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

In some situations, women and girls may be at risk of homicides, specifically under the pretence of "honour killings." This is usually blamed on women who resist early and forced marriages or are exhibiting behaviour deemed shameful by society's standards. Regardless of circumstances, women and girls who fall victim to this crime are also often the ones blamed for it: *"For girls/women, this group is denied opportunities and are blamed for any violence like honour killings"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Women and girls with disabilities are particularly

a target for GBV: *"Girls with disabilities and younger ones, especially, are exposed to types of violence, such as psychological violence, and community's rejection of them. They are deprived of an education due to the lack of schools equipped and suitable for person with disabilities, and sometimes harassment and rape due to the inability to defend themselves or disclose"* (Adolescent girl with disability, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). An additional risk factor for GBV is marital status, with widows and divorcees experiencing vulnerability to economic and social violence: *"As for married women, they are different from divorced and widows. It is possible to get their rights and find someone to provide their needs and rights. Divorced women and widows are exposed to economic and social violence and the community's negative view of them"* (Adolescent girl with disability, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Displaced women and girls are vulnerable to violence, including exploitation. *"For the displaced, they feel weak in the region and vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and psychological violence"* (Adult woman with disability, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

Women and girls reported doing nothing as the most used coping mechanism when facing GBV. Some noted that they did nothing because of the shame of disclosure when the perpetrator is family: *"It is shameful to file a complaint against my sons"* (Older woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Others noted the consequences of reporting violence, such as the risk to one's job when the violence is in the workplace: *"Inability to file a complaint to the judiciary against employers or even telling the family out of fear of losing the job and thus the income source"* (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Lastly, confronting violence may lead to more violence, a very real and dangerous consequence to disclosure, particularly in the case of IPV: *"I keep silent as I can do nothing, because if I confront him, I may be exposed to physical violence, and if I complain to the judiciary, my reputation will be affected negatively. That is why I prefer silence"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate). Related, some women chose to isolate themselves in order to avoid violence when possible, including locking themselves in rooms away from abusive partners: *"In order to reduce the effect of physical violence by my husband, I avoided him and sometimes locked myself in a room so that he would not hit me and to reduce being in contact with him. If the judiciary would stop him from beating me forever, I wouldn't hesitate to go to court! But what happens is that they punish the offender for a short period of time and then he is released to return and practice violence in a worse way than before"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Some women and girls do seek out safe spaces they can go to and increase their awareness on GBV: *"As for women, they go to centres that care about women's*

98, 99 Ibid.

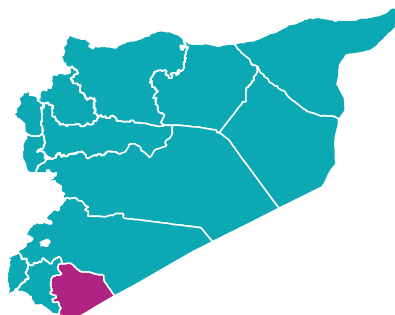
affairs such as the WGSS, and attend awareness sessions that contribute to reducing the spread of violence, as well as the participation with trusted persons in case they are exposed to violence, or resort to dialogue with the husband to reduce violence, especially domestic" (Adolescent girl, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Experts are seeing increased rates of disclosures of GBV at these spaces and are able to provide GBV-specialised services including vocational or livelihood activities and awareness raising: *"There are increased rates of GBV survivor disclosures. This is a strategy used by women and girls when they experience GBV, engaging more in vocational training, in education and informative sessions in order to strengthen their social network, look for job opportunities to become self-reliant"* (GBV Expert, NES hub). At these spaces, survivors of GBV can receive case management, which can be potentially lifesaving services: *"First of all, during case management, many cases come up with a safety plan around how to avoid GBV. In adolescent girls' programmes - we teach them and caregivers on how to avoid violence in the community. An example is how to deal with upsetting behaviour"* (GBV Expert, NES hub).

However, some women and girls face barriers in accessing safe spaces and other GBV services, including the distance to the service or lack of transportation, lack of awareness of services, safety concerns in accessing services, and gender customs such as restricting women and girls' movements: *"It is difficult to know all the safe spaces and other centres in the city due to the distance between them, and it's hard to get there in the current context, including hot weather, transportation fees, harassment, kidnapping"* (Adult woman, Ar-Raqqa sub-district, Ar-Raqqa governorate).

Although it is true many women and girls find silence their best coping mechanism in the face of violence, experts note how some in Ar-Raqqa, particularly women who are widowed or divorced or older women, act as focal points in the community as a support network for others facing violence: *"I think they showed themselves to be very resilient. The challenges they go through are everywhere, and organisations have also done a lot to support them. I think they are being very resilient, given the years they have lived in this situation. They come to the safe spaces for years and tell us about losing everything, including family members, but they are still smiling, inviting others to participate, showing solidarity, so they are resilience heroines. I actually felt they are more resilient, despite what they have gone through. It depends on the location, for example in Raqqa we noted many widowed and divorced and older women being very resilient. Some have become focal points in the communities and become a source of strength for others in the community"* (GBV Expert, NES hub).

As-Sweida



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Sexual violence: rape and harassment in the street, at work, in schools
- Economic violence: deprivation of inheritance for women, males in homes controlling the finances, etc.
- Physical violence, particularly beatings: men abusing wives, physical violence in schools

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Confronting violence
- Victim blaming
- Seek protection services

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Safety concern (kidnapping)

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

"Many types of violence occur in our communities, including, physical violence, psychological violence and economic violence" (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Women and girls in As-Sweida governorate frequently report denial of rights and freedoms including economic violence. Economic violence is often exhibited through

control of finances, as men deny women their inheritances: *"Women are exposed to violence more than men, especially economic abuse. For example, women receive four times less inheritance than men, and this is known in all families. In addition to economic violence against women by the husband and the family as well, the man always has the right to do anything"* (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate). Additional control happens when denying adolescent girls their education and establishing movement restrictions as a traditional method to "protect" them from violence on the street, in the market, and at work. Women noted that the rise in this type of violence is due to the economic decline in the country and the continued security situation, contributing to household pressures: *"Violence increased a lot more than last year, of course, as a result of the economic and security conditions. Husbands have become more psychologically stressed and anxious, and found an excuse to prevent women from leaving the house as a result of the bad security situation. They prevent her from going to work or visiting her friends and everything is under the pretext of the security situation"* (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Women and girls reported the threat of sexual violence, including the extreme cases of harassment and rape in public places such as streets and workplaces. They noted that this type of violence has also increased in the last year: *"Then sexual violence intensifies, such as harassment and rape in the street or at work, and of course, all of this has increased during the crisis. This year is more than last year and the next year will be more again"* (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate). While women and girls are primary target groups for this violence, marital status is a specific risk factor, resulting in widows and divorcees becoming more vulnerable: *"Women are also exposed to sexual violence such as harassment, especially in schools. These days, harassment is widespread, especially with the spread of narcotic drugs, and violence is more common on widows and divorced women because there is no one to protect them"* (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Additionally, in the 2022 PNA, 95% of children live in locations where early marriage is occurring to girls aged 15-17 years old.¹⁰⁰

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

Women and girls reported different coping mechanisms, ranging from using silence and non-disclosure to confronting violence. Some noted that women cannot speak out about violence because of a victim-blaming culture and that they would experience not only social stigma but also tangible consequences such as losing their home or children: *"When there is violence against the wife, she is forced to keep silent, because if she*

speaks, she would be blamed by the community and she will lose her home and children, so it is better to put up with violence" (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

However, others argued that even within a victim-blaming culture, women should confront the violence, although it was often referred to as encouraging women to speak out, not confirming that women do. Some felt if all women speak out and confront violence, it could shift the culture: *"Woman must know that whatever she does, she is blamed because our eastern society always takes the side of the man. If every woman confronted and refused violence, whether by husband or family, we would notice a reduction in rates of violence. Or simply the violence would be viewed differently. I mean, the woman can complain or discuss, or she can consult a lawyer through an association, organisation, or any legal body"* (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

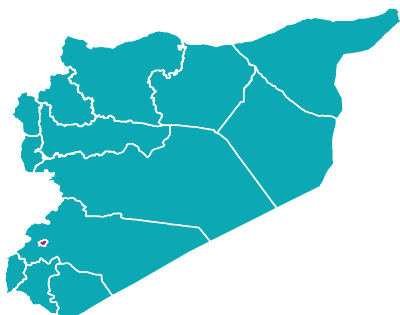
Some thought that violence, particularly IPV, will only increase or get more severe in the absence of action and so encouraged action to escape: *"Violence exists anywhere and at any time, but if a woman keeps silent about violence, it will increase, so every abused woman must refuse and confront violence however they can, whether through discussion, standing strong, or complaining, but the most important thing is not to keep silent about violence"* (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate). They also noted that even if they wanted to confront the violence and seek redress through a judicial or community-based system, that would likely not help them: *"In my opinion, community and laws oppress women, because even if we complained, they would take the side of the husband"* (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Women and girls highlighted the use of organisations and WGSS at which they can receive GBV specialised services and psychosocial support: *"There is more than one possible solution she can resort to. For example, at this centre or another, she can consult with psychological support providers, or discover other solutions and ideas to cope with the abuse"* (Adult woman, As-Sweida sub-district, As-Sweida governorate). Barriers to accessing GBV services included lack of transportation and safety concerns in accessing a WGSS: *"As for the challenges in accessing centres and services, all participants said that the most important challenge is the lack of means of transportation and its high costs, especially for girls who come from neighbouring villages. One of the participants also referred to the security situation and the problems of kidnapping as a challenge to reach the centre"* (Facilitator for group of adolescent girls, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

Other coping mechanisms included disclosing to a family member or other supportive person, or in cases where one's family is not safe to disclose to, utilising GBV services through an organisation: *"The most important thing is to tell the family that they are facing violence, but if the violence is applied by the family, they can go to any organisation centre and discuss cases of violence with them"* (Adolescent girl, Salkhad sub-district, As-Sweida governorate).

