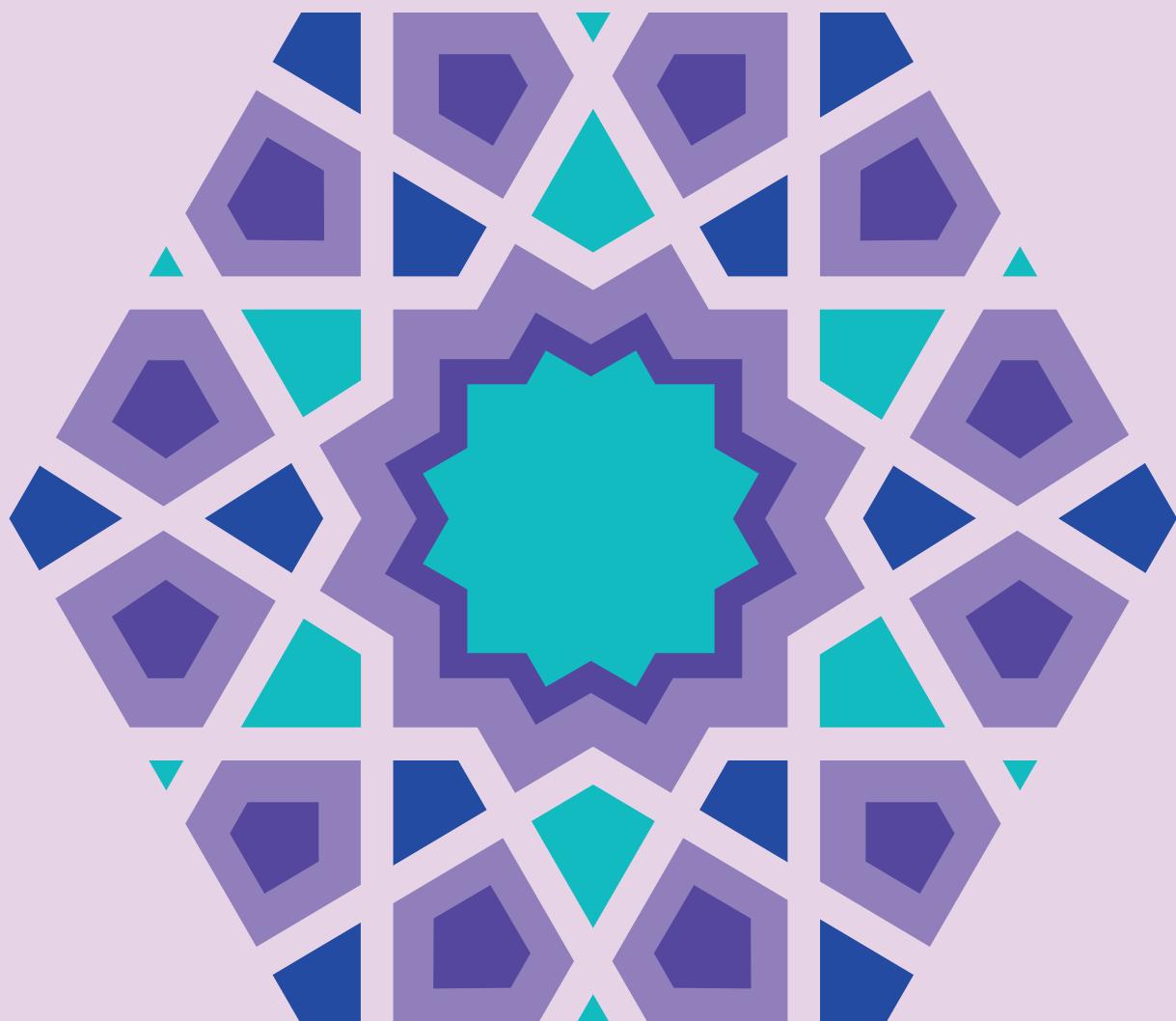


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VOICES

from Syria 2025



My wish is for women to be independent, strong and empowered, and to never be subjected to violence again. (Woman from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

If I could change one thing, I would choose to get out of this camp and go back to my village where I feel truly safe. My only dream is to see myself outside the camp, breathing fresh air away from this camp and its scary situation. If I could change something, I would choose to go back to my humble home, to my old life before the camp, where I used to herd my sheep and water the crops. (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)

VOICES

from Syria 2025



Table of Contents

Foreword	7
Executive Summary	10
Introduction	14
Intended Use of Voices from Syria 2025	14
Scope of Data Used to Inform This Report	14
Key Contextual Developments in 2024–2025.....	15
Findings	20
Snapshot.....	20
Key GBV Trends 2024–2025.....	21
Types of GBV	21
GBV Contexts	32
GBV Drivers and Risk Factors	34
Affected Groups	36
Consequences of GBV	39
Coping Mechanisms	40
Prevention of and Response to GBV	42
Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services.....	46
Recommendations and Hopes	52
Hopes and Dreams of Women and Girls	52
Recommendations for Humanitarian Actors	57
Looking Back: Voices from Syria Over the Years	64
Amplifying the Voices of Women and Girls	64
Risks in Humanitarian Assistance.....	65
Affected Groups	65
Coping Mechanisms and Resilience.....	65
Types of Violence	66
GBV Services.....	68
Hopes and Dreams	70
Recommendations.....	70

Governorate Analysis	74
Al-Hasakeh.....	75
Aleppo.....	78
Ar-Raqqा.....	81
As-Sweida.....	84
Damascus	87
Rural Damascus.....	90
Dar'a.....	93
Deir Ez-Zor	96
Hama.....	99
Homs	102
Idleb.....	105
Lattakia	108
Tartous	111
Annexes	116
Annex 1: Voices from Syria 2025 Approach and Methodology	116
Annex 2: Acronyms.....	118
Annex 3: Key Terminology	119
Annex 4: References.....	124

Foreword

Violence is everything that is cruel and harmful to the soul and body. (Woman from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)

Dear readers,

Since the beginning of the Syria crisis in 2011, the daily realities of women and girls have been marked by a rising tide of gender-based violence (GBV), deeply affecting their lives and limiting their futures. These risks have only intensified in the face of relentless conflict, widespread displacement, deepening economic hardship and political instability.

As infrastructure deteriorates and critical systems collapse due to a lack of investment and continued violence, basic services such as water, sanitation and healthcare are being pushed beyond capacity. Communities are grappling with preventable diseases, food insecurity and water scarcity, resulting in escalating morbidity, mortality and humanitarian needs. At the same time, the humanitarian resources used to respond to these critical needs continue to decrease.

Amid this complex landscape, the Whole of Syria GBV Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) remains committed to its mission to protect, support and empower women and girls across Syria. In close partnership with local actors, we are working to prevent and respond to GBV, while ensuring that services remain accessible and grounded in the needs and realities of those most affected.

The Voices from Syria series has long served as a cornerstone of GBV prevention and response in the country, offering critical insight into the lived experiences of women and girls, and informing more targeted, survivor-centred humanitarian responses. It has come to be recognized as a global model for ethical and participatory data collection in conflict settings.

As we look ahead, at this pivotal moment in 2025, we recognize a crucial opportunity to shape a future for Syria where women and girls are not only protected, but empowered – where their rights are upheld, their leadership is recognized and their voices continue to guide our collective action. UNFPA and the GBV AoR reaffirm their commitment to advancing this vision and to ensuring that women and girls are at the centre of Syria's recovery.



Laila Baker,
UNFPA Regional Director, Arab States



1

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Fourteen years after the onset of the crisis, Syria continues to grapple with one of the world's largest and most protracted humanitarian crises. Changes in government since December 2024 have exacerbated the effects of protracted displacement, ongoing hostilities and regional insecurity, economic crisis, and climate impacts, and contributed to extremely high levels of humanitarian need, which is compounded by the impact of regional conflicts, including displacement into Syria from Lebanon. More than 16 million people – over 70 per cent of Syria's population – are in need of humanitarian assistance, and 7 million people are displaced across the country.¹

This report documents findings from Syrian women and girls themselves about the gender-based violence (GBV) they face, their access to GBV services and other humanitarian assistance, their recommendations for humanitarian actors, and their hopes and dreams for the future. It aims to influence the design and implementation of humanitarian response in Syria in this pivotal moment to meet the needs and desires of women and girls.

Women and girls in Syria are, as has long been the case, facing the worst consequences of these intersecting political, social and economic crises, including multiple and increasing forms of GBV. They are experiencing a wide range of violence on a daily basis – including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic violence – and are denied access to rights, opportunities and services. Nowhere is safe, with violence occurring in homes, public places, and digital and online platforms. Their freedom of movement is severely curtailed and they are prevented from accessing services and support. Restrictive and discriminatory social and gender norms underpin this violence, which is exacerbated by displacement, economic hardship and insecurity.

While the change in government of 8 December 2024 has led to some optimism² and the consequent return of many displaced families to their homes – more than 1 million displaced people have returned from other areas inside Syria, while some 400,000 have returned from neighbouring countries³ – women and girls have linked these political changes to deteriorating safety and increased levels of GBV.

In these times of crisis, GBV programming remains an essential and lifesaving intervention. Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) are often the only place that they can feel truly safe and free to express themselves, and seek much-needed support. GBV prevention activities

are contributing to increased awareness of key services among women and girls and community-level shifts in attitudes towards violence.

Women and girls, despite years of protracted and intersecting layers of violence and oppression, still have hope for the future. They shared dreams of ending violence against women and girls, achieving women's empowerment and equality, and changing society for the better, including by helping and supporting others. To enable the achievement of these dreams, women and girls recommended that humanitarian actors:

- Increase the availability and accessibility of WGSS and other female-only spaces, especially in underserved areas;
- Increase the quality, availability and accessibility of specialized GBV services including GBV case management, psychosocial support, healthcare and legal assistance;
- Expand effective GBV awareness-raising and social and behavioural change approaches to shift harmful gender norms that drive GBV and limit opportunities for women and girls;
- Improve safe and equitable access to humanitarian assistance, services and protective living conditions;
- Increase availability of and safe access to formal and informal education for adolescent girls;
- Expand vocational education and support for income-generating activities for women and older adolescent girls;
- Strengthen access to justice and legal protection for women and girls.

1 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Voices of Syrians – 2025: The Dawn of a New Era (New York, 2025).

2 Ibid.

3 As of 10 April 2025. OCHA, Voices of Syrians.



2

Introduction

Introduction

Fourteen years after the onset of the crisis, Syria continues to grapple with one of the world's largest and longest humanitarian crises. A shifting governance landscape, protracted displacement, ongoing hostilities and regional insecurity, environmental and climate impacts, and a severe and worsening economic crisis all contribute to extremely high levels of humanitarian need. Women and girls face the worst consequences of these intersecting crises, including multiple and increasing forms of gender-based violence (GBV). Voices from Syria 2025 presents the experiences, priorities and recommendations of these women and girls. They share that GBV continues to increase across the country, even in the context of increased hope and optimism among many since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. This report highlights the narratives of women and girls, their responses to the violence and deprivation they experience, their demands for improved humanitarian services, and their hopes and dreams for the future.

Intended Use of Voices from Syria 2025

This report aims to amplify the experiences and voices of the women and girls in Syria, particularly regarding GBV in their daily lives. The report serves as a crucial platform to share their experiences, needs and capacities, providing invaluable insights to inform efforts aimed at addressing GBV. The primary goal of this report is to guide humanitarian programming, planning, advocacy and policymaking, ensuring that the response to the crisis effectively addresses GBV and supports the empowerment of women and girls in Syria.

This report does not contain or represent prevalence data on GBV and should be read with an understanding of the complexities of the Syrian context. It is not intended to substitute or invalidate the need for localized participatory consultation as part of ongoing programmatic approaches for affected women, girls and communities.

This publication is not intended to present a picture of Syria to the media or provide journalists with information on GBV. If any journalist is interested in further information on GBV in Syria, they should contact the Syria GBV coordination team, listed on [ReliefWeb](#).

Scope of Data Used to Inform This Report

The scope of consultations with women and girls, wider community members, and GBV experts that took place to inform this report are summarized in the tables that follow. It should be noted that data collection took place in January 2025 when the situation remained volatile; risks and perceptions may since have changed (see Annex 1: Voices from Syria 2025 Approach and Methodology).

Total focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted:

 **44** FGDs with women and girls

 **10** FGDs with men and boys

 **2** FGDs with GBV experts

424 total participants in FGDs

Total number of FGDs and participants, disaggregated by age and gender

Gender/age groups	# of FGDs	# of participants
 Adolescent girls	15	120
 Adult women	29	249
 Adolescent boys	4	24
 Adult men	6	31

Total number of FGDs and participants, disaggregated by disability and other considerations

Group	# of FGDs	# of participants
 Women and girls with disabilities and their caretakers	4	32
 Older women	6	50
 In camps	22	190
 Internally displaced persons (IDPs) ⁴	40	335

These consultations were supplemented by secondary data analysis; further details are provided in Annex 1: Voices from Syria 2025 Approach and Methodology.

⁴ This includes the 22 FGDs in camps plus 18 FGDs out of camps.

Key Contextual Developments in 2024–2025

Syria has entered a new era in 2025, with the ousting of President Bashar al-Assad and his government bringing hope of an end to the armed conflict that has raged since 2011⁵ – but the humanitarian crisis is far from over. More than 16 million people, over 70 per cent of Syria's population, remain in need of humanitarian assistance.⁶

Political Instability and Insecurity

A new transitional government is now in place, but the country remains fragmented among various armed actors.

Waves of insecurity have continued across different areas of the country. Ongoing active hostilities remain, especially in coastal areas – leading to civilian casualties, displacement and damage to critical infrastructure. Ongoing violence has exacerbated communal tensions.⁷

Regional conflicts have increasingly affected Syria in 2024–2025, triggering population influxes and increasing the stress on an already fragile humanitarian situation, straining the country's limited resources and placing additional pressure on essential services.⁸ Rising criminal activity and violence are reported and increased security measures, including more checkpoints, have further restricted access to services.⁹

Explosive ordnance contamination is widespread across the country, including in residential neighbourhoods, agricultural fields, infrastructure sites and access roads, particularly in Idlib, Deir-ez-Zor, Aleppo, Ar-Raqa, Al-Hassakeh and Rural Damascus. Fear of these explosive hazards limits movement and access to services and livelihoods.¹⁰

Displacement

The fall of the Assad government has prompted mass movements both within the country and from across international borders, adding to an already complex displacement landscape. Seven million people are currently displaced across the country,¹¹ and more than 1 million displaced people have returned from other areas inside Syria, while some 400,000 have returned

from neighbouring countries – even though conditions are currently far from fully stable or conducive to returns.¹² This raises concerns about premature returns and secondary displacement – many returnees already find themselves caught in a cycle of displacement and movement between governorates.¹³ Displaced families continue to live in overcrowded conditions in camps and emergency collective centres, with limited access to essential services like food and healthcare.

Economic Crisis and Food Insecurity

Syria's ongoing economic crisis has a severe impact on everyday life. Ninety per cent of Syrians are living in poverty, and 75 per cent now depend on some form of humanitarian aid – compared with only 5 per cent in the first year of the conflict.¹⁴ The total economic cost of the conflict is estimated at US\$254.7 billion, and the total estimated "lost GDP" over the period from 2011 to 2024 due to the conflict is estimated at \$800 billion.¹⁵ Inflation, price fluctuations, decreases in purchasing power, liquidity shortages and lack of public services including electricity have a severe negative impact on economic activities, livelihoods and aid delivery across governorates – and particularly in Coastal Area, Homs, Hama, Deir-ez-Zor, and the South.¹⁶

The cost of living has more than tripled in the last two years, and economic hardship, combined with limited employment opportunities, is pushing more households into poverty.¹⁷ Food insecurity rose from 46 per cent in September 2022 to 62 per cent in March 2024, contributing to malnutrition and particularly affecting children, pregnant women and the elderly.¹⁸

Infrastructure and Essential Services

Communities across Syria have been deeply damaged by over a decade of conflict and the extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure, medical and education facilities, and heritage sites, among others.¹⁹ An estimated half of the country's infrastructure has been destroyed or rendered dysfunctional.²⁰ Damage to essential

12 As of 10 April 2025. OCHA, Voices of Syrians.

13 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 2: As of 27 February 2025 (New York, 2025).