100 Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

Damascus



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence (targeting persons with disabilities, older persons, children in schools)
- Physical violence (focus on beating; targeting children and women)
- Early and forced marriage
- Denial of rights (education, inheritance, freedom of movement)
- Family violence (primarily by brothers and fathers who commit violence against women and girls through physical violence and control of movement and resources)

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Seek protection services
- Family or other support

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Family restrictions (re: Gender norms/ customs)
- Lack of awareness of services

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Women and girls in the Damascus governorate report experiencing denial of their rights and freedoms, specifically denial of education and inheritance and movement restrictions often perpetrated by male members of the family. Women may be deprived of their inheritance from their family, assuming that they will be taken care of by their husband, or their husbands may have their wives take the inheritance, but then take immediate control of it, demonstrating economic abuse: *"They deprive the girl from inheritance because her husband will benefit. They think he is not a son who they can benefit from and so they deny their daughter her rights"* (Adolescent girl, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).

Adolescent girls also experience denial of their education, controlled by her parents, and even her brother: *"I faced violence from my brothers who kept me from school in preparation for marriage."* (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate). In the 2022 MSNA, 44.2% of households (the most reported of any governorate) reported that fear of online harassment was a major reason limiting their school-aged child from learning through an electronic device, demonstrating a limitation of learning online due to the fear of violence.¹⁰¹ Adolescent girls and women often face movement restrictions, lifted only when they are accompanied by an appropriate relative. They can also be denied the freedom to choose when and to whom they marry, facing early and forced marriage: *"Violence against adolescent girls, education deprivation, movement restrictions except with a relative, early marriage and poor choice of husband, whether her own choice or forced by her family to marry someone she doesn't want."* (Adult woman, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate). Early marriage was reported as occurring in Damascus governorate in the 2022 PNA with 99% of children living in locations where early marriage is occurring to girls aged 15-17 years old (with 28% of children living in locations where it is very common). Movement restrictions were also reported through the same assessment with 75% of women and girls living in areas where movement restrictions are occurring to adult women and 70% of women and girls living in areas where these occur for girls under 18 years old.¹⁰²

Controlling women and girls often takes place in the household and is perpetrated by male family members, including fathers, husbands, and brothers. In addition to the restrictions just mentioned, physical and psychological violence may unfold: *"Violence by males to their sisters, families give males authority and restrict girls' movement and suppress their personality"* (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate). Women and girls also mentioned family

¹⁰¹ Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

¹⁰² Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

violence, resulting in sexual violence against women and girls: *"It differs according to age and gender, at home by brother or father (sexual violence against daughter or sister), or brothers against each other" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).*

Sexual violence was also reported as occurring outside of the household with many concerns of TFGBV. This form of GBV happens most often through obtaining photos of a girl that would be compromising if shared publicly and then blackmailing girls into sexual acts: *"Males make fake accounts where they pretend to be a girl and communicate with other girls. Then she discovers that he is a male and he starts to blackmail her" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).*

In the 2022 PNA, 78% of women and girls live in locations where harassment for women is occurring during humanitarian assistance, and 56% of women and girls live in locations where harassment for girls (under 18 years old) is happening during humanitarian assistance.¹⁰³ According to the 2022 PNA, 39% of women and girls live in locations where requests for personal relationships in exchange for, or as condition of, receiving humanitarian assistance/services occur. 23% of women and girls live in locations where similar requests happen for girls.¹⁰⁴

Some women and girls see this violence as being a constant in life, and shifting from one type of violence in adolescence such as denial of rights and education, to a different form of GBV in adulthood, such as IPV: *"I faced a violence through denial of my inheritance rights and couldn't confront it. I left my family's verbal violence and denial of education to face my husband's violence" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).*

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

As is with all the other governorates, some women and girls mentioned silence as the safest coping mechanism: *"If she screamed and defended herself, they would blame her, so she keeps silent to avoid scandals" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).* This sentiment of silence as a coping mechanism was echoed by a GBV expert in the region: *"Women and girls try to find their own coping strategies. IPV and domestic violence is culturally accepted, and women and girls find their coping strategies to face this situation – such as showing obedience and submission, including submission of the children or agreeing to marrying off their adolescent girls so as not to contradict the word of the breadwinner. Such is the way of men" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).* However, sometimes women or girls will disclose to a family member or trusted friend for

stress relief: *"Woman resort to her family upon facing beating and rape" (Adult woman, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).*

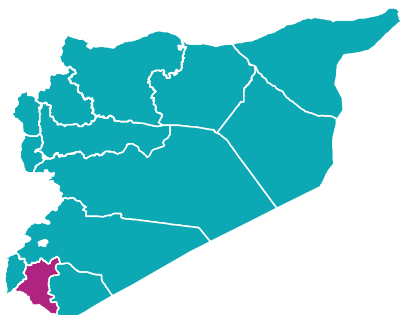
There were many references to seeking out services following violence, including health and protection: *"In our community, women resort to the women's development and support centre or to the family planning association" (Adult woman, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).* However, some noted that health services and professionals may not always be able to help: *"A doctor may or may not help" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).* Additional barriers to accessing services, specifically GBV response services include a lack of transportation or distance to the service, family restrictions on women and girls to access services, and a lack of awareness of services: *"We were not aware of the family protection centre [i.e., WGSS]. There should be adverts on the TV and online to publicise them" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).*

One GBV Expert in the region noted that there is currently a push from girls to learn about GBV risks and learn self-defence: *"We notice that women are most resilient and tend to build strength out of their trauma. Girls are requesting classes on self-defences, body combat, which means they are more aware of the risks and more willing to protect themselves. There was change in gender roles during the crisis, as men are either in the battlefield, abroad or hiding themselves and women had to become the breadwinner, and this has increased their strategies to protect themselves" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).* However, the flipside is that others are resorting to self-harm and suicide: *"The inability to cope with the daily situation may challenge their resilience. You may find a woman who fights for her rights, as a member of the women committee or a woman who is learning to be a plumber so she can survive. But you may also find a woman with suicidal thoughts because she sees no hope in tomorrow" (GBV Expert, Whole of Syria).*

One girl shared that she would report to local security officials: *"I tell the security checkpoint" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).* However, another explained that children face barriers in reporting to security officials: *"She has to report, but in our community, she is prevented from doing so. Girls and boys are facing violence but they are prohibited from resorting to the police or specialists" (Adolescent girl with disability, Damascus sub-district, Damascus governorate).*

103, 104 Ibid.

Dar'a



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Primary focus on economic violence including denial to education for girls and exploitation, particularly economic exploitation (recruiting children for work, taking money from people to use their children with disabilities for begging, older persons exploited for their money, etc.).
- Early and forced marriage

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Seek protection services

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Safety concerns (kidnapping or murder, sexual harassment/ exploitation)
- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Gender Norms/ Customs (family restrictions)
- Lack of awareness of services

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Women and girls reported family violence by male members of the household including denial of rights and freedoms as well as physical abuse.

Adolescent girls are being denied their education: *"The certificate would not benefit her as she will stay in her husband's house" (Adolescent girl, Izra sub-district, Dar'a governorate).* Adolescent girls reported this was due to customs and traditions as well as fears of societal stigma or shame, fear of kidnapping and harassment, the prioritisation of child labour over education, and poverty. This is further demonstrated in the 2022 MSNA data where 40.2% of households interviewed considered fear of online harassment as majorly limiting their school-aged child from learning through an electronic device, showing the extension of denial of education from physical schools to online learning.¹⁰⁵

Often denial of education is linked to being forced into early marriages: *"They drop her out of school to marry her" (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).* Adolescent girls expressed that early marriage has spread widely and they themselves had been exposed; they cited the main reasons driving early marriage are "fear of shame," customs and traditions, economic decline, and poverty in general (Izra sub-district, Dar'a governorate). The prevalence was echoed in the 2022 PNA with 95% of children living in areas where early marriage is occurring to girls aged 15-17 years old (with 50% of children living in locations where it is not very common and 45% of children living in locations where it is very common).¹⁰⁶

Physical abuse reported in households was perpetrated by family guardians (father, brother, or husband) through beatings which lead to physical disabilities. Although women and girls noted that they are exposed to physical violence in numerous public and private locations: *"Physical violence: girls, women and children are exposed to it in homes, schools and at work by employers, in addition to minibus car parks" (Adolescent girl, Izra sub-district, Dar'a governorate).*

Movement restrictions are also a concern following data from the 2022 PNA. 72% of women and girls live in locations with movement restriction in place for women (18 years or older) and 63% of women and girls live in locations with similar restrictions for girls (under 18 years old).

One woman reported trafficking occurring, but without any details to further understand the kind of trafficking and groups which are targeted: *"Economic violence: cases of deprivation of personal allowance or exploitation and live trafficking" (Adult woman, Dar'a sub-district, Dar'a governorate).*

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

All adolescent girls in the group discussion agreed that

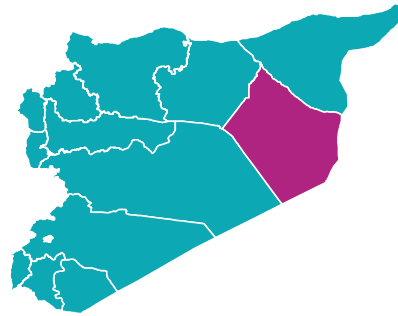
¹⁰⁵ Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

¹⁰⁶ Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

there is no possibility of doing anything or reporting anywhere if they are subjected to violence. One of the girls elaborated on these barriers, including those that occur when family members are the perpetrators as well as the shame related to GBV: *“To whom can we report? The divorced woman is controlled by her father and brother, and the married woman can’t talk to anyone because it is shameful”* (Adolescent girl, Izra sub-district, Dar’a governorate).

Some women can seek out support and services through WGSS: *“We know a woman in the course who has cancer, and her husband keeps hitting her. We told her to attend the course with us and her mental health is better now”* (Adult woman, Dar’a sub-district, Dar’a governorate). Although, the availability of opportunities and services differs between the urban and rural areas, with more opportunities in urban environments: *“It differs between the city and the rural as in the city woman can work, train in a profession and continue her education while in the rural this is impossible or rare”* (Adult woman, Dar’a sub-district, Dar’a governorate). The same problem was expressed regarding community centres and safe spaces for women where they can receive PSS or vocational training. Such services were mainly available in urban areas. Additional barriers to accessing GBV response services include a lack of transportation or distance to services, safety concerns when accessing services, including kidnapping and sexual harassment, a lack of awareness of services, and family restrictions of women and girls accessing services: *“The women indicated that the challenges of accessing services are great and form a major obstacle, especially for those coming from rural areas, and the most important of these challenges are: transportation costs are high, and they are unavailable, the security situation, fear of kidnapping or of explosions/ bombs, and distance to services”* (Facilitator for group of adult women, Dar’a sub-district, Dar’a governorate).

Deir-Ez-Zor



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Physical violence most mentioned, primarily beatings, some targeting children, some done by strangers.
- Early and forced marriage
- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence grave concern; the verbal violence is sometimes linked with sexual harassment; affecting women and girls; from strangers as well as in the home (husbands, fathers, mothers, brothers)
- Additional concerns are economic violence and exploitation in the face of poor economic situations; movement restrictions; and denial to education.

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Family or other support
- Seek protection services

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Safety concerns
- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Lack of awareness of services

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

"There are several types of violence that women and girls are subjected to in the rural community in general, such as beatings, harassment, rape, domestic violence, and deprivation of resources, education, and inheritance" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

A group of adolescent girls all agreed to the types of violence that this group is prone to experiencing, including deprivation of education, income, physical violence, and the most common, early marriage. However, they also noted that parents may force them to marry "in order to protect them". Some of these forms of violence are interrelated, for example, some girls are denied education after it is arranged for them to enter an early marriage. Also, the threat of sexual harassment results in parents forcing their girls to drop out of school and stay home: *"For education in some areas in Deir-Ez-Zor, adolescent girls experience two types of GBV; either they are denied an education due to early marriage or child labour, or they face violence going to school, as in some communities the nearest school is a kilometre or more away, which means exposure to verbal and sexual harassment on the way, given that these areas are not safe" (GBV Expert, NES hub).* It was also noted that girls are very often exposed to and at risk of experiencing such harassment: *"If a girl is walking in the street, she will definitely be subjected to verbal violence and harassment" (Adolescent girl, Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Adolescent girls are also exposed to movement restrictions, controlled by men in the household (fathers, husbands, brothers): *"I am forbidden from working and leaving the house in general, but my mother convinced him to let me come to the safe space" (Adolescent girl, Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).* According to the 2022 PNA, 64% of women and girls are living in areas with movement restrictions in place for women (over 18 years old) and girls.¹⁰⁷

Physical violence is affecting women and girls, including cases of IPV: *"My husband does not prevent me from working or going out of the house but sometimes he gets angry, especially when his meal is late or he is stressed. Sometimes, he beats us or swears at us" (Adolescent girl, Al-Mayadin sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).* Physical violence may also include homicide, including "honour killings," which an expert noted has increased in the past year in Deir-Ez-Zor: *"Also, more honour killings of single women in Al-Hasakeh and Deir-Ez-Zor" (GBV Expert, NES hub).*

Some recognise this violence and restricted rights and freedoms as a result of a patriarchal society: *"Girls*

and women in community are subjected to violence and their freedoms are restricted because it is a conservative community and there are some strict beliefs, as well as the fact that it is a patriarchal community, where women are subjected to violence in all its forms by men" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). However, some noted that since the beginning of the conflict, a societal shift has taken place. Prior to the crisis, decision making within households was shared, and physical violence was less prevalent: *"It is not always the man who controls, but the father's opinion is usually dominant. Violence has increased more than ever since Syria changed in 2010. Families used to talk instead of hitting each other. But after the crisis, tolerance decreased. People said: 'it's better we go back to beating'. They consider the best way for educating the boys and girls is by beating them" (Adolescent girl, Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Widows and divorcees were identified as at risk of movement restriction and other types of violence from their families: *"Widows and divorced women face great pressure from parents, husbands or his parents, sometimes children (male children), who prevent them from leaving the house, fearing shame and gossip" (Adult woman, Al-Mayadin sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).* Experts agreed and noted the difficulties divorced women have in accessing services due to their marital status and the social stigma surrounding it: *"Women and girls are segregated, lonely and mentally affected, for example in Deir-Ez-Zor. When they are divorced, they are not accepted by the community. They are even refrained and impeded from accessing services or there is stigma around accessing certain services" (GBV Expert, NES hub).* Ability was also noted as a risk factor for experiencing violence amongst women and girls: *"Disabled people are verbally and psychologically abused and bullied without regard to their situation" (Adolescent girl, Deir-Ez-Zor sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

In general, most women and girls agreed that women and girls with disabilities, those who are displaced, and widows and divorcees, all react in different ways to violence. This includes reporting to authorities, doing nothing, or reaching out to services: *"In my opinion, prevention of violence differs in the community from one person to another. Disabled girls resort to the authorities or just accept reality, or resort to centres that integrate them into the community, but they are few" (Adolescent girl with disability, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).*

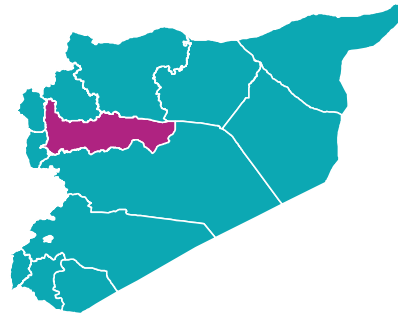
In general, women and girls are restricted to seeking help through the family, however, recently that has shifted, allowing for women and girls to access help through WGSS: *"Due to customs and traditions, girls or women in general cannot escape the family network. They are bound to their family, and if they need help, they go to the elder of the family. In recent times, some women*

have gone to the community support centre for advice and assistance where there is a safe space for them and full freedom of expression" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

Many women and girls discussed seeking out GBV services: "As for women, they go to the safe space that takes care of women's issues and attend sessions that can help them reduce the spread of violence" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). Some specific services that were sought out included PSS at WGSS: "Widows seek help from older family members to protect them against violence. Some go to the Community Support Centre to relieve the psychological pressures they suffer. They can discover new horizons by listening to other women's experiences. They find a safe space for discussion at the centre without fear" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate).

However, some GBV-related services, including legal or medical care, are not always available and there are barriers for girls to access the WGSS: "There is no legal or medical care, so there is no party that we can resort to in order to report the violence cases. There is a woman centre but we feel afraid to go there. As for psychosocial support, we have received many sessions conducted by the organisation and mobile team, which provide psychological support and awareness-raising sessions" (Adolescent girl, Kisreh sub-district, Deir-Ez-Zor governorate). A GBV expert in the region noted that barriers to services can also be challenging due to gender-related movement restrictions on women and girls: "Health services sometimes also create difficulties because the women need to be accompanied by a man. If the health services are placed in women-only spaces, this creates barriers to access also for women. According to cultural norms, they must be accompanied by men. This happens in Tel Bayda in Al-Hasakeh and Deir-Ez-Zor, mainly" (GBV Expert, NES hub).

Hama



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Denial of rights (denial of education and work, primarily for women and girls)
- Sexual violence: harassment of women in transportation means or crowded places, TFGBV
- Early and forced marriage
- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence against women and girls by their fathers, husbands, teachers (boys receiving this violence in schools as well), in person and online
- Discrimination/ Inequality against people with disabilities, older persons and females

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Seek justice, Raise awareness, Empowerment/ Psychological strength
- Suicide as impact of violence

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Safety concerns
- Lack of awareness
- Family restrictions (Gender norms/ customs)

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Women and girls in Hama governorate report denial of rights and opportunities, early marriage, sexual violence, and psychological violence as concerns.

Women and adolescent girls are experiencing movement restrictions. With marital status as a risk factor, this is especially true for divorced women: *"If you are divorced, you are forbidden to go out. You are forbidden to continue your studies"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).

Adolescent girls experience various forms of violence, including denial of education due to various reasons, including a lack of transportation, movement restrictions, or a lack of schools in the area: *"Girls are deprived of education, not just regular education. A girl might like to learn drawing or music but, in our community, it is prevented"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). In addition, social stigma also contributes to denying girls education; however, some families are persuadable to ignoring the social judgement and supporting girls' education: *"People around my father gossiped when they saw me going to the institute. He wanted to prevent me from studying a baccalaureate, so I told him I would not destroy my future. I asked him if he had confident in me and he said yes, so we agreed to let me continue my education and ignore others' gossip"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).