14 United Nations Development Program (UNDP), The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road Ahead to Social and Economic Recovery (New York, 2025).

15 Ibid.

16 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 3.

17 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1: As of 12 February 2025 (New York, 2025).

18 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Response Priorities January–June 2025 (New York, 2025).

19 See A/HRC/55/46; OHCHR, 'UN Panel Concludes That Enforced Disappearances in Syria Widespread and Being Used as Tactic of War', 19 December 2013; OHCHR, 'No End in Sight: Torture and Ill-Treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 10 ,2023–2020 July 2023; OHCHR, 'Web of Agony': UN Commission's Report Unveils Depths of Former Government's Detention Crimes during First Decade of Syrian War, 27 January 2025.

20 UNDP, The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road Ahead to Social and Economic Recovery (New York, 2025).

5 Human Rights Council, "Web of Agony": Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Ill-Treatment by former Government forces in the Syrian Arab Republic (Companion Report to A/HRC/55/46): Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. A/HRC/55/CRP.2025 .3.

6 OCHA, Voices of Syrians – 2025.

7 United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Protection Landscape in Syria: Snapshot (Geneva, 2025).

8 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 3 (New York, 2025).

9 Ibid.

10 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 5: As of 28 April 2025 (New York, 2025):

11 OCHA, Voices of Syrians.

infrastructure, including roads, bridges, water networks, health and electricity facilities, continues to severely disrupt the delivery of essential services, as well as early recovery efforts and livelihoods. Many public and private schools are closed or serving as temporary collective shelters.²¹

The healthcare system in Syria is extremely fragile and dependent on humanitarian services. As of December 2024, only 57 per cent of Syria's hospitals and 37 per cent of its primary healthcare centres were fully functional, with the rest either partially or completely out of service.²²

Climate and Environmental Impact

Syria faces increasingly frequent climate-related natural hazards, including extreme heat waves, prolonged winters, erratic rainfall and drought-like conditions. The country is now experiencing an intensifying water crisis related to delayed and erratic rainfall patterns and low lake water levels. These conditions have severely strained access to essential water for both communities and agriculture, leading to significantly reduced wheat production and livestock productivity.²³

Humanitarian Funding Landscape

In the midst of these unprecedented humanitarian needs, Syria faces a severe and increasing funding shortfall. The Humanitarian Response Plan of 2024 was only 35 per cent funded by the end of the year and that situation looks set to worsen, particularly in the face of a US funding suspension in early 2025 which has severely affected humanitarian organizations across the country.^{24,25} Many of Syria's essential services were delivered by humanitarian organizations – for example, in north-east Syria, where nearly 3 million people need assistance, humanitarian actors were reliant on US funding to provide around 90 per cent of their interventions. In the absence of this funding, humanitarian coordination and programmes are receding in many areas, leaving large numbers of people even more vulnerable.²⁶

21 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1.

22 Health Sector Syria, Health Sector Bulletin February 2025) 2025).

23 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 5.

24 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 4.

25 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 3.

26 As of 12 February 2025. OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1.



3 Findings

Findings

Snapshot

Primary forms of GBV

- Physical violence
- Psychological violence
- Sexual violence (including exploitation, abuse, harassment)
- Denial of resources, services, opportunities and rights
- Domestic, family and intimate partner violence (IPV)
- Early and forced marriage
- Technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV)
- Kidnapping
- Femicide (often described as “honour” killings) including as a consequence of other forms of violence

Primary contexts for GBV

- Homes
- Public spaces – markets, bakeries, public transport and transport hubs, streets
- Camps and informal settlements
- Schools
- Workplaces
- Humanitarian aid distribution points
- Detention centres
- Online and digital platforms

Main drivers and risk factors contributing to GBV

- Social and gender norms
- Insecurity
- Displacement and poor living conditions, particularly in camps and temporary shelters
- Economic hardship
- Social identity factors including age, disability, former detention
- Decreasing humanitarian assistance, and unsafe delivery that does not adequately take into account the risks faced by women and girls

Primary coping mechanisms used by women and girls to avoid GBV and manage consequences

- Silence, avoidance and self-restriction
- Reporting to family, friends and other trusted individuals
- Reporting to GBV services and support, including Women and Girls’ Safe Spaces (WGSS)
- Resorting to potentially harmful negative coping mechanisms (e.g. early and forced marriage, leaving school, transactional sex, self-harm)

Groups at increased risk of GBV

- Adolescent girls and young women, including unaccompanied and separated girls
- Widowed and divorced women and girls
- Women and girls with disabilities
- Older women
- Displaced women and girls, particularly in collective shelters and camps
- Currently or formerly detained women and girls
- Persons with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC)

Key GBV Trends 2024–2025

Participants reported a noticeable increase in multiple forms of GBV across this period, including physical, emotional, psychological and economic violence:

"We are currently afraid to go out after five o'clock to avoid being beaten, and the violence cases number has increased since last year" (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

Physical violence, particularly IPV and abuse by male family members, was described by many as becoming more severe. Psychological violence – such as threats, intimidation and verbal abuse – was also reported to be on the rise, especially within the household. Participants highlighted that girls are increasingly experiencing harassment in public spaces, such as streets and schools, including verbal harassment and threats. TFGBV is emphasized as an increasingly pervasive and harmful form of violence, especially as access to technology and digital spaces and platforms continues to rise.

Changes in risks of violence – especially sexual exploitation and IPV – were particularly linked by respondents to deteriorating economic conditions, insecurity and displacement. For instance, there were mentions of increased early and forced marriage driven by financial hardship, as well as economic violence where women are denied resources or control over financial decisions:

"Cases of violence are continuing due to the worsening economic situation and the resulting family disputes, which makes women less safe than before" (Older woman from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Several groups noted that the worsening humanitarian situation and interruption in the delivery of aid has intensified tensions within families, contributing to more frequent and severe violence against women and girls:

"Changes since last year include increased sexual and intra-family violence due to displacement and wars. Sexual exploitation in displacement situations is a new form of violence since last year" (Man from Al-Ommah camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

These findings reflect the compounding effects of economic insecurity, displacement and social stressors on GBV prevalence.

Several participants linked increases in GBV to the recent political changes in Syria, and described deteriorating safety and increased violence following the fall of the Assad government:

"Since December 2024, we are more afraid, especially with the spread of many armed demonstrations, accompanied by lack of electricity supply hours. Women strive to return to their homes before darkness, especially in narrow neighbourhoods, and may have to take longer routes due to fear of walking in some dark alleys" (Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate).

These changes were associated with greater instability, weakened protection systems and shifting power dynamics within communities, which have contributed to heightened risks for women and girls. Participants described a rise in fear, uncertainty and exposure to violence during this period. Some linked these concerns to the influx of new or returning populations:

"psychological violence, verbal violence, verbal and physical harassment, early marriage, abuse, physical violence and feeling danger and lack of security, all of which appeared sharply and increased during the past two months due to change in the living and political situation in the region and the presence of newcomers who are strangers to the local community" (Woman from Jebel Saman, Aleppo Governorate).

On a positive note, some women and girls noted improvements in their lives due to the impact of GBV awareness-raising efforts in their communities:

"there is a relative change due to men attending awareness-raising sessions, which has contributed to improving adolescent girls' sense of safety compared to the past" (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

However, the same girls also noted that *"this violence can be eliminated through raising men's awareness more"*.

Types of GBV

Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting forms of violence both inside and outside the home, in what amounts to a lifelong cycle of harm – most often perpetrated by those closest to her:

"First by the father or brother and then by the husband, a girl must submit to them and is subjected to all violence forms" (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

Often, forms of violence experienced inside and outside the home go hand in hand: for example, the perceived need to protect girls and women from sexual violence outside the home leads to increased restrictions on freedom of movement inside the home. Some 53 per cent of respondents in a rapid protection assessment in

North-West Syria reported that there is no safe place for women and girls.²⁷

Data from service providers show that physical assault is the most commonly reported type of GBV in North-West Syria – for example, it comprised 44 per cent of cases reported to GBV service providers in the fourth quarter of 2024. Following physical assault, the next most reported types of GBV are psychological or emotional abuse, denial of resources, sexual assault, forced marriage and rape.²⁸

The Whole of Syria (WoS) Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) of January 2025 also highlighted the following types of violence as being significant concerns for women and girls: being asked to marry by the family (23 per cent); violence in the home (21 per cent); sexual harassment in public spaces (13 per cent); and risk of violence when travelling outside the community (10 per cent).²⁹



Physical Violence

Physical violence is both pervasive and normalised – from beatings, kicking and slapping to the throwing of objects and pulling of hair – most often taking place within the home, perpetrated by husbands and male relatives:

"Girls in [the camp] suffer from all forms of physical violence by their family (father and brother); beating, throwing objects towards them and pulling hair" (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)

Adolescent girls, adult women and older women all reported examples of physical violence *"using tools (stick, belt, hose) or by kicking and hands"* (Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Idlib Governorate), and also noted that *"there are cases of young married girls whose bodies show signs of beatings (blue bruises)"* (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate). Women and girls describe physical violence as an extremely common part of a broader pattern of control and punishment within the household.

While both women and girls experience physical violence, girls are more frequently described as facing family-based violence and as being less able to resist or escape it:

"If parents don't beat the girl, one of her older brothers beats her, and if she is married, the husband beats her with a belt, a hose, or his hands and insults her" (Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)

27 OCHA, NWS Rapid Protection Assessment Dashboard 26 November 23–2024 January 2025 (New York, 2024).

28 GBV AoR, Gender-Based Violence Information Management System 2024 Quarter 4 Trends Report, 2024).

29 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Rapid Needs Assessment [Website, 2025].

Women and girls with disabilities are *"more exposed to violence than others, parents who are afraid for them keep them at home so no one see them and don't bully them, and many parents might beat them if they lose the energy to take care of them"* (Woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate).



Psychological Violence

Psychological violence is reported by women and girls to be an extremely common and deeply damaging form of abuse:

"One of the most common types of violence is emotional violence through insults and verbal abuse" (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

Women and girls experience bullying, insults, manipulation, humiliation, controlling behaviours, verbal harassment and threats, often occurring in tandem with physical violence.

"Psychological violence affects girls more than physical violence" (Woman from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

The most common perpetrators are male family members – especially husbands and fathers – though some psychological violence is perpetrated by in-laws, community members or people in positions of power such as teachers and employers.

Psychological violence occurs in the home, schools, workplaces and community spaces, where social norms and gender dynamics often enable or excuse emotionally abusive behaviour.

"Insults at home or at school or bullying weaken her personality and she remains afraid to speak up and give her opinion fearing she will be bullied" (Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

Girls are particularly vulnerable to verbal abuse and social humiliation, especially in school settings, and to bullying if they are displaced or have disabilities.

"Girls in [the] camp suffer from psychological violence due to displacement, education denial, prevention from leaving the tent for fear of people's gossip, customs, traditions and cultural differences in the community. The psychological violence increased after displacement due to

“living in one tent and the family’s economic situation, in addition to the deprivation of resources” (Adolescent girl from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Women with disabilities also report that they *“are exposed to psychological violence and bullying, and have nowhere to go for rest or entertainment and feel that they are a burden on their community”* (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate). Widows and divorced and elderly women were also reported to be particularly vulnerable to psychological violence.



Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a deeply rooted, multidimensional risk for women and girls in Syria, manifesting in both public and private spheres. Intimate partner sexual violence, including marital rape, is common – though often unacknowledged or normalized. Women and girls face sexual abuse and exploitation in employment settings – particularly on agricultural lands or in informal labour arrangements – housing and detention, where vulnerability is heightened by poverty, displacement, lack of protection and gendered power dynamics.

“Some of us suffer from being forced to work in harsh conditions, such as working in factories, agricultural lands outside the city or shops for little pay and in conditions that expose us to sexual exploitation and sometimes even rape” (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate); *“Women and girls with disabilities suffer from sexual harassment due to their vulnerability and inability to defend themselves and psychological pressure due to bullying and verbal abuse, as they are dependent on the family, and lack special toilets for PWDs”* (Woman from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

One FGD linked men’s exposure to pornography on social media to increased sexual violence in marriage, including marital rape.

“Marital rape has increased from previous years due to the frequent access to social media sites where there are men who are obsessed with pornographic movies that make them captive to sexual desire” (Woman from Ya’robiyah, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Some participants noted that intimate sexual partner violence occurs less frequently than other forms of violence within the relationship:

“Women’s exposure to sexual violence and rape in smaller rates than other violence forms by intimate partner in houses” (Woman from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

A striking theme is the sexual exploitation and harassment that girls face in the workplace, particularly on agricultural lands or in informal labour arrangements.

“Adolescent girls are exposed to sexual harassment while working on agricultural lands by the supervisor, the parents deprive them of their wages, in addition to verbal abuse by the employer (supervisor) and sometimes beating” (Adolescent girl from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Girls are frequently harassed by supervisors and judged on their appearance – with those perceived as more beautiful seen to be more employable but also more targeted. Some participants described rape and coercion in exchange for housing, services or work opportunities, often under the guise of help:

“Girls are forced to work on agricultural lands where the father takes the girl’s wages from her work in which she suffers various types of violence such as verbal harassment, sexual harassment, gestures and sometimes physical violence by the employer (supervisor), where girls suffer from discrimination because beautiful girls have more opportunities to work” (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Adolescent girls appear especially vulnerable, lacking both physical protection and social power. As minors, they are unable to defend themselves, especially when working alone or under male authority:

“Violence occurs in the workplace on agricultural lands, sexual and physical harassment and exploitation of girls, as they are minors who cannot defend themselves” (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Women also reported denial of services – such as registration for humanitarian distributions – when refusing to comply with sexual demands by gatekeepers:

“Some women suffer from extortion and sexual exploitation, where they are offered help in exchange for sex and are stigmatised if they refuse” (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate).

Women who are detained for political or conflict-related reasons suffer extreme forms of sexual violence.

These accounts reveal how sexual violence is not limited to random acts but is embedded in systems of dependence, control and economic survival, where men in positions of authority – including intimate partners, supervisors, landlords and service providers – exploit women and girls' needs:

"Some weak-minded people exploit women in their need for housing if they are divorced or widowed and raise the rent or ask to leave in exchange for unethical things from them" (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

Though some FGD participants reported a reduction in incidences of sexual exploitation and abuse in relation to humanitarian assistance, it is clear that sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) continues:

"They refused my name and said there is no registration because I didn't want to go along with the employee who was registering the names and give him what he wanted from me" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate). "Being a displaced and a widow woman needing the humanitarian assistance provided in the area, and forced to go myself because there is no one who can go instead except my little son. When I went to receive the assistance, I was exploited and verbally harassed by a service provider who told me: 'You are as sweet as a rose' and asked me to say beautiful words to him to get the service" (Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh).

The WoS RNA noted some positive shifts, with a majority of respondents (59 per cent) reporting that they have been informed about the roles and responsibilities of aid workers and organizations, and 58 per cent that they have received information about where to raise a complaint about misconduct by aid workers. Some 73 per cent say they would raise a complaint if they experienced sexual exploitation by aid workers.³⁰ The most frequently cited challenges to reporting a complaint were concerns about confidentiality (20 per cent), fear of discrimination and exclusion (20 per cent), fear of retaliation (14 per cent), lack of trust in aid organizations (13 per cent) and fear of stigmatization or harassment (12 per cent).³¹

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Women and girls face widespread and multifaceted denial of rights, services and opportunities, often shaped by gender norms, age, displacement, poverty and conflict. Many women and girls are denied financial resources, economic opportunities and access to healthcare, making them more vulnerable to other forms of GBV:

"Women in the community face many restrictions, many husbands prevent their wives from going to the centre or going to a clinic, and fathers deny their daughters education and completing their studies" (Woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate).