There are intersections of GBV, such as when early marriage can lead to other types of violence. For example, early marriage can often result in divorce, which as a marital status is a risk factor for violence. Girls who are divorced often face other forms of violence and denial of their rights and freedoms, such as movement restrictions and being ostracised by society due to the stigma of divorce: *"Our neighbour's daughter is 14 years old. They married her to a 17-year-old boy. She married just for a month then got divorced and came back to her family. When I ask her to visit me, her parents stop her because she is divorced and can't go out. My parents prevent me from visiting my friend because they claim she will teach me bad things"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). Early marriage is reported to be a present problem according to the 2022 PNA, with 87% of children living in locations where early marriage is occurring to girls aged 15-17 years old. In the same assessment, 92% of women and girls live in areas where movement restrictions are in place for adult women and 88% of women and girls live in areas where similar restrictions are in place for girls (under 18 years old).¹⁰⁸

Sexual violence is perpetrated against women and girls, sometimes through harassment, often in public areas such as transportation modalities: *"In transportation,*

there is a lot of harassment due to the overcrowding caused by the lack of transportation" (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). Additionally, TFGBV and harassment is present: *"Many girls receive threatening messages, and they should immediately block the person, but he started threatening her that he would post her photos if she tried to complain"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).

In the 2022 PNA, 74% of women and girls live in locations where harassment occurs to adult women during humanitarian assistance and 21% of women and girls live in locations where it is very common.¹⁰⁹ The numbers were slightly less for girls under 18 years, where 54% of women and girls live in locations where harassment occurs to girls during humanitarian assistance and 17% of women and girls live in locations where it is very common. 40% of women and girls live in locations where requests for personal relationships in exchange for, or as a condition of, receiving humanitarian assistance and/or services are occurring for adult women and 19% of women and girls live in locations where similar requests are happening for girls.¹¹⁰ (see section on Distributions).

Women and girls may also be subject to psychological violence from their families including their husbands, fathers, brothers, and in-laws. People with disabilities are also targeted with verbal and psychological violence: *"People with disabilities are subjected to insults, hurtful speech and scorn. They are called names that undermine their confidence. They are harassed and bullied, and they must be greatly supported to become active members in the community"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

Women in the Hama governorate report resorting to silence when facing violence: *"If you are divorced or a widow you must keep silent. You have no one to protect or support you"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). However, some note a shift away from resorting to silence: *"Many girls used to keep silent when they faced violence, but now they know how to defend their rights"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). There are reported consequences to confronting and reporting violence to officials, especially social backlash: *"When a woman resorts to the judiciary, she is subjected to a lot of pressure. If she faces harassment and wants to complain to the court, her reputation may be affected, so she kept silent"* (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).

Many women rely on their own self-confidence and seek out empowerment opportunities as coping mechanisms: *"For me, promoting self-confidence helps*

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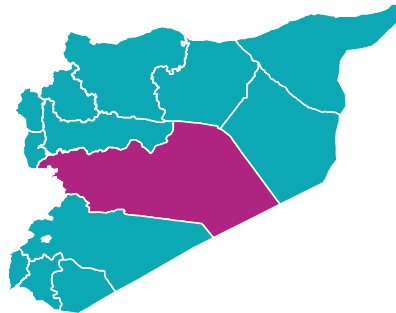
109, 110 Ibid

a lot in confronting violence and is very essential" (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). This also includes seeking out empowerment activities that can come with protection services: "With self-help training, she gained self-confidence. She is now attending these courses and likes to go out. I have started defending myself. Previously, I was worried that people gossiped about me" (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).

Similarly, additional GBV specialised services are available in some locations (with gaps in services in rural areas) and from which women reported benefiting: *"There were people who had no idea of self-protection before they came here. They were being misled about their rights. But in legal sessions, they explained to us that some traditional marriages were not official, and that woman should not be deceived" (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate). However, barriers facing women and girls while accessing GBV responses and other services were reported, including safety concerns accessing services, a lack of awareness of services, and family restrictions on women and girls: "There are centres but I can't register as my family prevent me from going. It is impossible for me to go if the centres are mixed, and if it is far away it is forbidden to go alone, so my mother must accompany me to and from the centre" (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).*

In line with the noted increase in the past year, some women report that women and girls are resorting to suicide as a response to violence: *"There are many young people who face violence and they try to commit suicide or they may turn to drug use. Because the father does not understand his son and is repressing him, the boy is turning to friends who lead him astray" (Adult woman, Hama sub-district, Hama governorate).*

Homs



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Sexual violence: harassment, sexual assault
- Physical violence: assault, killing
- Early and forced marriage
- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence primarily affecting girls but additional groups such as older women and people with disabilities.
- Denial of rights such as freedom of movement

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Staying silent/ nothing
- Seek justice
- Seek health services

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Insufficient services
- Services not free

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Extreme and dangerous forms of GBV occur including sexual and physical assaults, and even homicide: *"There was a four-year-old girl in our quarter who was kidnapped... harassed, assaulted, and...later people found her dead" (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate). The lack of safety is felt by adolescent girls who do not attend school due to threats of harassment on the streets: "The route is not safe. There is an education centre, but we feel afraid to go walking alone because*

there are young males who harass girls” (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate). In other scenarios, due to fear of violence, girls’ movements are restricted by their families: “They prevent the girl from going out” (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate).

Adolescent girls are also subjected to early marriage, with poverty contributing to its prevalence: *“Participants mentioned that there is early marriage. Due to poverty, the parents force their daughters to marry early fearing that their daughters will bring shame on them” (Facilitator for group of adult women with disabilities, Tall Kalakh sub-district, Homs governorate).*

Physical violence is also occurring inside the home via IPV as well as family violence from fathers to children: *“My neighbour suffers from anxiety and keeps beating his wife and daughter” (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate).*

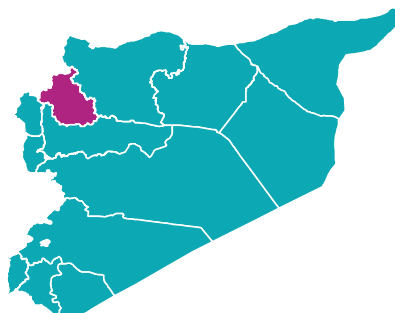
There is also unequal treatment of girls and boys, including restricting girls’ movements and favouring boys: *“They distinguish between boys and girls. Girls are prevented from going out” (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate).*

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

Doing nothing and staying silent were the most frequently mentioned coping mechanisms by women and girls when facing violence, with all adolescents in the group agreeing that they have no strategies to respond because of three reasons: 1) fear of their parents, 2) shame and blame from the community, and 3) the girls feel “...shy which prevents them from talking” (Adolescent girls, *Homs sub-district*, Homs governorate). They also fear consequences of reporting, which includes physical violence. This is why they may choose to remain silent: *“When the violence is from the family the girl can’t do anything. The girl fears to report a complaint against her father because he will beat her again. If someone talks to a father who beats his daughter, he will beat her again even harsher” (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate).*

Some services for GBV survivors, including legal advice and medical services were reported as available: *“There are legal services that are provided so the person may be imprisoned and there are medical services through the forensic services” (Adolescent girl, Homs sub-district, Homs governorate).* However, it was also reported by women that there are barriers to some of those services, such as financial barriers to medical services, and there is a gap in services for adolescents: *“There is nothing to do. If a person is poor or needs a surgery, people collect money and help him. There is nothing else, no awareness and no courses for adolescents to fill their free time so they just sitting smoking hookah to late hours at night” (Adult woman with Disabilities, Tall Kalakh sub-district, Homs governorate).* There is also a gap of services in rural areas.

Idleb



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence: insults, threats, bullying, stress (from displacement, economic situation, etc.)
- Physical violence: IPV, family violence
- Sexual violence: assault, rape, TFGBV
- Deprivation of rights and opportunities: denial of education, ability to work, access to children
- Early and forced marriage

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Family or other support
- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Seek protection services
- Seek other services/Aid
- Suicide as impact of violence

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Lack of awareness of services
- Safety concerns
- Family restrictions (Gender norms/ customs)
- Lack of access to technology to access remote services
- Stigma/shame

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Women and girls are subjected to sexual violence and they recognise this as severe and consequential: *"There is sexual violence, which is one of the most dangerous types of violence"* (Adolescent girl, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate). This violence also includes rape, which they mentioned as a great concern, and which can result in severe physical and mental health and social consequences for women and girls. *"Types of violence against women and girls include kidnapping, beatings, psychological violence, rape..."* (Adult woman with disability, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate). Another form of sexual violence experienced by some adolescent girls and women in the governorate is TFGBV, resulting in exploitation and abuse: *"I will also echo others on cyber harassment as we have heard more about cyber harassment during this last year in connection to exploitation and abuse, especially as Idlib and Aleppo are economically worse off. Women and girls use technology to earn some money, and often they get entrapped. Young women and girls are mostly affected"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border hub). Some noted that sexual violence is more prevalent in camps due to displacement and overcrowding: *"After displacement, sexual violence has occurred a lot, especially in camps and crowded places. This phenomenon has become widespread"* (Adult woman, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Women and girls experience economic violence and deprivation of rights and freedoms, including the denial of education and the denial to work: *"Economic violence and psychological abuse is a reality for her"* (Adult woman with disability, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate). However, while some women are denied the opportunity to work, others are sometimes forced to work and experience economic violence when their husbands or families take their salaries: *"We noticed an increased phenomenon of women being forced into work and then prevented from spending their salaries. This particular type of violence increased this year"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border hub – Idlib).