For many girls and women, rights to movement, healthcare or community engagement were curtailed by fathers or husbands, who denied them access to clinics, centres or even basic personal needs. Denial of healthcare was also raised for women with disabilities or elderly women, who struggle to access clinics due to mobility, cost or lack of support. These denials took many forms – from being prevented from earning wages or making decisions, to being excluded from humanitarian registration and aid, to gender-based restrictions on personal development and self-expression. Girls reported being forbidden from engaging in creative activities like music and art, and some felt forced to stay indoors while their male siblings moved freely and enjoyed more support. Some participants framed this as intentional deprivation, while others described it as a result of social norms or neglect. Girls and women who speak out, seek work or pursue autonomy were also described as being scolded, punished or socially ostracized.

Adolescent girls, particularly in camps, face acute barriers to education and empowerment opportunities. Girls from poor or displaced families, or those living without protective adult advocates, are often identified as the most affected. Widows, divorced women and those without male guardians were reported to face barriers to housing, aid and movement, often being excluded from registration processes or targeted for exploitation.

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

Women and girls in Syria face extremely limited freedom of movement, which is linked directly to oppressive and discriminatory social norms, as well as ongoing and escalating insecurity:

"Girls in our community cannot move freely due to restrictions imposed by the conservative community. It is considered a shame for a girl to leave the house" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Many are prevented by husbands and fathers from leaving their homes, visiting with family and friends, going to a health clinic or going to school – while others do not leave their home, especially in the evening, out of fear for their safety:

"I have cancelled all my daughter's lessons in the evening because I have concerns, and we can't get out after 5 o'clock" (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

30 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Rapid Needs Assessment [Website, 2025].

31 Ibid.

Restrictions on the movement and expression of women and girls are closely connected with gendered social norms related to shame, control and perceived "protection":

"There is a discrimination between men and women that has existed for a long time and has not changed – as man has right to do whatever he wants such as going out of the house, staying up late, meeting with friends, and working in the evening" (Adolescent boy from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate).

Restrictions on women's and girls' mobility have continued to increase, severely limiting their engagement in community life and their ability to access school, work and basic services. Restrictions were exerted and enforced through social and familial pressures, threats, physical violence and restraint, blame, judgement and social rejection:

"The man in the house may control her going out and times to go and prevent her from going to her family or friends. Her husband says you are not caring for me and threatens her to remarry, so she remains psychologically devastated and physically tired" (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Decision-making

Some reports indicate that women's leadership and participation in public and private spheres have changed with the influence of the ongoing conflict; for example, women became increasingly responsible for income-generating activities after the crisis began – whereas before they had been primarily responsible for unpaid care work within the family – since men were often absent or faced economic hardship. In this context, women-led organizations (WLOs) joined forces to advocate for women's rights and political participation.³²

Nonetheless, FGD participants overwhelmingly reported that women and girls do not have a meaningful role in decision-making processes at a family or community level in Syria:

"Women and girls are rarely able to make independent decisions without approval of parents, husband and family" (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate).

They are not able to make decisions within their families and may face violence when making decisions that are seen to be the purview of males within the household.

"Who are we to ask about decision-making? No one pays attention to our opinion except in determining the daily food" (Woman from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

This lack of decision-making power is even more evident at community level, where *"man holds decision and power ... due to inherited customs and traditions"* (Woman from Harasta, Rural Damascus Governorate).

Some girls are forbidden from engaging in creative activities like music and art, and forced to stay indoors while their male siblings move freely:

"I am denied from practicing musical or artistic hobbies because I am a girl" (Adolescent girl from Tartous, Tartous Governorate).

Girls and women who speak out, seek work or pursue autonomy are scolded, punished or socially ostracized.

"Girls are denied [the] right to make their own decisions, especially when it comes to education" (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Denial of Education

Girls are frequently prevented from attending school due to family restrictions, early marriage, prioritization of boys' education, high costs, unsafe or inadequate school environments and prevailing beliefs that a girl's role is confined to the home:

"We are denied the opportunity for education because we are females, as parents refuse to send us to school or even private education" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate); "There is only one school in [the] camp ... but girls are not allowed to go there" (Adolescent girl from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate); "there are no centres in the camp nor safe spaces that contain empowerment activities for learning" (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

The girl whose house is far from school, cannot go by herself, her parents must take her so that no one can harass or kidnap her, especially school starts early in the morning and streets are empty. If there is no one to drive her to school, she will have to leave it so that nothing happens to her on the way. I had to leave school due to distance from my house, and my parents forced me to get engaged after I left school. (Adolescent girl from Shaza Alhurriah camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)

32 CARE, Northeast Syria: Rapid Gender Analysis Brief, Ar-Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh Governorates, 2024).

Girls who are able to attend school face risks of harassment and violence:

"There is harassment in schools because they are mixed gender, which led to education denial for girls" (Woman from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Denial of Financial Resources and Opportunities

Many women and girls reported being denied financial resources or economic opportunities, making them more vulnerable to other forms of GBV:

"Adolescent girls are prevented to leave the tent except to work, and father or brother takes the money when they come back from work" (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

"I know a woman who goes to work from the morning until 6 p.m., and her husband stays at home and she still has to cook, take care of children and her home. Her husband says you are not caring for me and threatens her to remarry, so she remains psychologically devastated and physically tired." (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate)

"Nowadays, men stay at home and send their wives and children to work in the land and when they return home, men take all their wages, and if they need a doctor or medicine, they refuse to give them money and prevented them to go anywhere. (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)

Many women and girls reported that their income is taken by brothers or husbands, and they have no control over how it is used:

"There are men who control women and take their salaries if they are employed or deprive them of monthly allowance claiming with difficult circumstances, so the woman feels helpless and remains dependent on her husband, and it is the same even if she is single at home" (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate); "Women are exposed to deprivation from resources by husbands even if she works, she cannot dispose of her income" (Woman from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

This leads to ongoing dependence of women and girls, and increased vulnerability to exploitation:

"There are also many incidents of harassment and exploitation of women who go out to work on lands, where the supervisor or the landowner exploits the woman's poverty and harasses her, but she remains silent, so that she keeps her livelihood income" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

Denial of Access to Services

Denial of healthcare is also common for women with disabilities and elderly women, who struggle to access clinics due to mobility, cost or lack of support:

"Elderly women suffer from physical violence, as she is beaten by her sons, psychological violence due to neglect, bullying, being useless, and deprivation of resources, as she cannot control money due to husband's authority, if any, or the son controls her financially, as she needs to go to the doctor and buy medications, she needs help to go to the doctor outside the camp for treatment" (Older woman from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Denial of Inheritance and Housing, Land and Property

Denial of child custody, denial of inheritance, and denial of housing, land and property (HLP) are common forms of GBV in Syria:

"The most widespread violence in our community is economic violence, deprivation of rights and inheritance, and women always feel insecure, especially after death of the husband" (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate).

A CARE report described the inheritance and HLP risks faced by women and girls: "[Among] families who own their homes, women are further disadvantaged by not having their names included on HLP documentation, limiting their rights to these assets in the event of divorce or widowhood... Women may also be forced to renounce their inheritance rights at the point of divorce or widowhood, or when remarrying, leaving them without access to or control over resources of their own, and reinforcing their dependency on the men around them."

"My companion's mother was denied inheritance because she is a female" (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

The risk of losing child custody also serves as a powerful deterrent that prevents women and girls from reporting IPV and from seeking divorce or other legal recourse.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic, family and IPV are deeply entrenched and normalized in Syria. This violence is not new, but is reported by women and girls to have intensified in recent years due to economic hardship, displacement and the breakdown of traditional family support systems.

Intimate Partner Violence

IPV is extremely common and persistent, affecting many married women and girls on a daily basis:

"Women and girls suffer primarily from spousal violence, which is the main constant violence form prevalent in their region, including beatings, verbal insults and destroying women's self-confidence" (Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate).

Reports included physical violence, emotional and verbal abuse, reproductive coercion, and restrictions on movement and access to services.

"We are used to beating in our community, no one in the family is safe from it, the father beats the mother, girls and boys when he is nervous. Violence is present in every house, not only beating, but also verbally it is more painful than beating such as insults and bad words from the husband to his wife and children" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate).

These findings align with GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) data from North-West Syria, which finds, for example, that IPV accounted for 67 per cent of cases reported to GBV service providers in the fourth quarter of 2024.³³

Women described being beaten, insulted or controlled by their husbands, often during arguments or when requesting basic household needs. Husbands may use the threat of divorce or remarriage as a coercive measure:

"Beatings at home, the father may come home angry, tired, or annoyed and release his anger on his children or his wife, or the mother releases her anger on the children and beats them" (Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate).

Sexual violence within marriage, including rape, was also reported – though some participants noted that this is less common than other forms:

"A husband can force his wife to engage in sexual intercourse and get pregnant. They say 'if you refuse, I'll re-marry'" (Woman from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

This also highlights the use of threats of divorcing or taking another wife as a means of control.

IPV also has severe and long-lasting consequences on the broader family:

"Many cases of domestic violence have been observed and a large number of children are victims of family disintegration" (Woman from Damascus, Damascus Governorate).

Family Violence

Family violence beyond the intimate partner relationship is also reported as common. Girls are beaten, verbally abused or denied freedom and education by fathers, which is often justified as discipline:

"A lot of the violence that we face starts from the family, and the most common issue is mistreatment by our fathers or brothers, and discrimination between girls and their male siblings" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Both girls and boys are beaten by their parents, though girls face an additional layer of violence from their brothers, who enforce household restrictions through physical and emotional control, reinforcing male dominance within the family.

"There is violence at home, the girl's right is denied, she has no opinion, her brother can beat and can control her like her father, the girl feels weak" (Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate).

Sibling violence appeared closely linked to these broader patterns of authority and punishment.

Service providers in North-West Syria also documented family members other than spouses or caregivers as perpetrators in up to 31 per cent of reported GBV incidents in 2024, while primary caregivers accounted for 9 to 12 per cent.³⁴

Many participants underscored that violence in the home is so routine that it causes children to become aggressive or withdrawn – perpetuating cycles of harm across generations:

"Children who are orphans or whose parents divorced and live with their grandparents or uncles are subjected to beatings and insults, all of which reflects on the child's personality and he becomes aggressive" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate).

³³ GBV AoR, Gender-Based Violence Information Management System 2024 Quarter 4 Trends Report (2024).

³⁴ GBV AoR, Gender-Based Violence Information Management System 2024 Mid-Annual Trends Report (2024); GBV AoR, Gender-Based Violence Information Management System 2024 Quarter 3 Trends Report (2024); GBV AoR, Gender-Based Violence Information Management System 2024 Quarter 4 Trends Report (2024).

Some participants mentioned violence at hands of their husband's family:

"There is violence by the mother-in-law, the majority treats daughter-in-law badly, out of competition and jealousy or inciting the husband against his wife. This makes her feel ecstatic and victorious because she considers herself the house master, and daughter-in-law or the bride is an outsider who came to impose her control. This is her belief, and this happens whether they are within one house or in a separate house, and this worsens as mother-in-law grows older" (Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Characteristics of Intimate Partner and Family Violence in Syria

- Women and girls face a combination of types of violence in their households, including physical, sexual, verbal, economic and restrictions on movement.
- There are often multiple perpetrators, including husbands, fathers, brothers and other family members.
- Boys begin to demonstrate the same patterns of abuse of authority and power as their fathers from a young age.

Early and Forced Marriage

Many girls are forced to marry at an early age, have no say in choosing a husband and face great difficulty in adapting to married life, often suffering from isolation and deprivation as well as IPV in many forms:

"Parents often force their widowed and divorced daughters to marry men with a great age difference or whom they do not want. We often hear about girls whose husbands died or were divorced, and their parents married them against their will to men older than them who paid a large dowry. In addition, widows are forced to marry their brother-in-law in order not to return to their family's house and deprive their children" (Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

This common practice leads to increased risk of IPV, as well as lifelong physical and mental health consequences for girls.

Death or detainment of the father, or the perceived need to "protect" a girl's honour, may drive child marriage.

"Girls also suffer from early and secret marriages due to displacement, poverty, war and lack of livelihood, and under the pretext of having a husband to protect her" (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqah Governorate).

In other situations, economic hardship, combined with social norms that devalue girls, is the primary factor for *"families who marry their daughters at a young age to get rid of living burdens"*. In many such cases, the young girl *"cannot bear responsibility for the house, family and children and returns to her parents' home divorced. The girl feels helpless as if she is a burden on her family and goes out to work under harsh conditions"* (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

If a girl is divorced or widowed, she faces economic challenges and becomes more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and other forms of violence due to social marginalization:

"Divorce is increasing a lot for girls who get married early, girls are pressured from all sides to get married, and if they don't agree to marry, it means that they are in love with someone" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Forced marriages mainly affect divorced and widowed women and girls. Women and girls forced into second marriages are less likely to be able to leave violent relationships. They also suffer denial of basic rights such as custody of children and rights to inheritance.³⁵

Some 13 per cent of respondents in the WoS RNA (January 2021) reported that they have observed or heard of cases of child marriage.³⁶

Technology-facilitated Violence

TFGBV has continued to grow in importance for women and girls in Syria since it was first introduced in Voices from Syria 2022. Women and girls face varied and increasing forms of TFGBV, particularly through social media, including platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. This can include photo-based threats and exposure, extortion and the use of such platforms as forums for the sexual exploitation of girls.³⁷

"We often hear about online and via phone violence this year and we didn't hear much about it before, where a girl talks to a young man online and he threatens her not to give her money until she sends her photo. After she sends a photo, he threatens to post it on TikTok unless she returns the money, or he promises to marry her and says he loves her but he is a liar and takes screenshots of their conversation and threatens her to keep talking to him or they'll be exposed" (Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

35 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), GBV AoR 2024. Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Strategy 2025–2024 (New York, 2024).

36 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Rapid Needs Assessment [Website, 2025].

37 UNFPA and ACAPS, Technology-facilitated Gender-Based Violence in North-West Syria (New York, 2025).

TFGBV in former North-West Syria Areas³⁸

The below table gives a summary of the different kinds of TFGBV identified in a study in former North-West Syria areas. These align with the primary data collected for this report, indicating that these forms of violence are common for women and girls across Syria.



Hacking – The use of technology to gain illegal or unauthorized access to online systems, computers or mobile devices, or online accounts to acquire personal information, change or delete information, spread lies to hurt someone's reputation, or target people or organizations. In Syria, TFGBV perpetrators are reported to hack predominantly social media accounts and mobile phones to obtain private pictures, videos or other personal information and use it for blackmail or coercion by demanding money or sexual relationships under the threat of publishing photos or information online.



Online harassment – The use of technology to repeatedly contact, annoy, threaten or scare another person through unwelcome, offensive, degrading or insulting verbal comments and images is common and deeply gendered, ranging from persistent unwanted messages and explicit pictures or videos to online sexual harassment and threats of physical or sexual violence. It occurs on social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp or Telegram, and often escalates into real-world stalking or intimidation, or serves as grooming for future sexual assaults. Online harassment is particularly used to target women who are active in online spaces, express their opinions online, or hold leadership positions such as activists or female students.



Image-based abuse (IBA) involves using intimate images to coerce, threaten, harass and objectify. Many women and girls have had their private images and videos shared without their consent. Intimate content – sometimes fabricated, including images generated by artificial intelligence (AI) or videos known as deepfakes – is shared or published on social media to blackmail, shame or humiliate women and girls, often as revenge after they reject romantic advances. Leaked content often results in severe social stigma including so-called “honour” killings or threats of violence towards the survivor. Sextortion is a serious form of IBA that exploits digital vulnerability to prey on women and girls and often leads to in-person forms of sexual exploitation and violence.



Cyberstalking and repeated harassment, particularly targeting female students, activists and journalists, have been reported, where perpetrators track their online activities and location-tagged content to monitor routines, networks or movements. This can escalate into stalking in real life, with some perpetrators following victims' movements by gathering information about their location through social media.



Online scams or phishing – Perpetrators use fraudulent emails, text messages, phone calls or websites to trick people into sharing sensitive data, downloading malware or otherwise exposing themselves to harm, including using links purporting to connect to job opportunities or humanitarian aid (designed to target women), or English courses or scholarship applications (designed to target girls).



Sexual exploitation through gaming platforms is an increasing trend. Women and girls are being exploited through mobile games and chat applications, including where the games promise additional perks or even money for uploading pictures or videos (with a direct intent of using these for blackmail or exploitation). For example, a new reported trend known as “coins” promises financial rewards for chatting with people online. More money is sometimes offered for longer and more intimate exchanges.