Adolescent girls experience numerous types of violence and threats, including denial of rights and freedoms such as education, and are forced into early marriage: *"For girls, most of the violence forms they face are early marriage, forced marriage... denial of education, denial of opportunities and resources, denial of expressing their opinion"* (Adolescent girl, Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate). As of 2022, 94% of children live in areas where early marriage is occurring for girls aged 15-17 years (with 53% of children living in locations where it is not very common and 41% of children living in areas where it is very common).¹¹¹

Widows and divorcees can experience a different form of violence, including denial of access to their children due to their marital status: *"It is different for divorced women because of our community's perception of divorced women. They face insults, social stigma, rejection, mockery of their opinions, harassment and denial of their rights and children"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib Governorate).

Women and girls are experiencing physical abuse, sometimes from intimate partners: *"Domestic violence, such as the husband beating his wife and daughters"* (Adult woman, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate). However, they are also experiencing physical violence from other members in the household, such as by brothers or in-laws: *"For women, violence is by the husband or his family, such as physical violence, deprivation of resources and psychological abuse"* (Adult woman with disability, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate). This violence can also be from outside of the home and is sometimes targeted against women and girls with disabilities: *"We suffer a lot from physical violence inside and outside the home"* (Adult woman with disability, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate). Numerous women and girls reported escalations of physical violence such as kidnapping and homicide, including "honour killings": *"Women and girls in community are subjected to many types of violence, including sexual violence such as harassment, forced and early marriage... as well as physical violence like...honour killings, kidnapping and death threats"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Risk factors beyond gender include ability, marital status, and displacement as mentioned above. Widows and divorced women are especially vulnerable to abuse: *"Widows and divorced women suffer exploitation and psychological abuse"* (Adult woman with disability, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate). Some noted the additional factors that those who are displaced experience that can contribute to GBV: *"It is different for displaced persons through psychological and economic stress, kidnapping, frequent displacement, exploitation, lack of employment, low income and their inability to meet family needs"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

As previously noted, there are 42 widows' camps in Idlib that contain their own specific forms of violence (see section on Adolescent Girls and Women who are Widowed and Divorced), such as economic violence: *"...in the camps where widows live, they are deprived of financial resources by the families of their husbands, under the pretext that the camp is providing them with housing and assistance. They also face sexual exploitation and early marriage, with rates also increasing during this last year"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border hub).

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

Multiple women and girls report doing nothing as their

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coping mechanism in response to violence, sometimes because they feel there is no place to go for help: *"There is no place to go"* (Adult woman with disability, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate). Women and girls may also opt to do nothing in the face of violence because of fear of social stigma, especially in the case of sexual violence: *"It is not possible to seek help for fear of scandal if the violence is sexual"* (Adolescent girl, Maaret Tamsrin sub-district, Idlib governorate).

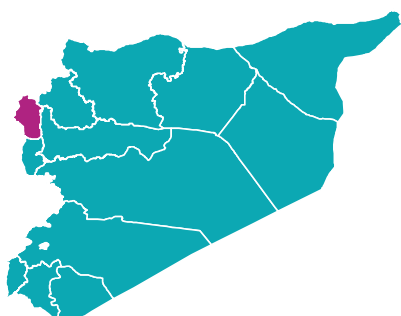
Some women and girls report that there are no places to go when they have experienced violence: *"Girls generally do not feel safe due to poor understanding and the lack of places they could turn to"* (Adolescent girl, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate). While others, especially those with women-led organisations and grassroots teams operating in their communities share that they have access to women's empowerment activities, and report accessing various protection-related services, especially WGSS: *"Protection centres include women's empowerment, youth empowerment, WGSS, community centres, police stations and camp managers"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate). Through these GBV-specialised services, women and girls can access additional services to support them: *"They resort to women's protection and empowerment centres, which in turn refer them to legal or medical services, or resort to psychological support services at the centre. Girls also resort to people they trust within their community or families"* (Adolescent girl, Dana sub-district, Idlib governorate). In addition to WGSS, older women may also report violence inside of camps to camp management: *"Older women are subjected to violence claiming that they are a burden on community and useless. They may resort to protection centres or the camp manager"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Despite the success of GBV services, these may have decreased in the past year due to closure, according to a GBV expert in the region: *"Yes, the spaces became less and they were shut down in many areas, and this included women's safe spaces, children's safe spaces, and medical spaces, all of which negatively affected women. This forces them to accept the status quo, reduce disclosure and increases the possibility of them being exposed to violence"* (GBV Expert, Türkiye Cross Border hub – Idlib). Other barriers to accessing GBV response services include lack of transportation or far distance to services, safety concerns whilst accessing services, family restrictions of women and girls, and lack of access to technology when seeking remote services: *"Several parents prevent girls, widows and divorced women from leaving the home, accessing protection services or owning personal phones because they fear exploitation and extortion via their mobiles"* (Older woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate). Some women and girls also face public shame and stigma when seeking out services: *"Women, girls, divorced women and widows have difficulty in reaching the centre or WGSS due to family pressure, the inferior view of these women by their community, prevention from going out, social stigma and bullying by parents and male brothers who impose their control over women"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Women and girls may turn to their family or a close, trusted person to disclose their situation, for support or resolutions: *"Girls resort to parents, relatives or friends and sometimes just give up."* (Adolescent girl, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate). Sometimes, women may report to judicial mechanisms to seek justice: *"Women go to friends to tell their worries or complain to the court if it is necessary"* (Woman with Disability, Jisr al-Shugur sub-district, Idlib governorate). While judicial mechanisms were reported as available (in some governorates women and girls considered there to be no effective mechanisms), some women and girls reported hesitancy to report to such mechanisms due to fears of retaliation with violence or a loss of resources, rights, or children: *"Yes, when violence occurs, people are unable to deal with it or to put an end to it, so they resort to courts and police stations. Women are reluctant to go to justice because they fear revenge, deprivation of economic and financial resources, fear of expulsion, divorce, deprivation of children and of rights"* (Adult woman, Harim sub-district, Idlib governorate).

As in other governorates, in the face of violence, some women and girls' resort to suicide: *"Some women resort to self-harm, such as suicide or attempting suicide, and this phenomenon has spread recently"* (Adult woman, Ariha sub-district, Idlib governorate).

Lattakia



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence
- Physical violence (primarily IPV, adolescents also experiencing)
- Denial of rights and freedom
- Sexual violence

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Seek protection services, Employment, psychological strength/empowerment, family or other support
- Suicide as impact of violence

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Lack of awareness of services
- Distance to service/ lack of transportation

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Women and girls are experiencing family violence, including IPV and violence from other members of the household, such as in-laws: *"Women inside the community can be subjected to violence by their husband. He may beat and insult her and she cannot face him out of fear because he is stronger than her. She also faces violence from the husband's family who think that they have the right to interfere with their life, especially by his mother and father. They can also practice violence on her"* (Adolescent girl, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate). This violence

may include physical violence by various members of the household: *"There is physical and verbal violence against adolescents in our community, especially in cases of dysfunctional families. This has an impact on increasing violence among adolescents. They then use swear words and insults themselves, taking what they are subjected to inside their homes onto the streets and schools"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate). However, a lack of opportunities for financial independence creates an inability for women to leave these relationships or households: *"Women are subjected to the threat of divorce and psychological pressure inside their home. But she does not leave, as she can't be economically independent and support her children, and she won't be supported by her own family"* (Adolescent girl, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).

Women noted that the denial of rights and freedoms to access resources and opportunities and economic violence are prevalent and often result in contributing to additional violence: *"Resource deprivation and economic violence are the most widespread violence forms. Those women who do not have an income resource to support them, are obliged to cope with physical, verbal, and psychological violence in a large way"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate). According to the 2022 MSNA, 38.1% of households interviewed identified that "care responsibilities" are a main barrier for the household members to access the labour market.¹¹²

Psychological and emotional violence were greatly discussed by women and girls, with the economic crisis and the stress created by COVID-19 contributing to this type of violence: *"The women agreed that the economic situation and the financial hardships they are experiencing, in addition to COVID-19, are the main causes of violence against girls and women, as men have become more verbally and physically violent to their families"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).

Women and girls with disabilities and divorced and widowed women are vulnerable to all of these abuses, with divorced women particularly vulnerable to sexual violence: *"Divorced women are heavily subjected to sexual violence. Men believe they can treat them however they want to, and gossip about their honour, reputation, and so these women face harassment"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).

According to the 2022 MSNA, 37.5% of households mentioned (in female-to-female interviews only) that women and girls feel unsafe in certain areas in their community or neighbourhood, citing public transportation (53.5%), on the way to work (34.3%), and in social/community areas (22.9%).¹¹³

112, 113 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

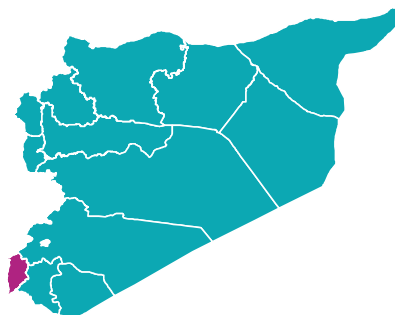
Women and girls report barriers to disclosing violence or taking action. Many women shared that resorting to the judiciary to report violence is difficult for fear of the community's view, especially if the violence was perpetrated by the husband: *"My sister was severely beaten by her husband but she could not report him to the police out of fear for her children. She hoped that he would improve his treatment with her, but he continued to insult her, and she preferred to stay with her children so that he would not deprive her of them, if she filed a judicial complaint against him"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia Governorate). The justice system is considered by some to be ineffective due to normalisation of GBV: *"There is no redress by the judiciary and a failure to deal with cases independently. They consider it normal [that violence] happens in all families and that the judiciary is not the necessary solution"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).

Some women are able to turn to their family for support in reducing the violence: *"The support that women receive from their families can be effective in reducing violence in all its forms"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).