Defamation, involving the public release and spreading of exaggerated or false information, often occurs on social media and is used against women activists, non-governmental organization (NGO) workers and other professionals. There are reported to be specific Telegram channels used for mass exposure (known as "scandalous" channels).



Doxing consists of non-consensual disclosure of personal information involving the public release of an individual's private, personal, sensitive information, such as home and email addresses, phone numbers, employers' and family members' contact information, or photos of their children and the school they attend with the purpose of locating and causing physical harm.



Impersonation often involves fake social media accounts, using stolen or fabricated pictures of women, which are used for defamation or extortion. Perpetrators also lure victims into conversations or collect personal information.



Creepshots (digital voyeurism), an offline form of TFGBV involving taking non-consensual photos or videos of women and girls, in public places such as stores, public bathrooms, locker rooms, classrooms or the street, but also in their own apartments and spaces they consider safe. Women reported being secretly photographed in public places such as universities and even in their homes, including while sleeping.

Many forms of TFGBV are reported to be increasing across Syria:

"Violence has entered people's houses from the phone and programmes of money, in which men take pictures of women, talk to them, and then threaten them, and women are forced to go along and give man what he wants due to poverty" (Woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate); "Violence happens on social media, and through cyber-harassment. In one incident, a girl's picture was published on Facebook and this led to severe problems in her family" (Woman with a disability or her caregiver from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate); "There was an incident of a girl's marriage in which a young man blackmailed her by publishing her photos, which led to a clash and death of a young man, and the girl's entry into a bad psychological state" (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate).

Others talked about online platforms as a new and growing platform for transactional sex, through which women and particularly adolescent girls are exposed to exploitation due to difficult economic circumstances:

"A woman talks to an unknown person via phone and he gives her money for sending pictures and talking with him and then threatens her that he would disclose everything if she stopped sending pictures, and eventually if her husband knows he divorces her" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

The continued rise in TFGBV reflects a shift in how abuse is occurring, adding new layers of risk in both public and private spheres for women and girls, which may be especially difficult to detect and confront.

"Violence via the phone and from chat programs becomes common, a woman might be exposed to violence from an unknown person who talks to her, deceives and pressures her, takes her photos and conversations with her then threatens her" (Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

Multiple forms of TFGBV are often used simultaneously, or in connection with each other or other forms of non-technology-related violence – for example, hacking a phone or social media account allows a perpetrator to access private pictures or information, which can lead to IBA including extortion or allow them to identify the survivor and her location in real life. This can lead to harassment, sexual violence, defamation and femicide in the form of so-called “honour” killings:

“Many girls are exposed to cyberviolence through social media, where some young men deceive girls in the name of love asking them to send their photos. Once the girl trusts the guy and sends photos, he starts threatening to publish them. The camp is small and everyone knows each other, and scandal means death. Sadly, many girls have lost their lives due to this exploitation, and cyberviolence is still prevalent in the camp” (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

TFGBV, like many forms of violence documented in this report, is used to target individuals and also as part of a broader pattern of gendered social control with an aim to “force women into silence, deter their participation in public life, or systematically harm specific groups” – including female journalists, activists and humanitarian workers.³⁹

“Often, the violence is not “dealt with seriously. For example, a girl’s pictures were leaked online and her family forced her to leave school and get married” (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Some participants reported that progress is being made in fighting TFGBV through improvements in legislation:

“the issue of electronic violence has become somewhat under control due to legal restrictions” (Man from Deir Ez-Zor, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate).

Kidnapping

Women and girls reported risks of kidnapping, often restricting their movement due to this fear:

“Women have many fears that prevent their freedom of movement, including fear of assault, rape and kidnapping” (Woman from Harim, Idleb Governorate); “Women and girls cannot move easily in the community due to security chaos and spread of robbery and kidnapping” (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate).

Femicide

Femicide is reported by women and girls in Syria, often in relation to or as the consequence of other forms of GBV such as sexual violence and TFGBV.

“If she is raped, she remains silent out of fear of being slaughtered, killed, exiled, disbelieved, and blamed” (Adolescent girl from Kesrah, Ar-Raqa Governorate); “Participants said that we face difficulty in speaking and disclosing when we are subjected to any form of violence, especially sexual violence, which is represented by exploitation and harassment, due to fear of community’s perception that the woman is the cause to be subjected to sexual violence and that she is a disgrace to her family and community, which leads to murder her” (Woman from Harim, Idleb Governorate).

So-called honour killings also appear as a strong controlling factor for women and girls’ self-restriction and silence as a coping mechanism in response to other forms of GBV:

“A change in violence forms has been observed, especially physical violence, with lack of law in the current period and lack of accountability, so there are more cases of murder and revenge” (Woman from At-Tall, Rural Damascus Governorate).

Femicide is particularly mentioned as a risk for formerly detained women:

“some detainee survivors’ families refused to accept them, especially those who came out with children, and some families killed women and their children” (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate).

GBV Contexts

Violence occurs anywhere there is a male with an authoritarian mindset. (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)

Women and girls report that nowhere is safe from GBV:

"Violence is everywhere, both inside tents and in the surrounding community, so girls feel that there is no safe place to resort" (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).



Homes and camps/shelters

Violence occurs in every house, violence from the husband to his wife and from brother to his sister due to life pressures and lack of awareness among people, all of which reflects on the health and psychological well-being of women.

(Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate)

In quarter 4 of 2024, 71 per cent of reported cases occurred either at the survivor's or perpetrator's home.⁴⁰



Public transportation and transportation hubs

Girls are also exposed to sexual violence such as verbal harassment especially in crowded public transportation which has increased this year and last year due to lack of transportation.

(Adolescent boy from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)



Workplaces (and travelling to and from)

There is violence in the workplace, on agricultural lands, in shops, and we hear incidents of exploitation and harassment from employers.

(Woman from Harim, Idleb Governorate)

Violence occurs in the street while going to work and in the market such as verbal harassment and undesirable touching due to overcrowding.

(Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqa Governorate)



Public spaces (e.g. streets, markets)

Violence occurs in public spaces, but less than domestic violence, to maintain a good image by those around.

(Adolescent girl from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)

Harassment is more frequent in the market due to crowding, verbal abuse, undesirable gestures and touch.

(Adolescent girl from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)



Schools (and travelling to and from)

On their way to school and inside it, girls suffer from psychological pressure.

(Adolescent girl from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqqqa, Ar-Raqqqa Governorate)

Violence against adolescent girls due to coeducational schools, girls are emotionally exploited and blackmailed by young men.

(Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)



Detention centres

We see all forms of injustice, torture and violence, including beating, humiliation, deprivation and rape of women, men and children in detention centres.

(Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate)



Service facilities and distribution points

Violence can occur when women go to distributions, especially if they are alone or not registered.

(Adolescent boy from Al-Khateeb camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate)

Women may be verbally abused in services distribution sites.

(Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyah, Hama Governorate)



Online/virtual spaces

There is harassment via phones or social media or blackmail by taking photos of girls and asking them to do immoral things or he will tell her family.

(Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate)



Camps and informal settlements

Girls are often subjected to sexual harassment due to the lack of toilets, lack of security patrols in the camp, and lack of lighting.

(Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqqa Governorate)



Bakeries

Most common places where violence occurs are in bakeries, where sexual violence occurs through contact.

(Woman from Jablah, Lattakia Governorate)

On transportation, side streets, crowded places, bread bakeries, locations where free services and distributions are provided, destroyed places.

(Woman from Jebel Saman, Aleppo Governorate)

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

A complex range of intersecting factors increases the vulnerability of women and girls to different forms of GBV.

Insecurity

Insecurity emerged as the most frequently cited factor, with participants describing how armed conflict, lack of safety and the presence of weapons in communities contribute to heightened violence.

"Girls are subjected to discrimination and exposure to violence, especially when there is no protection or safety in the community" (Adolescent boy from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate);

"this group of beneficiaries is constantly exposed to fear due to the spread of violence and insecurity in the area" (Adolescent boy from Al-Khateeb camp, Idleb Governorate).

Gendered Social Norms

Oppressive and discriminatory gender and social norms are an important root cause of violence, driving expectations around obedience and family control over girls, normalizing violence, and leading to underage or forced marriages as a means of "protection" and control:

"Girls are subjected to gender inequality. This issue still exists today. It is always said 'A boy is a boy and a girl is a girl,' implying that a girl is inferior to a boy. Girls are not allowed to express their opinions freely in presence of boys" (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate); "Girls and elderly women suffer from physical violence and restrictions because of customs that allow male relatives to control them" (Older woman from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Many also highlighted the compounding violence of victim-blaming, stigmatization and norms around the silence of women and girls that discourage disclosure and help-seeking.

"Girls are often blamed for being harassed and are told to stay home or dress differently to avoid problems" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

The findings underscore that GBV is not just a product of external instability but is deeply entrenched in social structures and norms that must be addressed alongside humanitarian responses:

"there is more discrimination than before because men are allowed to practice normal life while women are not due to fear of the current situation" (Adolescent girl from Tartous, Tartous Governorate).

Previous Voices reports have highlighted some shifts in social norms in connection with the prolonged crisis in Syria, where some opportunities for women have opened up due to conflict, displacement of male family members and women taking on roles as heads of households. While FGDs did identify, in some cases, shifts in social norms around men's violence against women, they did not report positive changes related to other caring responsibilities or other social roles. Indeed, results of the WoS RNA showed that 37 per cent of respondents believe that women now have more caring responsibilities than before (52 per cent report that there has been no change, and 10 per cent believe that men have more responsibilities), and 88 per cent said that women are primarily responsible for unpaid care work (cooking, cleaning, caregiving). Thirty-two per cent said that the time spent on unpaid care work has increased in the last three months (64 per cent said it has stayed the same, 4 per cent said it has decreased). At the same time, 78 per cent of respondents said that both women and men participate in economic/income-generating activities in the community. This shows that women are still carrying a severe double-burden of paid and unpaid work.⁴¹

Nonetheless, some women and girls described their perception that social norms have changed for the better due to GBV awareness-raising interventions (see Prevention of and Response to GBV), as well as their dreams for a future without violence (see Recommendations and Hopes).

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Displacement and life in camps or temporary shelters further expose women and girls to physical and sexual violence and exploitation, particularly in overcrowded or unprotected environments:

"The violence that women suffer has increased after displacement, life changed from home to tent, there is no privacy in the tent in addition to losing their sources of livelihood and working on agricultural lands for low wages" (Woman from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Many participants also linked increases in violence to the influx and/or return of displaced people to their communities:

"Tensions and violence within families have increased after the recent events in Syria, especially among returnees from abroad who claim their homes" (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)

⁴¹ OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Rapid Needs Assessment [Website, 2025].

Many women and girls made the connection between displacement, insecurity and increases in early marriage:

"Early marriage increased under pretext of displacement and that marriage is protection for the girl" (Adolescent girl from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Various types of violence were described as being exacerbated by displacement and living conditions, including IPV:

"Women are beaten in homes or camps by their husbands or other relatives, especially after displacement where living conditions are worse and there is no privacy" (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate); "Girls suffer from physical violence by their family in the tent (father and brother), and psychological abuse due to conditions they suffer after war due to living in one tent" (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Poor living conditions – including shared or makeshift housing, lack of toilets and lighting or inadequate sanitation in camps – were also identified as increasing exposure to GBV. The WoS RNA reports that 25 per cent of respondents say that overcrowding is the most serious shelter issue, followed by lack of privacy (21 per cent).⁴²

Violence has increased in the past year due to pressure on men under current circumstances. There is physical violence due to the husband's loss of job opportunities, which leads to deterioration of his psychological state and practicing violence against women. The most serious violence within our community is psychological and economic violence due to villagers coming to the city fearing the new developments in our country. (Woman from Jablah, Lattakia Governorate)

Economic Crisis

Poverty and economic crisis were another prominent theme, with unemployment, financial stress and women's financial dependence on men fuelling IPV and early marriage:

"this group of beneficiaries suffers from economic hardship, which contributes to increased early marriage and domestic violence" (Adolescent boy from Al-Khateeb camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

Some FGDs also mentioned the heavy responsibilities that women must take on – and related risks of violence – as heads of households:

"women bear responsibilities that exceed their physical capacity due to absence of men, whether due to travel or loss due to war" (Adolescent girl from Tartous, Tartous Governorate).

Social Identity Factors

Many identified risks were linked to intersecting social identity factors, including: living with a disability, having formerly been detained, or living without a male head of household. For more information on identity-based risk factors, see Affected Groups. Early marriage was reported as a risk factor for IPV.

TFGBV Risk Factors

Risk factors for TFGBV partially overlap with risk factors identified for other forms of violence; however, some additional elements also emerge. A study on TFGBV in former North-West Syria areas highlighted that the "convergence of armed conflict, displacement, economic hardship, cultural conservatism, weak governance, and rapid technological adoption without adequate digital literacy or safeguards creates a fertile ground for digital abuse. TFGBV is shaped by deeply embedded gender norms and unequal power dynamics that enable control, surveillance, and exploitation based on gender."⁴³ Peaks in reported TFGBV often coincide with major political or humanitarian instability, suggesting that the violence is exacerbated by the region's ongoing social, political and economic instability.⁴⁴

Girls also highlighted how restrictions on their freedom of movement lead to increased risks of TFGBV, highlighting the complex interplay of different kinds of violence: "[The] community marginalises girls, she cannot go out for a walk alone due to her family's concerns for her, not allowed to visit her friends, and her only outlet is school or the course where she attends private lessons, and family visits, so her use of mobile phone to fill her free time has increased" (Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

Intersectional factors that make TFGBV risks for women and girls in Syria even more acute include disability, financial vulnerability, public professions, and sexual orientation and gender identity characteristics. Journalists and online activists face significant risks due to their high online presence.

42 Ibid.

43 UNFPA and ACAPS, Technology-facilitated Gender-Based Violence in North-West Syria.

44 Ibid.

Affected Groups



Adolescent girls

Types of violence highlighted:

- Physical violence in the family by father and brothers
- Bullying and harassment by young men
- Sexual violence, including exploitation
- Denial of education
- Denial of basic needs
- TFGBV

Adolescent girls seem to be more exposed to violence due to community's lack of awareness of importance of protecting them.

(Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)



Unaccompanied girls and orphans

Types of violence highlighted:

- Insults
- Discrimination compared with children that are not unaccompanied or orphans
- Physical violence from other children
- Exploitation
- Neglect

Unaccompanied children are beaten by other children and suffer from exploitation and neglect due to lack of a defender or helper.

(Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)



Older women

Types of violence highlighted:

- Physical violence
- Psychological and emotional violence
- Denial of resources and services, particularly healthcare
- Financial control

Elderly women are subjected to harsh words, restraint and scolding by family members or the community.

(Adolescent girl from Kisrah, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)

Older women suffer from neglect and negligence by their husbands and children and mistreatment from sons and daughters-in-law.

(Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)



Widowed and divorced women and girls, female heads-of-households

Types of violence highlighted:

- Psychological violence including humiliation, stigmatisation, gossip, blame
- Physical violence
- Forced marriage
- Emotional and sexual exploitation (linked to difficulties in meeting basic needs, less access to identity documentation)
- Interference in and control of their lives, including dress and movement
- Restraints on freedom of movement

The way the community and people look at divorced women and girls is unfair and their families treat them badly because they consider it their fault that they did not maintain their families and the marriage failed. The widow is also forbidden to rejoice and dress after the death of her husband, all eyes are on her, and many families have married off their widowed daughters against their will to men they did not like, just so the girl would not stay with them.

(Woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate)



Women and girls with disabilities

Types of violence highlighted:

- Physical violence, including by throwing stones and other objects
- Psychological violence
- Neglect
- Bullying
- Sexual violence, including harassment and exploitation
- Isolation
- Difficulties accessing employment opportunities, essential goods and services, destroyed infrastructure including markets – leading to increased risks of exploitation

Unaccompanied children are beaten by other children and suffer from exploitation and neglect due to lack of a defender or helper.

(Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)

My relative is disabled and suffers a lot from her family, discrimination and treatment, they make her feel that she is a burden to them at mealtimes and they get nervous and sometimes look at her with pity so she feels that she is inferior. Our neighbour's daughter has a disability with her legs and the children in the neighbourhood bully her and sometimes throw her with stones.

(Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)



Displaced women and girls

Types of violence highlighted:

- Sexual violence, including exploitation
- Discrimination by host communities
- Psychological and emotional violence in schools
- IPV, especially related to crowded and poor living conditions

IDPs are highly vulnerable to violence due to the interruption of food parcels, the lack of a source of income for families, and their need to work on agricultural lands and hard jobs, which exposes them to various forms of violence.

(Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)



Individuals of diverse SOGIESC

Individuals of diverse SOGIESC are vulnerable to various kinds of violence in Syria, including “blackmail, extortion, kidnapping, arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual violence by armed actors, and other forms of physical violence and stigma”.⁴⁵ This information did not directly emerge in primary data collection that informed this report; however, secondary data highlights the vulnerabilities of this group and the barriers that they face in accessing services, support and information.⁴⁶

45 Maydaa, Chayyda, Myrttinen (2020). *Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC Populations* (2020).

46 Centre for Operational Analysis and Research, *LGBTQ+ Syria: Experiences, Challenges and Priorities for the Aid Sector* (2021); UNFPA, GBV AoR Whole of Syria, *Voices from Syria 2023: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview* (2022); UNFPA, GBV AoR Whole of Syria, *Voices from Syria 2024: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview* (2023).

Spotlight on Detention

GBV risks related to detention emerged as a strong theme from FGDs with women and girls, including violence taking place in detention, and against formerly detained women and girls who were released with the fall of the Assad government.

Types of violence highlighted:

- Psychological violence, including being forced to listen to other detainees being tortured
- Physical violence, including extreme forms of physical torture
- Sexual violence, particularly rape
- Stigmatisation, rejection, isolation in communities

Torture in detention included forced nudity, rape, beatings, insults, denial of access to the bathroom, and terror during interrogation [...] and husbands rejected women after release from detention due to their psychological and health condition or because they were tortured.

(Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)

There is an unfair perception of detained women and girls compared to men when they are released from prison. If the community does not show mercy to widows and divorced women, how can it show mercy to detainee women? One of my relatives was detained a long time ago, but there is still no news about her, and her family wishes they could see her, hug her, and then kill her because they know that community will not show mercy if she comes out of detention.

(Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)

Women and girls detailed severe forms of violence in detention, as well as the ongoing consequences of this violence for those who were formerly detained and their families:

Detentions are the worst places where women and girls are subjected to psychological, physical and sexual violence and all kinds of insult and humiliation.

(Adolescent girl from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

Young people are subjected to physical and psychological violence in detention, where they are imprisoned on false charges and subjected to beatings and torture.

(Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)

We hear a lot from the detainees' families that they are exposed to severe beating by stick or hose before even determining the accusation as a disciplinary method.

(Adolescent girl from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)

Women and girls who were formerly detained face severe social stigma, isolation and further violence: "As for adolescent girls who come out of prisons and detention centres, community rejects them and they feel that they are not wanted, blames them, some of them are [harassed] verbally because they were raped or harassed in prison"

(Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Respondents also highlighted the connection between men's experience of violence during their own detention with their use of violence against their partners and children: "Some men who were tortured in detention practise it inside their homes, beating their wives and children in a similar way to what they experienced" (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate).

Consequences of GBV

Women and girls describe the devastating toll that different forms of GBV take on their lives, ranging from physical harm and emotional trauma to loss of autonomy, disrupted education and death:

"I was forced by my father to marry at 15. I suffered many troubles and violence from my husband. In the end, I ended up with a divorce and health issues due to my weak body and the consequences of early pregnancy and repeated miscarriages" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Women and girls indicate feelings of depression, loss of self-esteem and confidence, withdrawal from aspects of community life, and a generalized mood of fear:

"Adolescent girls report insults, threats, and manipulation of their feelings by young men, has devastating effects on their mental health" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate); "Women and girls suffer primarily from spousal violence, which destroys women's self-confidence" (Adult woman from Homs, Homs Governorate).

Many also highlight the links between GBV and suicidal thoughts and attempts:

"For divorced women and widows, they keep silent for fear of being killed or people's gossip, which causes psychological pressure on them and may think about suicide" (Woman from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

TFGBV leads to acute stress and mental health impacts, including suicidal ideation and attempts "stemming from overwhelming fear"; economic impacts; isolation and withdrawal from online and offline spaces; physical violence including femicide by families (so-called "honour killing"); social exclusion and stigma; and forced displacement.⁴⁷

It also has extensive impacts on the broader community by limiting the participation of women and girls in public life and eroding trust in digital spaces and platforms.

Femicide is described by women and girls as a common consequence of other forms of GBV:

"There are programmes that women and girls play on it, collect money and compete to see who can collect more money and get support from other strange men, and she starts talking to him and he harasses her on the phone and asks her for sexual requests, and there are girls who go along with it when the support is cut off, and if her family or her brothers know, they beat her and may kill her to protect family's reputation" (Older woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate); "There are barriers that prevent adolescent girls from disclosing violence like: fear of parents and being blamed for it, fear of being killed, slaughtered or exiled outside the camp, stigma, people's gossip and breaking confidentiality if she talks to a close friend" (Adolescent girl from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

⁴⁷ UNFPA and ACAPS, Technology-facilitated Gender-Based Violence in North-West Syria.

Coping Mechanisms

Women and girls use a variety of different strategies to cope with experiences of GBV and/or attempt to protect themselves from further harm. These strategies are employed in a context of survivor-blaming and stigmatization, and though they often bring additional risks, they may be seen as the least harmful option by survivors. Previous Voices from Syria reports have highlighted that consistent, prolonged exposure to violence and insecurity has gradually eroded the resilience of Syrian women and girls and their ability to respond to continued shocks.

Seek Support from Others	Silence	Seek Services	Change Behaviour and Environment	Self-Care and Empowerment	With Possible Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family support Support from peers Community support (leaders/elders) Degree of support varies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoidance and isolation Over-compliance Fear of stigma, retaliation, loss of income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WGSS Health Shelters Report to authorities (Legal, Security) - less frequent, lack of trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accompaniment Limit movement Divorce Change dress/appearance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find comfort and joy in other ways Increase awareness, empowerment and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dropping out of school Exploitation Survival/transactional sex self-harm
<p>"When violence occurs, women and girls seek support from friends or neighbors before considering official reporting." (Man from Ommah camp, Idlib Governorate)</p> <p>"Some seek help from community leaders, but their concerns are not always taken seriously." (Man from Kafran camp, Aleppo Governorate)</p>	<p>"When a girl is subjected to harassment, even if it is just a word or a look, she avoids telling anyone for fear of being punished by being detained inside the tent and completely banned from going outside." (Adolescent Girl from Hol camp, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</p>	<p>"When different types of violence occur, women and girls sometimes go to the police, but often they are dismissed or ignored." (Man from Jisr Shogoor, Idlib Governorate)</p>	<p>"Some try to prevent violence by changing their dressing style or lifestyle." (Adolescent Girl from Aziz camp, Aleppo Governorate)</p>	<p>"Women and girls now are able to face their problems, trying their best to create solutions. The weak, fragile woman no longer exists." (Man from Deir-ez-Zor, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)</p>	<p>"There are many incidents for women who go out to work on lands, where the land owner exploits the woman's poverty and harasses her, but she remains silent, so she keeps her livelihood income." (Woman from Shaa Alhurriah camp, Idlib Governorate)</p>

Silence

Many women and girls choose to remain silent after experiencing violence due to fear, stigma or lack of trust in available support systems:

"Most women who experience violence tend to remain silent out of fear for their families and fear of social stigma" (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Though keeping silent and not seeking support may lead to severe physical and mental health problems (GBV Experts), many women and girls also reported that speaking about the violence they have experienced is expected to lead to worse consequences, including other forms of violence and restriction:

"silence is always the solution due to fear of revenge or husband's increased violence. There are no authorities responsible for protection" (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate); "the woman ... may have to endure if she is married because she has concerns about herself and her children" (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

GBV experts noted that women and girls may accept violence as normal, or try to justify violence by the perpetrator. They also noted that some divorced women and widows who keep silent for fear of being killed or of people's gossip, in turn suffer psychological pressure

which may lead to suicidal thoughts.

Seeking Support from Informal Networks

Many survivors turn to family members, friends or trusted individuals rather than formal institutions:

"If a woman or girl experiences violence, she often turns to her family first or a close person for support" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate); "Some adolescent girls feel safe only when they find supportive family members" (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Women and girls sometimes rely on close family members, neighbours or trusted individuals for support, though responses vary based on family dynamics and cultural expectations.

"Some families do not support their daughters in such circumstances, which makes the woman look for alternative solutions, such as asking for help from trusted people" (Woman from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

These insights highlight a divided response – while some families provide support, others prioritize preserving family reputation over the survivor's safety.

Isolation and Self-restriction

Many women and girls resort to self-restriction – limiting their mobility, altering their behaviour or suppressing their identities to reduce the likelihood of violence:

"Some try to prevent violence by changing their dressing style or lifestyle" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

This pattern reflects the deeply ingrained fear and power imbalance that forces women to compromise their personal freedoms for safety. Some women and girls resort to isolation and not interacting with the surrounding community, which increases their feeling of loneliness and marginalization:

"Women choose isolation and introversion as a reaction to violence" (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh governorate).

Self-harm

Women and girls report use and abuse of substances (cigarettes, drugs) and bodily harm (e.g. cutting) as coping mechanisms employed by survivors who do not know where to turn or feel unsupported:

"Some women may harm themselves due to social and economic pressures" (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate). Others may resort to suicide attempts. (Woman from Aziz camp, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

GBV experts confirm reports that survivors attempt or commit suicide when they feel there is no other avenue for support.

Reporting to Authorities

Some women attempt to report violence to authorities:

"Women do not seek help from relatives for fear of the abuser, but some feel relieved when they report to the authorities" (Older woman from Jablah, Lattakia Governorate).

However, many fear backlash, lack of action or further harm, and the lack of trust in legal mechanisms remains a barrier:

"Elderly women: some of them try to speak up and report violence, but they say it rarely leads to action" (Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate).

"When different types of violence occur, women and girls sometimes go to the police, but often they are dismissed or ignored" (Man from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

These accounts suggest that while some women seek justice, legal and procedural barriers, as well as community stigma, make it difficult to report violence effectively. GBV experts noted some signs of improved access to justice or protection, but these remain isolated and highly dependent on individual context. This reflects a highly localized and inconsistent environment for institutional support, with personal networks and context determining access:

"it is different from one woman to another, based on her relations and power".

Community Leaders – Traditional Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

Some communities rely on traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, such as local leaders or elders:

"Many women and girls prefer silence for fear of retaliation, but some seek intervention from local elders" (Older woman from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate); "If the violence is domestic, such as physical violence and divorce, women resort to the tribal solution and claim their right through it" (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate).

These mechanisms are not always survivor-centred:

"Some women and girls remain silent. Some seek help from community leaders, but their concerns are not always taken seriously" (Man from Kafray Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Building Positive Coping Skills

Some women and girls recognize the importance of community support, empowerment programmes and awareness initiatives to prevent violence.

"When we are subjected to violence, we can do nothing but cope. We try to minimise the impact by doing anything that makes us happy" (Woman from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate); "Battered women go to counselling centres for support and help, as it is difficult for them to deal with their issues on their own" (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

"Women and girls try to prevent violence or minimize its impact by seeking psychosocial support, staying away from abusers, resorting to shelters, raising awareness of their rights, and communicating with legal authorities" (Man from Al-Ommah camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

GBV experts noted that access to safe spaces and supportive GBV services significantly reduces the use of potentially harmful coping strategies, as women and girls find opportunities to develop more positive approaches. However, there remains a lack of transformative social change to enable real protection and recovery. GBV experts also noted that the presence or absence of services plays a major role in whether and how women and girls develop or apply coping strategies, which points to a service-dependent resilience gap, where only informed or connected women develop new strategies, leaving others behind.

Prevention of and Response to GBV

Impact

In these times of crisis, GBV programming remains an essential and lifesaving intervention. WGSS are places of refuge for women and girls who often do not have access to any other space in their lives in which they feel fully safe and equal. WGSS are also vital hubs for empowerment, education, skills training and emotional healing. GBV prevention activities drive increased awareness of GBV and available services, and are seen to contribute to shifts in social norms about the acceptability of violence.

Women and girls themselves noted the overall positive impacts of GBV prevention and response programming:

"I have become aware of what is right and wrong, and I am able to act on my own. I have become a little stronger after attending awareness sessions" (Woman with a disability or her caregiver from Azaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Some women also noted that GBV services – especially psychosocial support and awareness-raising – have helped them to understand and cope with the violence they have experienced:

"We become aware that what we pass through is violence. [The] centre helped us to know this thing and I changed my thoughts, and my husband supported me to come, and many men ask their wives to go to the centre. I have changed and have more courage to speak up and feel this change in my life" (Woman from As-Salamiyah, Hama Governorate).

Awareness-raising efforts have had a tangible, positive impact by helping women and communities recognize and name experiences as violence, which in turn builds the confidence of women to speak up and seek support. Notably, involving men in these sessions has also contributed to increasing support for women's participation and improving girls' sense of safety.

Reach

Some improvements in access to survivors were noted by GBV experts in North-West Syria in 2024 as organizations began to operate in new areas; community awareness of services increased, and the addition of elements such as sign language trainers helped improve services for persons with disabilities (PWDs).

However, these experts also highlighted the decrease in the number of safe spaces during 2024, and the huge negative impacts on women and girls, as these spaces are considered the only breathing space for them to receive psychological and social support as well as the necessary services. GBV survivors who lost access to essential psychosocial support and protection services have been particularly affected. A case study of the closure of a WGSS in Ar-Raqqa Governorate demonstrated the negative impact of the loss of services and support that women and girls had come to rely on. Staff and community members highlighted the loss of individual and group support, emotional distress, heightened family tensions and a decline in the community's understanding of GBV and women's needs and rights, while community leaders also emphasized the broader community implications such as the loss of vital support networks and diminished capacity to learn skills.⁴⁸ Without alternatives, many survivors faced heightened exposure to violence and were unable or unwilling to transfer to distant or unfamiliar centres due to fear of stigma. Adolescent girls were especially affected, with the absence of safe environments contributing to increased isolation and harmful coping behaviours. Older women and women with disabilities also experienced deepened isolation and loss of tailored support, while pregnant and young women missed critical health and parenting guidance. The closure of safe spaces further strained case management workers, who faced growing caseloads without the supportive infrastructure needed to respond effectively.

According to GBV experts in areas of Syria formerly under the control of the Assad government, despite the overall number of WGSS remaining stable in 2024, the demand for services increased significantly, outpacing current capacity:

"We didn't face any decrease but the need is increasing so we always feel that we couldn't achieve the target".

This growing gap has led to overstretched services, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas where access remains limited. While the expansion of mobile teams and WGSS has improved outreach in some areas, service availability remains highly uneven, especially in rural or insecure locations. Community resistance, especially towards adolescent girls participating in GBV programming, further limits reach and underscores the importance of community awareness and prevention efforts. Participants highlighted that while some new spaces have opened, many are only partially functional or inactive, especially

towards the end of 2024 and into early 2025.

Donor-driven priorities often influence the location of WGSS, sometimes at the expense of aligning with actual community needs, which has left some high-need areas underserved (GBV Experts). Limited funding has weakened the ability to scale up or maintain inclusive, comprehensive support – such as case management or cash assistance – leaving many survivors without safe, sustained pathways to care. Challenges related to coordination, targeting and operational consistency were frequently cited, contributing to inefficiencies and duplication in some areas while others remain neglected. The mismatch between available services and rising needs has reduced the overall effectiveness and equity of GBV service delivery.