Some girls are able to access GBV-specialised services through a WGSS: *"Girls are attending awareness sessions within the safe space, psychological support sessions, sessions on GBV such as early marriage and violence forms, as well as educational courses within the safe space. We feel safe while receiving these services"* (Adolescent girl, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate). However, women and girls report barriers to accessing such services, including a lack of awareness of services and a lack of transportation to get to the services: *"Women do not know any other services and do not receive support. We do not know any other places or sources for services because the information is not disseminated within the community and this limits our ability to access it"* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).

Multiple stressors, including both GBV and non-GBV related, have contributed to adolescents committing suicide: *"Adolescents are unable to face the constant psychological violence and community pressure. As a result, many have committed suicide due to exam stress in elementary and secondary school."* (Adult woman, Lattakia sub-district, Lattakia governorate).

Quneitra



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Denial of rights and opportunities: denial of education
- Early and forced marriage
- TFGBV

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Due to logistical considerations, there were no consultations conducted in Quneitra governorate. Hence, all available data comes from the PNA and the MSNA. According to 2022 MSNA, 39.9% of households mentioned that women and girls feel unsafe in certain areas in their community/neighbourhood. Of these areas, the most mentioned were in markets (65.6% of respondents), on public transportation (31.4%) and when crossing checkpoints (29.9%).¹¹⁴

Denial of education and online harassment should be considered GBV concerns as one in four (24.9%) households cited a fear of online harassment as majorly limiting their school-aged child from learning through an electronic device.¹¹⁵ Movement restrictions were also identified; 57% of women and girls live in locations where movement restrictions are in place for adult women. 66% of women and girls live in locations where similar restrictions are in place for girls.¹¹⁶

Gender discrimination was identified as a concern with the highest percentage of households (13.4%) of any governorate reporting gender-based discrimination in

¹¹⁴ Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

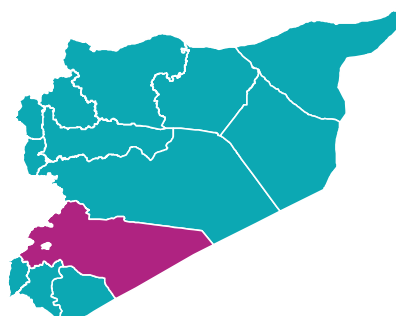
¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

their community¹¹⁷. This number in all reality may be higher as certain aspects of gender discrimination may not be considered as such due to cultural and societal beliefs and customs.

Early marriage is a concern in Quneitra as all children are living in locations where early marriage is occurring to girls aged 15 to 17 years old (with 92% of children living in contexts where the practice is very common for this gender and age group).¹¹⁸

Rural Damascus



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Economic violence and denial of their rights and freedoms
- Sexual violence: including rape, TFGBV
- Psychological/ Emotional violence

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Seek services
- Suicide as impact of violence

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Lack of awareness
- Lack of transportation
- Family restrictions

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

According to the 2022 MSNA, in the governorate of Rural Damascus 73.2% of households reported that women and girls feel unsafe in certain areas in their community/ neighbourhood, the highest percentage of households of all the governorates in WoS.¹¹⁹ Of those households citing women and girls feeling unsafe, the most common locations for feeling unsafe included when crossing checkpoints (70%), on public transportation (61%), and in markets (46.1%).¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

¹¹⁸ Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

¹¹⁹ Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

According to the 2022 PNA, 56% of women and girls live in locations where kidnapping and /or abduction occurs for adult women but these issues are not very common.¹²¹

Sexual violence in various forms was reported by women and girls, including sexual harassment, exploitation and rape. Widows and divorcees were discussed to be at risk for this type of violence specifically: *“Widows and divorced women, the most vulnerable groups, face insults, stigma and discrimination, mental violence, and they are vulnerable to harassment and rape”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). Women reported technology-facilitated sexual exploitation as a risk to adolescent girls: *“Cyber violence, exploitation by photos, girls are blackmailed”* (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). Marital rape was also reported as occurring in relationships, along with other forms of IPV: *“There is marital rape, beating, domestic battery, enforced silence, living restrictions within the house, and threat of divorce”* (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate).

Women and girls cited economic violence and denial of their rights and freedoms. This included the denial of access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making powers, and the ability to express one’s opinion: *“Denial of inheritance, denial of choosing the suitable husband, movement restrictions, denial of expressing opinions. All are against women”* (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). Movement restrictions were raised in the 2022 PNA, with 86% of women and girls living in locations where movement restrictions are in place for girls (under 18 years old) and 94% of women and girls live in locations with similar restrictions for adult women.¹²²

Age was identified as a risk factor by some girls, as adolescent girls are deemed to be facing more violence than older women: *“Girls face more violence than older ones, early marriage, deprivation of education and personal allowance, movement restriction so she can’t go anywhere, as well as community gossip”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). Early marriage, deprivation of education, and movement restrictions were highlighted as key issues faced by adolescent girls.

There were also reports of women and girls experiencing psychological violence, with additional vulnerability if unmarried: *“Psychological violence against unmarried girls, verbal violence against girls who have dropped out of school and community stigma”* (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate).

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

The most common coping mechanism reported by women and girls was to do nothing and remain silent: *“Some girls keep silent after harassment so they suffer depression, stay indoors and fear that anyone may know”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). Silence is chosen sometimes due to the consequences of speaking out or taking action after violence, such as losing one’s job: *“A divorced girl who is married early has no rights, so she keeps silent and keeps working if she faces workplace violence”* (Adult woman, Kisweh sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). Additionally, confronting violence, especially domestic violence, can sometimes result in its escalation. *“When the girl confronts domestic violence, it increases”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate).

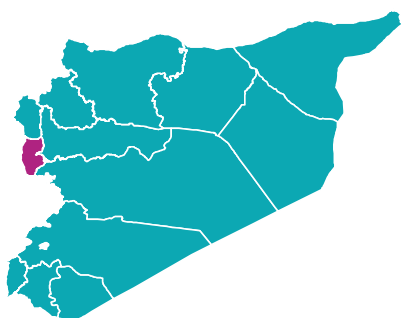
Women and girls highlighted the services available to them should they face GBV, including a safe space that offers assistance: *“If she needs legal help, she resorts to the safe space because we have attended lectures with a lawyer in the Woman Support centre on how to register official documents, register children and how to learn our rights upon marriage”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus Governorate). They also acknowledged that part of the services they can use are GBV-specialised services like case management: *“We can talk with the case manager and access support”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). However, some reported barriers to accessing services including family restrictions on women and girls and lack of awareness: *“Some people don’t know this information due to movement restrictions, but people tell each other”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate). Other barriers include lack of transportation or distance to service and limited space available at the service: *“There is difficulty in transportation and the WGSS sometimes has no space to accommodate all beneficiaries, so the appointment and services may be delayed to the next day”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate).

As highlighted by women, girls and GBV experts from the area, women and girls may turn to suicide in the face of GBV: *“Domestic violence causes mental stress, instability and depression, and they may even think in committing suicide”* (Adolescent girl, Kafr Batna sub-district, Rural Damascus governorate).

¹²¹ Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).

¹²² Ibid.

Tartous



Types of Violence Frequently Reported

- Sexual Violence
- Psychological/ Emotional/ Verbal violence: Psychological pressures, threats, and verbal violence
- Denial of education

Coping Mechanisms Identified

- Remain silent/ do nothing
- Confront violence
- Flee, run away

Barriers to Accessing Services

- Distance to service/ lack of transportation
- Lack of awareness of services

Types of Violence and Risk Factors

Sexual violence and harassment were reported as risks for adolescent girls: *"Many girls have been raped, harassed and experienced a lot of verbal violence"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate).

Widows and divorcees were identified as a vulnerable group with marital status being a risk factor for violence. When asked for the types of violence widows may face in their community, harassment was also identified: *"Harassment as they have no support"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate). Psychological abuse is also affecting divorced women: *"They face*

psychological violence, as being divorced is enough make you feel anxious in our community because everybody blames her, even though no woman wants to separate herself from her family" (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate).

Adolescent girls reported that the denial of education is affecting this group: *"Girls drop out of school due to financial and economic violence"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate).