Moreover, GBV organizations have been badly affected by funding cuts in 2025. A total of 453 GBV service points are reported to be functioning across Syria as of May 2025, while 45 closed between January and May.⁴⁹ Around 54 per cent of RNA respondents stated that health services for women and girls are not available.⁵⁰

Survivors have minimal access to tailored TFGBV services, with legal support nearly non-existent due to absent legal frameworks and law enforcement. Psychosocial support and digital safety trainings are scarce, and health services rarely address TFGBV-specific trauma, leaving survivors reliant on inadequate informal networks and perpetuating a cycle of vulnerability.⁵¹ Shelters for GBV survivors were mentioned by a small number of FGD participants, most often framed as services that should exist or are desired, rather than as resources that women and girls commonly access. In the few mentions of actual shelter services, there is often uncertainty about whether they are operational or truly safe.

Spotlight on WLOs

In North-West Syria, WLOs and women's rights organizations (WROs) have always been at the forefront of the humanitarian response, delivering lifesaving assistance to communities and disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Despite numerous challenges – including safety and security risks, limited access to sustainable funding opportunities and limited representation in decision-making bodies – WLOs and WROs have continued to uphold the principle of "leaving no one behind" through their day-to-day work. Their deep-rooted community presence and extensive on-the-ground experience have made them invaluable contributors to humanitarian efforts.⁵²

49 GBV AoR, GBV Service Delivery Points in Syria Dashboard [Website, 2025].

50 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Rapid Needs Assessment [Website, 2025].

51 UNFPA and ACAPS, Technology-facilitated Gender-Based Violence in North-West Syria.

52 UNFPA, Enhancing Women's Voices, Leadership, and Participation: Roadmap for Strengthening the Engagement of Women-led Organisations and Women's Right Organisations in Northwest Syria (2024).

Awareness of GBV Services

A majority of participants indicated that women and girls are aware of the GBV services available to them. Awareness appears to come from a mix of formal and informal sources, with many respondents stating that women are informed through local organizations or word of mouth:

"Women and girls are aware of services offered by NGOs and the government, but some may not know all the details" (Adolescent boy from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Despite general awareness, some women and girls do not know about available services, while others have misconceptions about how to access support. Some FGDs identified specific ways in which women and girls receive information about GBV services. Community meetings, NGOs and word of mouth were mentioned as effective channels:

"Information is mainly spread through community meetings and awareness sessions by NGOs" (Man from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

A few discussions pointed out that certain groups of women and girls are not reached by information about GBV services. These might include marginalized populations, those in remote areas or those who do not attend community meetings:

"Some women are not reached because they do not attend community gatherings or are restricted by family" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Some women and girls are unaware of available GBV services:

"There are women who do not go out of the house and do not know what services are" (Woman from Aziz camp, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

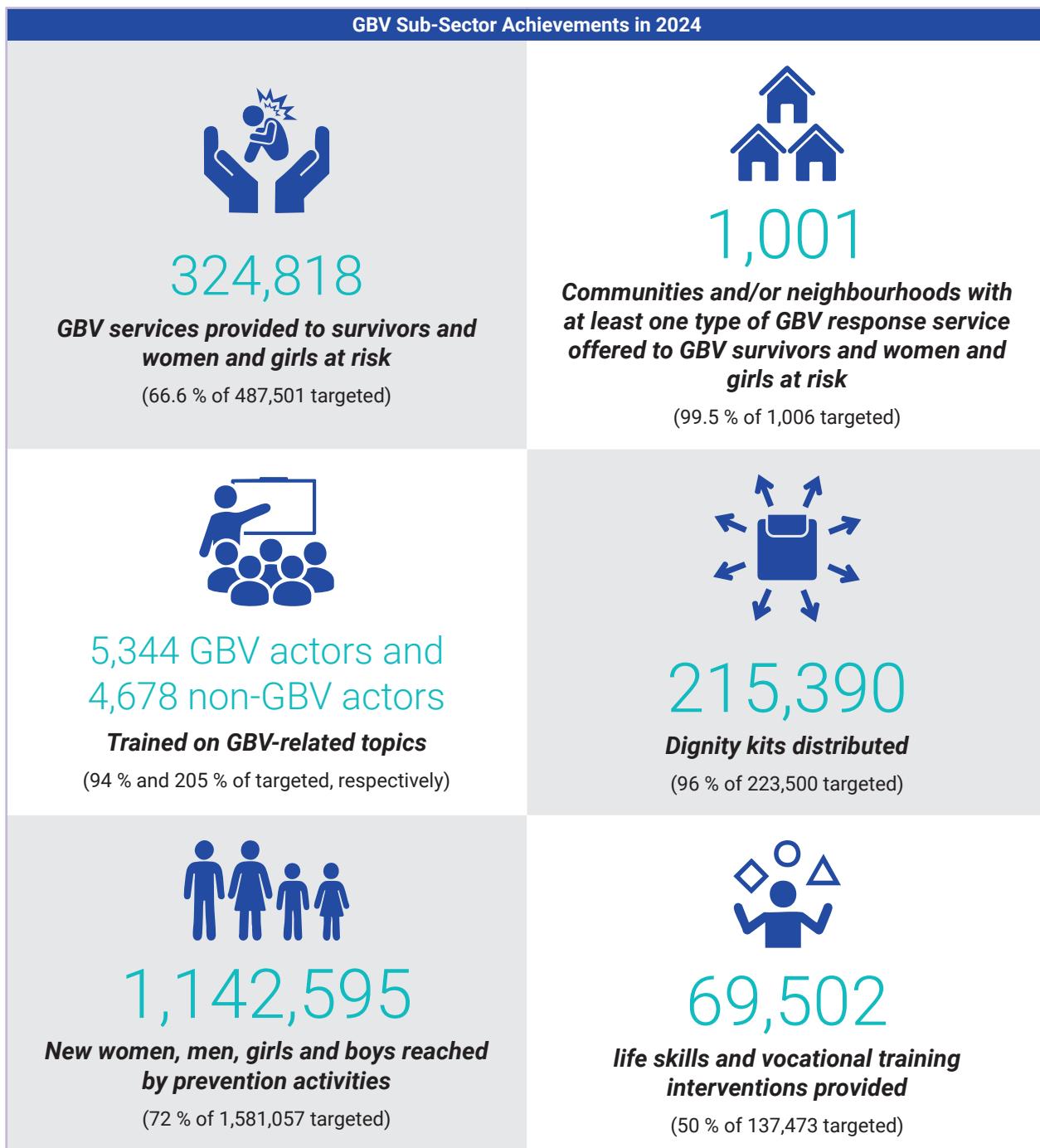
Participants emphasized the need for better outreach and awareness campaigns, particularly through community centres, organizations and hotlines.

Some 17% of RNA respondents stated that women over 59 years have the most difficulty in getting information and giving feedback about humanitarian assistance. This was followed by people who cannot read (16 per cent), people with disabilities (15 per cent), girls below 18 (13 per cent), boys below 18 (10 per cent) and child-headed or women-headed households (10 per cent).⁵³

53 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Rapid Needs Assessment [Website, 2025].

GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) Achievements in 2024–2025⁵⁴

Indicator	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Jan–March)
People targeted	1,694,100	1,800,000	1,581,057	1,800,000
People reached	1,133,541	1,068,471	1,142,595	270,000



⁵⁴ Whole of Syria GBV AoR Dashboard. Available at <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiOTRkZDZlZTQtNjNIMi00YWNkLWlyY2YtY2UwZjBkNDBiZTgzliwidCl6ljZjOTBmNzA3LTUxYzgtNGY1ZC04MGRiLTBINTA5ZWYxZGE2MCIsImMi0j9.ho>

Barriers to Accessing GBV Services

Survivors' access to GBV services is limited by logistical and structural barriers – including distance to service points, the cost of transport and a lack of available resources – as well as social and cultural norms. The WoS RNA described the major barriers stopping GBV survivors reporting to services as: fear of being identified as a survivor (30 per cent), lack of confidential services (20 per cent), distance from health facility (16 per cent), lack of trained staff (15 per cent) and lack of female staff (12 per cent).⁵⁵

Access Constraints

Women and girls frequently report that services are inaccessible or difficult to reach due to logistical and structural barriers:

"Due to the distance of service centres, survivors are unable to report incidents or seek help" (Adolescent boy from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Geographical distance and lack of transportation further restrict access to services, particularly in remote areas like Afrin, Rajo, Maabatli and Suran.⁵⁶ GBV experts focusing on Aleppo and Idlib noted that new demographic factors – like women's return to their original areas – made it more difficult to provide services to them.

Fear and Security Concerns

Lack of safety in reporting mechanisms, fear of retribution and overall insecurity prevent survivors from seeking support:

"Women and girls often do not feel comfortable or able to seek support due to fear of stigma or revenge" (Man from Al-Ommah camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate); "Security issues make it unsafe for survivors to travel alone or even report incidents" (Man from Al-Ommah camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate); "They do not feel comfortable and safe to go to service centres" (Adolescent boy from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Social and Cultural Barriers

Family and societal norms often discourage women and girls from reporting violence or seeking help:

"Husbands and family members discourage women from reporting, saying 'it will bring shame to the household'" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Social stigma and shame associated with GBV prevent many survivors from coming forward:

"Women may know about the services but find it difficult to access them due to fear of social repercussions" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

There is a strong cultural belief that survivors, especially women, will be judged or blamed for their experiences:

"She does not seek services because she is afraid of being blamed by her family and relatives" (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate).

Survivors are often discouraged or outright prevented from reporting due to family honour, pressure from husbands or parents, or community expectations:

"There are women who know about the services but do not seek them due to societal and family pressures" (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate).

This community resistance also extends to the work of the WGSS as a whole. A recent UNFPA study highlighted examples where "local authorities shared brochures inviting communities not to send women to the WGSSs. When you talk about gender, their thoughts immediately go to LGBTQI+. This is misleading for communities. In the WGSSs, we target all women and girls. Part of their [the local authorities'] concern is that we target only women, and we do not target all [members of] the community."⁵⁷

55 OCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Rapid Needs Assessment [Website, 2025].

56 UNFPA, GBV AoR WoS, Whole of Syria Gender-Based Violence Strategy 2024) 2025–2024).

57 UNFPA, Enhancing Women's Voices.

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Women and girls face significant challenges in accessing basic humanitarian aid, including food aid, health services, water and sanitation, and education. Services are becoming increasingly limited in many areas, and many humanitarian services fail to address the specific needs of women and girls, particularly in terms of reproductive health, security and mobility:

"There are no specialized services for women nor special places during distribution to avoid harassment and friction that occurs between men and women, which makes us feel humiliated" (Woman from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Women and girls face limited access to services due to distance, insecurity and cultural barriers that restrict mobility, as well as a lack of information about service access. Patriarchal control over women's direct access to aid in crowded or mixed-gender settings due to fears of harassment or social judgement is a central barrier. Decision-making around whether women can access services is often left to male relatives, undermining women's autonomy and deterring them from going out alone to collect aid:

"Not all women are able to reach the service points, as their husbands or fathers refuse to let them go out. If they do go out, they are subjected to violence. Most women are unable to go out due to pressures they face from their families or husbands, as they are prevented from leaving the tent except in cases of very chronic illness to receive treatment. Their going out is considered a stigma for the families" (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

In some cases, vulnerability is stratified by marital and social status. Unmarried women and girls face the most extreme restrictions, often being completely barred from leaving the home, regardless of age. Widows and divorced women are particularly vulnerable:

"According to my social status as a divorced woman, I am not allowed to leave the house, even if I go out to receive cash assistance or food baskets, in such a case the father or brother goes, and it happened to me, as my brother went and received my entitlement of cash assistance, but give me nothing" (Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Moreover, women and girls face significant risks when trying to access aid, including exposure to violence, harassment and exploitation where aid workers or

community leaders use their positions to demand sexual favours in exchange for assistance:

"Women have some concerns about service centres that offer parcels or distributions for sex in exchange for service" (Woman from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate).

Many report risks on the way to and from humanitarian services, such as theft and fear of kidnapping.

In Aleppo and Idlib, GBV experts agreed that both access to the humanitarian assistance and the movement of women and girls inside the various sectors have witnessed a relative improvement in 2024 due to the increased society awareness and training of the humanitarian service providers, especially in relation to protecting women and girls from GBV. One FGD mentioned improvements in security that enabled them better access to distributions:

"We used to be very afraid to go to distribution centres due to bombing, but we are relieved now, thank God" (Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

However, there are still challenges and violations that take place in some sectors and sites and these vary based on the conditions and practices in each of them. GBV experts report little change in the safety of women and girls in accessing humanitarian services, agreeing that essential services such as shelter, healthcare, distributions and training venues are not safe environments.

GBV experts also reported that other sectors are not consistently integrating GBV risk mitigation, increasing the vulnerability of women and girls at service points. This is supported by information from FGDs, which showed a mixed situation. Some mentioned the availability of complaints mechanisms –

"Humanitarian services are distributed free of charge, and if someone asks for something in return, we report it to the responsible party" (Women from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

while others mentioned gaps and even negative consequences of trying to report a complaint:

"As for filing a complaint, most of them emphasized that complaining does not lead to any result and can sometimes lead to denial of the beneficiary's right to services" (Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate).

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Lack of privacy and gender-sensitive sanitation facilities is a recurring theme. According to recent assessments, about 90 per cent of sites do not have solid waste management and 75 per cent have not been reached with any water supply and sanitation services.⁵⁸ FGDs and experts report that shared toilets and water access points are not safe for women and girls, increasing risks of harassment and violence:

"Women and girls cannot access toilets safely because there is no separation between men and women; there are risks and no privacy" (Man from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

These challenges and risks are particularly acute for individuals living with disabilities who face additional access constraints:

"[People with disabilities] suffer from access to toilets because there are no aiding means for them" (Man from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Access to hygiene materials remains limited, which has an important impact on women's and adolescent girls' health as well as limiting their economic and education participation:

"There is no distribution for women's personal hygiene or menstrual items, and this has affected our lives. We feel shy, we have no money and use cloth during menstruation, causing gynaecological infections and urinary tract infections" (Woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate).⁵⁹

The particular hygiene needs of pregnant and lactating women, older populations experiencing incontinence and people living with disabilities are not being met.⁶⁰

Shelter

Overcrowding and the lack of gender-segregated living spaces create unsafe conditions for women and girls. Participants – including community members and GBV experts – consistently raised shelter and displacement settings as high-risk spaces for women and girls:

"Lack of privacy and security in shelter increases exposure to GBV risks" (Adolescent boy from Al-Khateeb camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

GBV experts also highlighted that these risks were significantly increased during post-earthquake response, particularly where emergency shelter operations involved untrained personnel:

"[Regarding] shelter for example the risks were very high; during the earthquake many people were helping from the community who have no trainings related to GBV and PSEA".

Distributions

Distributions (of food, non-food items (NFI) and cash) are the sites of multiple types of GBV, including harassment by male community members while waiting in line and sexual exploitation by distribution staff:

"Overcrowded or poorly managed distribution exposes women and girls to neglect or exploitation" (Adolescent boy from Al-Khateeb camp, Harim Idlib Governorate).

GBV experts report that many distribution workers are not sufficiently trained on protection procedures or codes of conduct, and use their power to exploit women.

Food insecurity is a critical issue:

"Food services, nutrition, health and medical services do not exist, nor any service for women, girls and PWDs" (Man from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

GBV experts in Aleppo and Idlib highlighted the difficult access for many women – and especially women heads of households – to distribution points due to insecurity and social norms that limit movement without a male guardian. Food insecurity also leads to risks of sexual exploitation for women seeking to meet their families' food needs:

"We are subjected to blackmail or harassment to obtain services. There are some employees who ask for something in exchange for the food baskets to provide the service and this is limited to relief assistance" (Woman from Tartous, Tartous Governorate).

Education

Girls experience harassment and violence from teachers and students, and are often denied the opportunity to attend school altogether:

58 CARE, Northeast Syria.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

"There are cases of girls who drop out in advanced stages (secondary school) because the camp has no school and school is far from it" (Adolescent boy from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate). Boys also face violence, including corporal punishment.

GBV experts report that many public schools have insufficient systems to identify and respond to violence in schools, leading to increased harassment and bullying. They also report that many girls are forced to leave school due to family pressure, leading to increased risks of early marriage.

Healthcare

Health facilities are insufficient to meet the needs of women and girls, especially in camp settings:

"Women and girls do not receive proper treatment due to the lack of a health centre or medical point within the camp. They go outside the camp, so they are exposed to violence sometimes" (Man from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Those that are available are reported to often be unsafe for women and girls, including due to lack of privacy and insufficiently trained staff (GBV Experts). In some camps, such as Al-Hol, people need to get approval to exit the camp – even for health issues – creating great limitations to the confidentiality of the person.