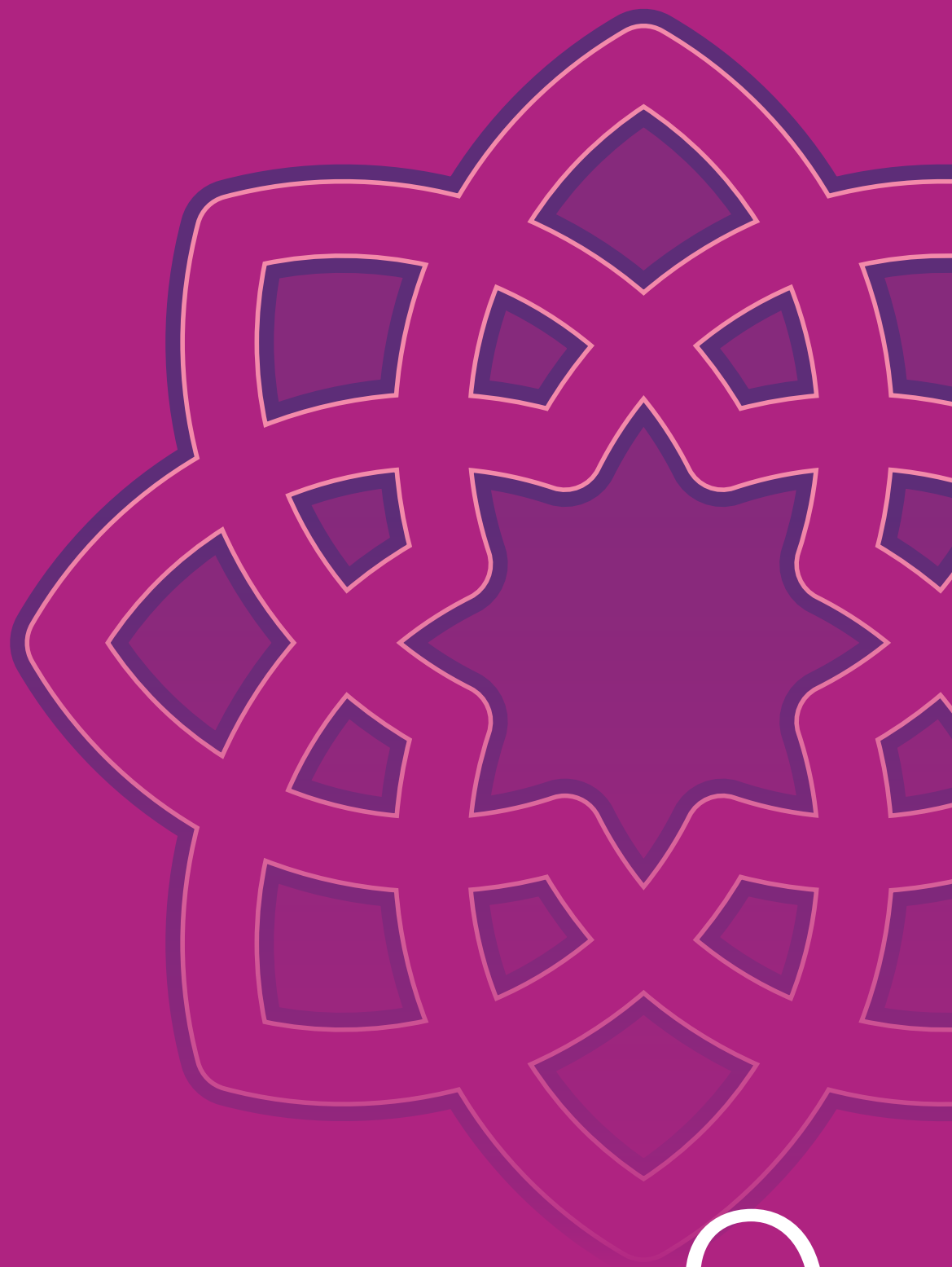
According to the 2022 PNA, 15% of women surveyed in the Tartous governorate reported living in locations where early marriage is occurring, but that it is not very common.¹²³

Coping Strategies and Access to GBV Services

Some adolescent girls shared that they would not know how to respond in the case of facing GBV, a sign of a lack of awareness raising and potentially limited services: *"I may receive a bad reputation, so I don't know how to act"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate). Therefore, some girls expressed that they would not respond, and would remain silent if they faced GBV: *"I keep silent if I face harassment"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate). However, others stated that they would confront the violence, and potentially confront the perpetrator verbally, sometimes with concern for the perpetuation of violence towards others: *"I confront them and yell at them. If I keep silent, others may face harm"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate). Lastly, another option raised was to also confront the perpetrator, looking for explanations: *"To give the violent person room to explain his behaviour"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate).

Women and girls reported that GBV services were available in the WGSS through awareness sessions and courses. However, no one reported turning to services as a coping mechanism when faced with violence, and barriers to accessing services included a lack of information as well as a lack of transportation (particularly for people with disabilities): *"Some groups have difficulties in knowing the available services because they are no advertisement or publication regarding them. This is the most common reason why they don't know about them"* (Adolescent girl, Tartous sub-district, Tartous governorate).

123 Protection Needs Assessment: Whole of Syria (2022).



9

Annexes

Annexes

Annex 1: Methodology

Focus Group Discussions and Programme Monitoring Data

FGDs were conducted by GBV and other protection actors working from the Northeast Syria (NES) and Türkiye Cross Border (TXB) hubs. When deciding which sub-districts to conduct FGDs in, the following criteria was followed:

- Percentage of IDPs in the sub-district in relation to overall number of IDPs in Syria
- Population size of sub-district
- Severity of needs in the sub-district
- Capacities of partners, access, feasibility of conducting FGD.

In government-controlled areas of Syria, discussions with women, girls, boys and men took place as part of routine UNFPA programme monitoring activities with their implementing partners. The organisation of FGDs and programme monitoring activities followed safety precautions and social distancing measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Groups consulted hence varied in size, the largest including 14 participants, the smallest including four participants. No online or telephone consultations were conducted.

FGDs with GBV Experts

Four FGDs with GBV practitioners working across different regions of Syria were conducted in 2022, including two focus groups for the TXB Hub, one for the NES Hub and a WoS group bringing together GBV coordinators from across the country. These consultations aimed at identifying existing and emerging trends and needs related to GBV and GBV response and prevention in Syria. The expert FGDs were conducted following an adapted version of the Delphi method.¹²⁴ GBV experts FGD informants were presented with a series of statements regarding different aspects of GBV and GBV programming in Syria. Over a series of rounds, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with each statement and justify their responses. The statements were then reformulated based on participants' feedback and responses until a consensus was reached over a specific statement which best represented the situation in Syria as perceived by the focus group participants. The analysis of GBV expert FGDs is based on the transcripts of the entire discussion, ensuring that different viewpoints and geographical variations are integrated in the report.

Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment

Quantitative results from the 2022 MSNA, conducted by OCHA in collaboration with all humanitarian actors operating in Syria, were also used to complement qualitative data, through GBV-specific questions or through proxy indicators from other sectors' sections of the assessment. The final data includes 30,065 interviews with household respondents in 269 sub-districts in Syria, covering all governorates.

Protection Needs Assessment

This assessment collects protection specific data through informants representing their community, neighbourhood, camp or city. The final dataset includes 15,858 interviews across all 6,336 locations in Syria with a greater than 200 population. A larger number of interviews were completed in locations with larger populations. Interviews

¹²⁴ Hsu and Sandford (2007). 'The Delphi Technique: Making Sense of Consensus'. Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation. (Vol. 12, Article 10) Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol12/iss1/10>

were conducted by HNAP. Data was combined at location level in case multiple interviews were conducted in the respective location, and this by using the agreed protection aggregation methodology. Population data from OCHA was added to the locations to enable analysis on people (women, girls, children, etc.) living in locations where certain protection issues are occurring.

Coding, Analysis, and Writing

All FGD, consultations and programme monitoring notes were translated from Arabic into English and coded thematically using MAXQDA software by two consultants. The software relies on using a code taxonomy which was developed in collaboration with GBV coordinators and included over 400 codes reflecting the content of the FGD questionnaire and divided thematically as well as by sector (i.e.: Affected groups, Violence, Services, Distributions, Hopes and Dreams). The coding taxonomy had also been reviewed in previous years in conjunction with all relevant protection sectors (GBV, General Protection, Child Protection, Mine Action). Analysis was performed by using analytical functions in the MAXQDA program, such as variables (which organise the data by age, gender, disability, displacement status, and location), intersections between codes (which can demonstrate connections between, for example, early marriage and displacement), and a quote matrix (which collects all key quotes around a certain theme or issue such as IPV). The report outline generally followed the structure of the data collection tools and reflected the coding taxonomy, while also highlighting key findings that emerged from the data. The outline and the report underwent multiple rounds of feedback from UNFPA's staff, GBV Coordinators and Protection Coordinators, and GBV experts, in order to ensure consistency and to achieve the report's main aim of transmitting Syrian women's and girl's voices.

Annex 2: Terminology

Abduction

The criminal taking away a person by persuasion, by fraud, or by open force or violence. It is the unlawful interference with a family relationship, such as the taking of a child from its parent, irrespective of whether the person abducted consents or not. Kidnapping is the taking away of a person by force, threat, or deceit, with intent to cause him or her to be detained against his or her will. Kidnapping may be done for ransom or for political or other purposes.

Case management Case management is a collaborative process that engages a range of service providers to meet a survivor's immediate needs and support long-term recovery. Effective GBV case management ensures informed consent and confidentiality, respects the survivor's wishes, and provides inclusive services and support without discrimination. GBV case management is responsive to the unique needs of each survivor. It is important that survivors are provided with comprehensive information so they can make informed choices, including choices about using multisectoral GBV response services (health, psychosocial, legal, security) and the possible consequences of accessing those services.¹²⁵

Child or minor

Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged States to review the age of majority if it is set below 18 and to increase the level of protection for all children under 18. Minors are considered unable to evaluate and understand

the consequences of their choices and give informed consent, especially for sexual acts.

Child labour

The term 'child labour' is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities — often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of 'work' can be called 'child labour' depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed, and the objectives pursued by individual countries.

Confidentiality

A GBV guiding principle associated with survivor centred service delivery. Maintaining confidentiality requires that service providers protect information gathered about clients and agree only to share information about a client's case with their explicit consent. All written information is kept in locked files and only non-identifying information is written down on case files. Maintaining confidentiality about abuse means service providers never discuss case details with family or friends, or with colleagues whose knowledge of the abuse is deemed unnecessary. There are limits to confidentiality while working with children, in context with mandatory reporting, in case of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse perpetrated by humanitarian workers, or with clients who express intent to harm themselves or someone else.

¹²⁵ Inter-agency GBV minimum standards 2019

Consent/informed consent

Refers to approval or assent, particularly and especially after thoughtful consideration. Free and informed consent is given based upon a clear appreciation and understanding of the facts, implications, benefits, risks and future consequences of an action. In order to give informed consent, the individual concerned must have all adequate relevant facts at the time consent is given and be able to evaluate and understand the consequences of an action. They also must be aware of and have the power to exercise their right to refuse to engage in an action and/or to not be coerced (i.e., being persuaded based on force or threats). Children are generally considered unable to provide informed consent because they do not have the ability and/or experience to anticipate the implications of an action, and they may not understand or be empowered to exercise their right to refuse. There are also instances where consent might not be possible due to cognitive impairments and/or physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities.

COVID-19

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age.

Denial of Resources, Opportunities or Services

Denial of rightful access to economic resources/assets or livelihood opportunities, education, health or other social services. Examples include a widow prevented from receiving an inheritance, earnings forcibly taken by an intimate partner or family member, a woman prevented from using contraceptives, a girl separated from attending school, etc. Economic abuse is included in this category. Some acts of confinement may also fall under this category.

Denial of Rights

Active repression of rights (including the right to work, education, health, housing, freedom, expression, privacy, movement, etc).

Disability

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

Early marriage (or child marriage)

Early marriage is a formal marriage or informal union before age 18. Both girls and boys can be affected. Even though some countries permit marriage before age 18, international human rights standards classify these as child or early marriages, reasoning that those under age 18 are unable to give informed consent. Therefore, child or early marriage is a form of forced marriage as children are not legally competent to agree to such unions.

Economic abuse / Violence

An aspect of abuse where abusers control victims' finances to prevent them from accessing resources, working or maintaining control of earnings, achieving self-sufficiency and gaining financial independence.

Emotional abuse (also referred to as psychological abuse)

Infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. Examples include threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, social exclusion, stalking, verbal harassment, unwanted attention, remarks, gestures or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, destruction of cherished things, etc.

Empowerment of women and girls

Empowerment is a process although the results of the process may also be termed empowerment. More specifically, though, the outcome of empowerment should manifest itself as a redistribution of power between individuals, genders, groups, classes, castes, races, ethnic groups or nations. Empowerment means the transformation of structures of subordination, through radical changes in law, property rights, control over women's labour and bodies, and the institutions which reinforce and perpetuate male domination¹²⁶

Family violence and Domestic violence (DV)

Family violence and domestic violence are terms that refer to gender-based violence perpetrated against women and girls based on their gender roles by family members, which can include violence perpetrated by current or former intimate partners, as well as acts of violence from a parent or siblings, and more. Domestic violence refers to GBV that happens within a household, and could include violence amongst non-related members of a household, whereas family violence highlights familial relationships between perpetrators of violence and survivors, even when they do not reside together. See also 'Family Violence and Intimate Partner Violence' (IPV).

Femicide

The intentional killing of women and girls on the basis of their gender and/or their gendered behaviour and self-presentation, usually by a male partner or a male family member. Femicide can be the final result of IPV and domestic abuse. It can also be applied against women and girls accused of causing social shame and murdered under the guise of protecting "honour" and "reputation".

Forced marriage

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities or reduced capacity, cannot) consent to the marriage as they are pressurised, or abuse is used, to force them to do so. The pressure put on people to marry against their will may be:

physical: for example, threats, physical violence or sexual violence

emotional and psychological: for example, making someone feel like they are bringing 'shame' on their family

Financial: for example, taking someone's wages

An early (or child) marriage is considered to be a form of forced marriage, given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent.

Gender

Refers to the social attributes, roles and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men.

¹²⁶ International Medical Corps and International Rescue Committee: Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings. Page 11. Available at: <https://gbva.or.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/IRC-WGSS-Toolkit-Eng.pdf>

These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context.

Gender-based violence

An umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females. The term 'gender-based violence' is primarily used to underscore the fact that structural, gender-based power differentials between males and females around the world place females at risk for multiple forms of violence. As agreed in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), this includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The term is also used by some actors to describe some forms of sexual violence against males and /or targeted violence against individuals or groups with diverse SOGIESC, in these cases when referencing violence related to gender-inequitable norms of masculinity and/or norms of gender identity.

Gender Equality

This refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well

as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

Gender expression (GE)

It refers to external manifestations of gender, expressed through one's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, or body characteristics. Sex characteristics (SC) include primary sex characteristics (e.g., inner and outer genitalia and/or the chromosomal and hormonal structure) and secondary sex characteristics (e.g., muscle mass, hair distribution and stature).

Gender roles

A set of social and behavioural expectations or beliefs about how members of a culture should behave according to their biological sex; the distinct roles and responsibilities of men, women and other genders in a given culture. Gender roles vary among different societies and cultures, classes, ages and during different periods in history. Gender-specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions.

Humanitarian assistance and services

Assistance and services provided for free for humanitarian purposes (i.e., non-political, non-commercial, nonmilitary purposes) to persons based on their needs. This can include food and non-food items, medical supplies, clothing, and shelter material. Humanitarian services can include all activities of support offered to the population in need.

Intimate partner violence (IPV)

IPV is rooted in gender inequality and power imbalance among intimate partners. It refers to behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. This type of violence may also include the denial of resources, opportunities, or services. This abuse is typically manifested as a pattern of abusive behaviour toward an intimate partner (ex or current) where the abuser exerts power and control over the victim. 'Domestic violence' is a term sometimes used to refer to IPV, though there are important distinctions between the two terms. See 'Family violence and Domestic violence (DV)'

So-Called Honour Violence and Killings

Violence, including murder, stemming from a perceived desire to safeguard family "honour", which in turn is embodied in female behaviour that challenges men's control over women, including control exerted through sexual, familial and social roles and expectations assigned to women by patriarchal ideology. Such female behaviour may include adultery, extramarital sex, premarital relationships that may or may not include sexual relations, rape, dating someone unacceptable to the family and violations of restrictions imposed on women's and girl's dress, employment or educational opportunities, social lifestyle, or freedom of movement.

Perpetrator

Person, group or institution that directly inflicts or otherwise supports violence or other abuse inflicted on another against his/her will.

Physical assault/ Violence

An act of physical violence that is not sexual in nature. Examples include hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shoving, burning, shooting or use of any weapons, acid attacks or any other act that results in pain, discomfort or injury.

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)

As highlighted in the Secretary-General's 'Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse' (ST/SGB/2003/13), PSEA relates specifically to the responsibilities of humanitarian, development and peacekeeping actors to prevent incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations, NGO, and inter-governments (IGO) personnel, and actors involved in the delivery of aid against the affected population, to set up confidential reporting mechanisms, and to take safe and ethical action as quickly as possible when incidents do occur.

Psychosocial support services

Any type of local or outside support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorder, and/or help to heal psychological wounds after an emergency or critical event. Psychosocial support services can be specialised for GBV survivors, such as focused individual counselling or group counselling aimed at addressing the harmful emotional, psychological and social effects of GBV.

Rape

Physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. It also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object. Rape includes marital rape and anal rape/sodomy. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape. Rape of a person by two or more perpetrators is known as gang rape.

Sextortion

Sextortion: or sexual extortion, occurs when an individual has, or claims to have, a sexual image of another person and uses it to coerce a person into doing something they do not want to do.

Sexual abuse

The term 'sexual abuse' means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual assault

Any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration. Examples include attempted rape, as well as unwanted kissing, fondling, or touching of genitalia and buttocks.

Sexual exploitation

The term 'sexual exploitation' means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Some types of forced and/or coerced prostitution can fall under this category.

Sexual favour

The term 'sexual favour' or simply 'favour' is used in the Syrian and Middle Eastern context to refer to acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, and specifically demands for sex acts in exchange for something, such as money or humanitarian assistance.

Sexual harassment

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Sexual orientation, gender identity and expressions, sex characteristics (SOGIESC)

The acronym SOGIESC combines together different terms to refer to individuals and groups that do not fit within normative (heterosexual and cisgender) standards of sexuality, gender identity and gender expression. Sexual orientation (SO) is understood to refer to each person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender. Gender identity (GI) is understood to refer to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work". Sexual violence takes many forms, including rape, sexual slavery and/or trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and/or abuse, and forced abortion.

Survivor

A survivor is a person who has experienced GBV. The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' can be used interchangeably. 'Victim' is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. 'Survivor' is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resilience.

Technology-Facilitated GBV (TFGBV)

The use of technology, digital tools, and online platforms to perpetuate GBV, especially against women and girls as well as against persons with diverse SOGIESC. TFGBV includes already existing forms of GBV such as sexual harassment, movement control through stalking and monitoring, and social violence through online hate speech and threats. However, it also quickly "broaden(s) the scope of violence" that perpetrators subject women and girls to, such as defamation, doxing (wide disseminating of personal data), and sextortion. TFGBV also facilitates new forms of GBV such as image manipulation, non-consensual distribution of intimate images and videos, broadcasting sexual assault, impersonation, and networked violence. TFGBV interacts with offline forms of GBV, sometimes leading to the furthering of physical forms of sexual violence and vice versa.

Trafficking in persons

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Unaccompanied and separated children

Unaccompanied children are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. Separated children are those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or usual caregivers, but not necessarily other relatives. As a result, this may include children accompanied by other adult family members.

Victim

A victim is a person who has experienced GBV. The term recognises that a violation against one's human rights has occurred. The terms 'victim' and 'survivor' can be used interchangeably. 'Victim' is a term often used in the legal and medical sectors. 'Survivor' is the term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors because it implies resilience.

Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS)

A WGSS is a structured place where women and girls' physical and emotional safety is respected and where women and girls are supported through processes of empowerment to seek, share, and obtain information, access services, express themselves, enhance their psychosocial wellbeing, and more fully realise their rights.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ International Medical Corps and International Rescue Committee: Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings. Page 26. Available at: <https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/IRC-WGSS-Toolkit-Eng.pdf>

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