Women and girls report that healthcare services lack the necessary medications and services, including those specific to women and girls:

"Medical services lack the necessary medications and are limited to painkillers, antibiotics and some first aid items" (Adolescent girl from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate).

GBV experts report that women suffer ill treatment by medical staff, pushing women to resort to private clinics despite higher costs. They also report a lack of female staff and insufficient training for many health workers on GBV services and referrals.

"When a girl is sick and needs a hospital, the first thing she suffers is that parents have to go with her because the place is far away and her mother can't take her alone fearing to encounter any problem on their way there. Hospitals are crowded and a (male) doctor often comes to treat her. This embarrasses girls, and sometimes we can't tell them our state because we feel shy in front of the doctor and our parents who went with us. If there were female doctors, it would be much easier" (Adolescent girl from Shaza Alhurriah camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).



4

Recommendations and Hopes

Recommendations and Hopes

Hopes and Dreams of Women and Girls



End Violence against Women and Girls

Participants shared powerful hopes and dreams centred on ending violence and building lives rooted in safety, dignity and equality.

"Physical violence stops ... violence stops completely ... stop discrimination and exploitation of people's needs" (Adolescent boy from Kafrah Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Women and girls expressed a strong desire to live free from fear – of physical harm, sexual abuse, domestic violence and discrimination. They envisioned a future where no girl is forced into early marriage, where mothers can raise their children without passing down the trauma they endured and where legal protections uphold the rights of all, regardless of gender:

"I want to raise my children without violence, what we mothers have gone through is enough" (Woman from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Many called for laws that prevent harassment and abuse, and for the elimination of systemic inequalities that place girls and women at greater risk. There was also a strong focus on financial independence and personal empowerment, with women expressing a desire to be

strong, self-sufficient and able to fully exercise their rights. Participants emphasized that true change requires more than services – it demands a transformation in community norms and legal systems to ensure equality and accountability. Their dreams were not only practical but deeply emotional, rooted in the longing for peace, fairness and a life where women and girls are no longer silenced, harmed or held back simply for who they are:

"Our dreams are to be financially independent women in the future, strong and not abused, exercise all of our rights completely and live safely" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Changing Harmful Norms

Women and girls shared a clear and collective vision for transforming the harmful norms that perpetuate gender inequality and violence in their communities:

"We want to change how we behave in this patriarchal community, which is characterized by male violence" (Woman from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Many expressed a strong desire to challenge deeply rooted traditions – such as early marriage, male

dominance and restrictive gender roles – by increasing awareness, promoting education and building self-confidence among girls:

"We were married at a young age and were deprived of our education and became responsible for a house, children and husband and grew up early, we should reject our daughters and grandchildren to live like us" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

They envisioned a future where women are respected, heard and valued as equal participants in family and community life, not seen

"as a burden on husbands" (Woman with disability from Harasta, Rural Damascus Governorate); "We want to change customs, traditions, early marriage for girls and old wrong beliefs by increasing awareness and education. We want to change negative ideas about women and girls by increasing their self-confidence through awareness and psychological support sessions. We want to reduce restrictions on girls and give them freedom and capacity to make decisions by educating parents" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate); "If there was equality between them, women would not be oppressed nor lose their rights, and men would not undermine her because they are equal to them in everything, and as long as he feels superior to her, he would still usurp her right and beat her" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

Women also highlighted the importance of creating supportive spaces – both within families and communities – that promote girls' autonomy and decision-making:

"Valuing her, engaging in family and community affairs, hearing her voice, and changing the negative perception of her decisions" (Woman from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Many described a deep commitment to building a more just, participatory and peaceful society, starting with how they raise and guide the next generation.

Through these reflections, participants showed that real change begins at home, and that empowering women and educating children are essential steps towards dismantling patriarchal systems:

"My first and last role is to raise my children well, educate them, let them be self-reliant and not force them to do anything they don't want. Raising my male children a good upbringing

based on respecting women and not oppressing them" (Woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate).

Central to this vision was the role of parenting and early socialization. Participants emphasized the power of raising children, particularly sons, with values of equality, respect and non-violence:

"As a mother, when I raise my children in a respectful and non-discriminatory manner, I contribute to changing the community" (Woman from At-Tall, Rural Damascus Governorate).

They spoke of their responsibility as mothers to model inclusive behaviour, challenge stereotypes within the home and foster a culture of mutual respect,

"by raising children on the principle of equality between males and females and allowing girls and women to make decisions in the family and community" (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

Changing the mindset of parents and caregivers was seen as fundamental to shifting broader social norms:

"raising children to be non-discriminatory and respectful, giving confidence to girls and women" (Woman from At-Tall, Rural Damascus Governorate).

Desire for Women's Empowerment, Confidence and Equality

Participants expressed a strong desire for women's empowerment, equality and a shift in societal norms that currently limit their roles and voices. Many women and girls described dreams of living in a society where they are respected, heard and valued equally alongside men – not only in the home but in broader community and institutional decision-making. They called for an end to rigid gender roles and the patriarchal authority that reinforces male dominance, noting that true justice requires shared power, mutual respect and equal opportunity:

"To get rid of all forms of violence and to respect and value women ... to get rid of the authority of men and that it should be shared between them, to give the right place to the right person, and justice and equality should prevail between men and women" (Woman from Aziz camp, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Education, freedom of movement and safe public participation were seen as essential elements of empowerment:

"Girls hope to have greater freedom of movement inside and outside the camp, enabling them to attend sessions and activities at humanitarian centres and organizations. Girls and women aspire to greater dependence in making decisions related to their daily lives, such as education, work and mobility" (Adolescent girl from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate).

Some participants expressed frustration at being excluded from dialogue and decisions simply because they are not formally employed, emphasizing that housewives and non-working women also deserve to shape the future of their communities:

"We want the concerned authorities and the government to let us share our opinion on everything related to women, even if we are housewives because they ask working women their opinion, but don't ask us" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

Others stressed the need to challenge the cultural and societal norms that portray women as inferior or incapable.

"Changing the community's perception to know that women have the capacity of making correct decisions and fulfilling their duties like men" (Older woman from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

Many women aspired to change societal perceptions of women's roles but expressed doubt in their ability to do so, given prevailing norms.

Women envisioned a world where girls grow up with the tools to lead, advocate and dream without barriers – where their opinions are taken seriously and their potential fully realised.

"My dream is to be part of a global movement that encourages communities to collaborate to eliminate gender gaps" (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate).

Ultimately, these hopes reflect a deep commitment to transforming not just policies, but mindsets, towards a more inclusive and equitable society in order for all

"to live a better life. To see girls get the education they need to realise their dreams with no barriers.

"For women to be able to move freely and safely, and to feel respected and valued by the community" (Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate).

Aspiration for Education and Professional Achievement

Many women and girls expressed hopes centred on education, career growth and personal development – not only to improve their own lives but to support and inspire others in their communities:

"My dream is for women to become role models in the community" (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

Women and girls shared their dreams for future studies and careers:

"My dream is to write a novel and everyone read it" (Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate); "I want to study languages" (Woman with a disability or her caregiver from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

They envisioned a future where women could hold leadership roles, make decisions and serve as role models in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as law, healthcare and public administration:

"I want to grow up with a strong personality and become a doctor to help women in our community and demand my rights and those of all women and girls without fear" (Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate); "I want to become a lawyer to defend women's rights" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate); "I want to complete my education and become a psychologist" (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate).

For many, completing their education was a critical first step towards achieving these goals, with dreams of becoming lawyers, doctors, psychologists, writers or professionals in other fields:

"I will continue my studies and succeed in order to build my country and be a role model for the girls after us, teach my children and not marry off my daughters at a young age, and encourage all the people around me to educate girls and stop early marriage that deprive them of their right to childhood" (Adolescent girl from Atma camp,

Harim, Idleb Governorate).

These aspirations were deeply connected to a desire to advocate for women's rights, challenge harmful norms and promote equality:

"I hope to become a successful hairdresser and spread awareness about respecting each other and each other's opinion and not tolerate error" (Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate).

Participants also called for increased access to diverse job opportunities, better employment policies that support women's dual roles at work and at home, and the freedom to move safely and independently:

"If I could change one thing, I would work to promote freedom of movement for women and girls in the community. This freedom can greatly impact their daily lives and open opportunities in education, employment, healthcare and social life" (Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate).

Through education, empowerment and self-expression, women and girls hoped to create a more just and inclusive society for future generations.

"Changing the inferior reality of women by giving them influential positions, allowing women to work in important positions, making them in leadership roles and supporting each other" (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

Dreams of Helping Others and Changing Society

Many girls and women spoke about using their future roles to help others, especially other women and girls:

"I hope to change the stereotypes and roles of women. I hope to study media and present programmes that raise awareness about women and girls. Currently I am trying to spread awareness among my friends and at school. My dream is for women to have a role in decision-making in everything related to community" (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

They envisioned roles as educators, advocates, counsellors and leaders who raise awareness, challenge harmful norms and promote equality.

Women from all stages of life – from adolescence to old

age – shared aspirations of using their knowledge, skills and capacity to help other women and girls, and to build a better future.

"I can be a platform for those who cannot express themselves, whether by sharing their stories or helping them find solutions to their issues. I can help by thinking critically and working with civil society organizations, I can help design development programmes or projects that solve real issues such as domestic violence, education and early marriage. I can be a voice for marginalized and oppressed groups' rights, whether through media or by advocating changes in laws and policies" (Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate).

Girls spoke of their future careers and mentioned leveraging their knowledge of technology and social media, while older women spoke of transferring their knowledge to younger generations:

"The days are coming when women will be able to protect themselves and express their opinions and feelings without fearing anyone. I often try to talk to my parents to change their thinking about things related to women" (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate).

Some girls saw themselves creating media content to change perceptions of women's roles, while others hoped to lead initiatives, launch awareness campaigns or serve as a voice for those who are marginalized. Older women expressed a desire to pass on their skills, such as weaving or teaching, and to influence younger generations to reject violence and uphold women's rights.

"I have the ability to open a workshop and train the women in everything I know about weaving and this is my dream and dream of every woman" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate); "Even if we are old, we can influence our sons and daughters so that these young and adult men stop beating and oppressing women. Every woman, starting from me, must do this so that every family has no oppressed girl" (Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate).

Several participants emphasized their current efforts – whether comforting peers, intervening in violent situations or engaging in advocacy – as steps towards long-term change:

"I see my role as supporting women and girls' issues by raising awareness and participating in

advocacy campaigns. Participating in community activities and initiatives that aim to improve women and girls' lives" (Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate); "I aspire to become a strong and effective woman in the community, and to stand up against violence and bring about positive change" (Woman from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate).

Roles That Men See for Themselves in Helping Others and Preventing Violence

Men also shared visions of positive involvement, from teaching non-violence in schools to supporting their families with respect and understanding:

"As a teacher, I raise awareness among students about the dangers of violence and ways to avoid it to end it in the community" (Man from Kafray Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Together, these reflections highlight a shared commitment to building a future rooted in dignity, equality and mutual support, where everyone – regardless of age or gender – has a role in creating a safer, more just society.

"Trying to be supportive partners and fathers, putting into consideration that women and girls are able to choose, decide and play a main role in life" (Man from Deir Ez-Zor, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate).

Boys also shared their hopes of helping to improve the situation for women and girls:

"I hope to be a person who helps stop violence against women and girls and change people's thoughts. I can communicate the ideas I hear in the sessions to the rest of my friends" (Adolescent boy from Kafray Camp 1, A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate).

Boys highlighted the need *"to start with ourselves, at home and in the family, to eliminate the phenomena of violence that would destroy the family and community. This is the ultimate wish and dream to build a better community based on tolerance and living humanely"* (Adolescent boy from Al-Khateeb camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate).

Recommendations for Humanitarian Actors

The recommendations that follow are drawn from the suggestions and ideas of women and girls in Syria. They reflect the desired changes called for by women and girls and their expressed hopes and aspirations. It should be noted that it is still important for localized programmatic consultations to take place with women and girls, in order to adapt recommendations to each area and population group.

Summary	
	Increase the availability and accessibility of WGSS and other female-only spaces, especially in underserved areas
	Expand effective GBV awareness-raising and social and behavioural change approaches to shift harmful gender norms that drive GBV and limit opportunities for women and girls
	Increase availability of and safe access to formal and informal education for adolescent girls
	Strengthen access to justice and legal protection for women and girls
	Increase the quality, availability and accessibility of specialized GBV services including GBV case management, psychosocial support, healthcare and legal assistance
	Improve safe and equitable access to humanitarian assistance, services and protective living conditions
	Expand vocational education and support for income-generating activities for women and older adolescent girls

1. Increase the availability and accessibility of WGSS and other female-only spaces, especially in underserved areas

Recommendations	Voices of women and girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number and geographic coverage of WGSS, especially in camps and underserved areas. • Use WGSS as hubs for empowerment, awareness-raising, education and recovery support to rebuild confidence and autonomy. • Ensure WGSS are inclusive of adolescent girls, older women and displaced populations, with tailored services and training opportunities. • Provide transportation support, accompaniment and childcare for women and girls, to enhance access to WGSS. 	<p><i>Increasing number of women-friendly centres, because they are their outlet. (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Establish comprehensive and safe support centres, establish specialized centres that provide psychological, legal and economic support to women, while ensuring their privacy and safety. Expand these centres to include remote areas such as Jisr-Ash-Shugur and others where women lack access to services. (Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>We need someone who listens to us and understands what we are going through. (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>The most important thing for me is to have a care centre for adolescent girls that suits our age and provides training in areas such as computers and language learning. (Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Allocating nurseries for children in women's safe spaces. (Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>The most important thing for me is to have a care centre for the elderly, because we are sometimes neglected or even exposed to violence by those around us. I need a place where I feel respected and safe. If I could change something, I would change the way people treat the elderly, they think we have no value anymore. Sometimes I feel like I'm a burden on my family. I wish there were centres that offer psychological support sessions because loneliness is killing us slowly. (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh governorate)</i></p>

2. Increase the quality, availability and accessibility of specialized GBV services including GBV case management, psychosocial support, healthcare and legal assistance

Recommendations	Voices of women and girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide 24-hour hotlines, legal aid and clear, accessible service maps to help survivors seek help safely and confidentially. 	<p><i>Raising awareness of the services map and making it accessible to beneficiaries in a user-friendly manner.</i> <i>(Woman from Jebel Saman, Aleppo Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize female medical personnel in healthcare facilities and separate waiting areas to ensure comfort, privacy and dignity. 	<p><i>Provide doctors specialized in psychiatric and mental health.</i> <i>(Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand access to mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS), including counselling, support groups and psychosocial care. 	<p><i>A health centre with a female doctor and a midwife which respects women's privacy and confidentiality.</i> <i>(Woman from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure tailored healthcare for adolescent girls and other at-risk groups. 	<p><i>Allocate special waiting rooms for women and others for men in medical points, and have more female staff available to serve women and girls comfortably and to avoid embarrassment when they go to receive medical services and mix with men.</i> <i>(Woman from Harim, Idleb Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider tailored services for formerly detained women and girls, including referrals to human rights monitoring mechanisms, as relevant. 	<p><i>Ensure a 24-hour hotline.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforce GBV-Sexual and Reproductive Health integration in health centres with trained, female, sensitive staff. 	<p><i>Psychosocial support programmes: Helping women boost their self-confidence and acquire tools to deal with challenges.</i> <i>(Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase availability of GBV case management services. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify targeted approaches to address new and growing GBV trends, including TFGBV. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand awareness of services through a wide range of communication channels, particularly targeting at-risk groups including those with limited mobility. 	

3. Expand effective GBV awareness-raising and social and behavioural change approaches to shift harmful gender norms that drive GBV and limit opportunities for women and girls	
Recommendations	Voices of women and girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand effective GBV awareness-raising materials developed and designed for the Syria context. • Promote positive role models and share success stories to inspire change. • Use both physical and digital platforms to reduce stigma around seeking help and foster open dialogue. • Engage traditional leaders and community members in identifying risks and promoting protection and gender equality. • Target parents and key community members (such as teachers) as influencers to prevent early marriage and promote girls' education and safety. • Target men and boys for awareness-raising sessions and activities, including on positive masculinity, GBV, equitable decision-making, and the rights of women and girls; build on existing efforts that have increased men's support for women's participation and an improved sense of safety for girls. • Conduct structured parenting sessions with parents/caregivers in parallel to skills-building for adolescent girls. • Support women- and girl-led initiatives to raise awareness on GBV in their communities; build on existing efforts by helping women and communities recognize and name experiences as violence, which in turn builds the confidence of women to speak up and seek support. • Invest further in GBV prevention efforts tackling underlying gender norms and root causes of GBV. • Increase rights awareness and economic support programmes for widows and divorced women. 	<p><i>Launching awareness-raising campaigns targeting parents to explain the importance of girls' education and their role in building community. Providing inspiring examples of women who have achieved success through education. Providing media programmes that focus on the success stories of women and girls in education and work.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>We can activate an online hashtag and share success stories and most of the girls' access to education and their rights.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Launch awareness-raising campaigns targeting men and women to change the negative perception of women who seek help. Focus on eliminating the social stigma associated with seeking support.</i> <i>(Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>I recommend spreading awareness about women's rights, involving men in awareness-raising sessions and creating laws that protect women.</i> <i>(Woman from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Changing the community's perception that adolescent girls can perform all men's roles and are able to enter all fields (education, health and legal).</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Changing the stereotype view for women and girls and fulfilling equality in treatment by raising awareness among men and boys.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>There should be comprehensive awareness-raising sessions on the GBV dangers through sessions or social media sites such as videos because everyone is now using these means; this increases awareness among all community groups and on the other hand we learn the right way to confront violence when we are exposed to it.</i> <i>(Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Increasing awareness-raising sessions for widows and divorced women to be aware of their rights and capacities.</i> <i>(Woman from Al-Yunani camp, Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>

4. Improve safe and equitable access to humanitarian assistance, services and protective living conditions to reduce GBV risks

Recommendations	Voices of women and girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve camp infrastructure with gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, lighting and security patrols. 	<p><i>Establishing toilets and special ones for PWDs, separating women's toilets from those for men.</i> <i>(Woman from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide safer transportation to reduce harassment and support mobility for women and girls. 	<p><i>Providing allocations for girls, and ensuring the presence of trained female staff to provide support.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for recreation and youth engagement to ease household tensions. 	<p><i>Studying people's social situation and considering it before setting and defining standards for projects and services because the standards are often unfair and do not consider the need on the ground. Non-discrimination in providing services and eliminating favouritism.</i> <i>(Woman from Jebel Saman, Aleppo Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide mobile clinics and outreach services for PWDs, addressing access barriers and stigma. 	<p><i>Building sports clubs for youth and men can reduce violence by filling their time and discharging their energies positively. Holding competitions and material prizes can motivate them.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create safe, inclusive spaces where older women feel respected and valued rather than isolated or burdensome. 	<p><i>Security patrols to protect camp residents and camp management.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase direct consultation with women and girls, in order to identify access barriers and safety concerns and inform sectoral programme modalities. 	<p><i>I suggest that there should be mobile clinics that go to PWDs and know their needs, because not everyone likes to ask for help, they feel ashamed to go out to the community and suffer from the roads. If organizations also give them support to open their own business to make a living, it would be very good.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen GBV and SEA risk mitigation across sectors, investing in female distribution staff, monitoring, use of sex/age disaggregated data, concrete budgeting and capacity-building, including of non-traditional actors engaged in the provision of assistance and services. 	<p><i>We prefer to deal with female employees at time of distribution so it is more comfortable for us and for our men.</i> <i>(Woman from Shaza Alhurriah camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>

5. Increase availability of and safe access to formal and informal education for adolescent girls to reduce denial of girls' opportunities

Recommendations	Voices of women and girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement initiatives to address bullying, discrimination, TFGBV and other violence in schools. 	<p><i>Opening schools and institutes within the camp to have learning opportunities because most girls are not allowed to leave the camp to complete their education due to transportation, poverty and high education costs.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Tal Al-Saman camp, Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure training for teachers on inclusion, non-discrimination and protection. 	<p><i>One of the girls' wishes is to have a high school just for them, which would be a qualitative shift in their lives. Current schools only cover grade nine and are not recognized, which is a major obstacle. Girls must go to distant areas to receive secondary-stage education, which requires costs that families cannot afford. Girls hope to improve the quality of education and expand the curriculum to include important subjects that help them develop their skills.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate practical, advanced and empowering subjects like computer skills, languages, women's rights, leadership, and sexual health into formal and informal curricula. 	<p><i>We want to change dropping girls out of school and preventing them from completing their education by raising the awareness of men and women especially about the importance of education for women and adolescent girls.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct awareness-raising on the importance of education for parents/caregivers of girls. 	<p><i>Improving schools to become a safe environment free from bullying and violence. Training teachers on techniques to treat students fairly and prevent discrimination.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct regular safety audits in schools to identify and design strategies for addressing GBV risks. 	<p><i>Providing awareness-raising sessions about violence and its harms in schools is essential.</i> <i>(Woman from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate transportation and accompaniment to support adolescent girls' access to schools. 	<p><i>Encouraging girls to express themselves: Arranging activities and workshops to boost self-confidence. Training girls on leadership skills and expressing their opinion.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) and livelihood support to parents/ caregivers of at-risk adolescent girls, including the provision of school kits and supplies. 	<p><i>Integrate the concepts of women's rights and GBV into school curricula.</i> <i>(Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support out-of-school learning opportunities, including literacy, numeracy, remedial courses, computing and languages. 	<p><i>Spreading sexual health education among students in schools, especially adolescents.</i> <i>(Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Girls need to receive literacy services because they are illiterate.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqa Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>Establishing financial support programmes or scholarships for girls from poor or war-affected families. Providing educational equipment such as books and internet for free or at low costs.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>

6. Expand vocational education and support for income-generating activities for women and older adolescent girls

Recommendations	Voices of women and girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote sustainable, market-based and collective income-generating opportunities to reduce women's financial dependence on abusive partners and maintain supportive networks. 	<p><i>Providing job opportunities for women and girls, such as factories and workshops, reduces economic violence greatly and makes women financially independent, as there are many women who are forced to stay married despite being subjected to violence by the husband, because they are dependent on him financially and unable to provide the minimum needs. Also provision of small projects that support individuals and their creative capacities, and many ideas for such projects can be presented if this matter is applied on the ground.</i></p> <p><i>(Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand access to multipurpose cash assistance and financial support for GBV survivors. 	<p><i>Supporting women financially, providing empowerment activities, and helping them run small projects so they can secure their necessities without being subjected to harassment or exploitation.</i></p> <p><i>(Woman from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote women's freedom of movement to increase opportunities for employment and training. 	<p><i>Supporting small projects, granting a vocational kit upon completion of the vocational course.</i></p> <p><i>(Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure income-generating activities are inclusive of different groups of women and girls, including older women, those who are not working, or those living with disabilities or with restrictions on movement. 	<p><i>Economic empowerment for women helps them achieve financial independence.</i></p> <p><i>(Woman from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p> <p><i>I would work to promote freedom of movement for women and girls ... this freedom can greatly impact their daily lives and open opportunities in education, employment, healthcare and social life.</i></p> <p><i>(Woman from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accompany courses with awareness-raising sessions to promote participation in decision-making. 	<p><i>I wish there were centres dedicated to teaching women with disabilities any profession to help them be self-dependent and secure their income and not mix with other people while they are learning. I am very upset for my daughters because they have a disability in their legs so they could not learn anything before or after the war due to lack of such centres.</i></p> <p><i>(Older woman from Atma camp, Harim, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct awareness-raising sessions on sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace, as well as training of employers. 	

7. Strengthen access to justice for GBV survivors and legal protection for all women and girls

Recommendations	Voices of women and girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support inclusive gender dialogue and sustained policy reforms to advance women's rights and legal protections. 	<p><i>We propose opening gender dialogue and developing laws and legislation that protect women from violence.</i> <i>(Woman from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish safe, anonymous and confidential reporting mechanisms, such as hotlines and survivor-centred complaint systems. 	<p><i>Enacting strict laws to protect women from all forms of violence. Provide easy mechanisms to file complaints and obtain protection without exposing women to risk or stigma.</i> <i>(Woman from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for and raise awareness of gender-sensitive laws that guarantee equality and protect women from all forms of violence and discrimination. 	<p><i>Activating and supporting complaints and reporting mechanisms, especially complaint numbers for beneficiaries and increasing accountability.</i> <i>(Woman from Jebel Saman, Aleppo Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen enforcement of GBV laws and ensure perpetrators face real consequences, including for early and forced marriage. 	<p><i>There should be a confidential hotline where survivors can report abuse without being exposed.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide free legal aid to help survivors file complaints, seek protection and reclaim their rights. 	<p><i>I suggest providing free legal services to help women file complaints and recover their legal rights.</i> <i>(Woman from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)</i></p>
	<p><i>It's important to enrol abusers in psychological rehabilitation programmes to address their psychological gaps.</i> <i>(Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p>
	<p><i>The first thing I would do is equality between men and women and prevent polygamy through laws that protect and safeguard women like other countries in the world.</i> <i>(Woman from Harim, Idlib Governorate)</i></p>
	<p><i>Encourage the implementation of policies that prevent harassment and violence against women and ensure their protection.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Abu Khashab camp, Kisreh, Deir Ez-Zor Governorate)</i></p>
	<p><i>Taking strict action against abusers, supporting a policy of reporting abuse and taking fair procedures.</i> <i>(Adolescent girl from Al-Hasakeh, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)</i></p>

Looking Back: Voices from Syria Over the Years

This section presents an overview and comparison of findings and recommendations from previous Voices from Syria reports, giving a snapshot of how the lives of women and girls in Syria – and the GBV risks they face – have changed over the years.

This summary is based on a secondary review of Voices from Syria reports, which are in turn based on assessments with variations in scope and methodology. As such, this summary does not represent a quantitative comparison – where increases in different types of violence are noted below, these are increases reported by women and girls during that year's Voices from Syria report.

Amplifying the Voices of Women and Girls

Voices from Syria has shared the views, hopes and dreams of women and girls since the report was first published in 2015. This has served as an important platform for humanitarian actors and donors to better understand – and support – the needs and priorities of women and girls.

Since 2015, nearly 950 FGDs have been conducted with women, girls, men, boys and GBV experts. The views of more than 5,500 women and girls have been analysed and shared so that their priorities and visions for the future can drive better humanitarian action.

Voices from Syria reports over the years have highlighted the importance of giving the space needed for women and girls to speak up, which in itself is empowering – and unfortunately unusual as part of a humanitarian response – and has inspired other countries to do the same. The Voices methodology (see [Beyond Numbers: Improving the Gathering of GBV Data to Inform Humanitarian Response](#) for more information) has since been used in several countries from [Sudan](#) to [Ukraine](#) to amplify the voices of women and girls in crisis.

The impact of this process is felt across the humanitarian ecosystem, from GBV actors to humanitarian leadership to the donor community.

The fact that the GBV issues have been explored, analysis done and coordinated is an assurance that we (donors) are going in the right direction. Voices from Syria provides this sense of comfort, that we (donors) are in a safe area. The fact that this report exists helps us in making decisions.

(Major GBV Donor)

Voices from Syria has helped to:⁶¹

- Advance the approaches and standards of GBV analysis and provide a sustainable, replicable model;
- Increase visibility for women and girls, and especially adolescent girls, who are often invisible in humanitarian responses;
- Provide qualitative evidence to humanitarian leadership on the protection situation of women and girls in Syria;
- Drive stronger advocacy for improved GBV and gender mainstreaming, and for positioning GBV as a non-negotiable issue that must be addressed by all humanitarian actors;
- Inform a targeted response based on an improved understanding of GBV trends and risks;
- Increase GBV risk mitigation measures throughout the response;
- Increase buy-in by humanitarian leadership;
- Enable additional funding and support by the donor community.

⁶¹ UNFPA, [Beyond Numbers: Improving the Gathering of Gender-Based Violence Data to Inform Humanitarian Responses](#) (2021).

Risks in Humanitarian Assistance

Persistent risks of SEA associated with aid distribution sites and other forms of humanitarian assistance are documented across all years of the report. In Voices from Syria 2022, risks are associated more clearly with collective shelters, and in 2023 with the effects of the earthquake and displacement. The lack of systematic risk mitigation measures across humanitarian efforts and actors has also increased the likelihood of women, girls and marginalized groups facing GBV and SEA when seeking humanitarian assistance, particularly in collective shelters and camps. Though later reports (from 2022) note some increasing efforts to incorporate GBV risk mitigation measures into distribution and other assistance, this issue is a clear gap and significant risk across all Voices from Syria analyses.

Likewise, barriers to accessing humanitarian services are consistently reported as interrelated and mutually reinforcing: lack of proximity to service points and distribution centres; lack of accessible transportation options; risks of sexual violence and kidnapping; movement restrictions imposed by families and communities; and discouraging conditions, discrimination, mistreatment, exclusion and favouritism at registrations, distributions and service facilities.

Affected Groups

Adolescent girls, and widowed, divorced and separated women and girls, have been highlighted as particularly at risk since the earliest reports. The increased risks for displaced populations and people living with disabilities emerge more strongly from 2018, and the risks for older women and individuals of diverse SOGIESC have been increasingly recognized since 2022. The risks for formerly detained women and girls emerge particularly strongly in Voices from Syria 2024.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Women and girls describe non-disclosure (remaining silent), restricting their movement (or having their movement restricted by others) and changing their appearance or behaviour as the most common coping mechanisms across all years of the Voices from Syria. Seeking support from family (particularly mothers) and female peers is described by some women and girls across all years of the report, but this often comes with caveats that they may not get the support or understanding that they seek.

Survival sex and early or forced marriage are described among the most common coping mechanisms up to 2019, and again from 2023.

Up to 2020, self-defence – screaming, trying to escape and run away or fighting back against the attacker – is mentioned among the coping mechanisms employed by women and girls.

An increase in mental health issues and overall decline in women's and girl's psychological well-being is described from 2022, leading them to turn to self-isolation, silence and disengagement from daily life – and in some cases self-harm. This aligns with the marked decrease in the resilience of women and girls that is particularly noted from 2023.

However, a more positive trend can be seen in the growing reliance on GBV services described from 2019 onwards, aligning with increased reach, knowledge and understanding of the GBV services described below. Women and girls also describe raising awareness about GBV as a coping mechanism, particularly from 2022 onwards.

- Risk of GBV is ever-present for women and girls in Syria, general acceptance that this is the "way life is now".
- Domestic violence, child marriage, sexual harassment and sexual violence highlighted as main GBV concerns.
- Women and girls fear sexual violence and abuse in camp settings, at distribution and service points, when using WASH facilities, when crossing checkpoints, when walking without a male accompanying them.

- GBV – particularly verbal harassment, domestic violence, child marriages and the fear of sexual violence including sexual harassment – persist in the lives of women and girls.
- Restriction on freedom of movement inhibits access to services and humanitarian aid.
- Girls are reportedly marrying younger. With the protracted nature of the crisis, child marriage evolves from a cultural practice to a coping mechanism.
- Crisis-related changes in traditional gender roles in some areas – where women began to work outside the house to contribute to or solely provide the family's income. Linked to increases in domestic violence, as men perceive the change in family dynamics as a threat.

- Varied and persistent forms of physical and emotional violence, sexual exploitation and harassment, domestic and family violence, and child/early marriage. "Unrelated people living together" emerges strongly as a reason for child marriage, particularly in North-West Syria.
- Normalization of violence – women, girls and communities accept GBV as a part of life.
- Generational impact – a girl who was on the cusp of adolescence when the crisis began may now have endured several marriages, with children of her own to feed and protect.
- Online harassment, sextortion and revenge pornography emerges more strongly this year, as well as sexual violence, and denial of resources and opportunities.
- New GBV trends identified this year include forced pregnancy, sex-selective abortion and denial of women's opportunity to marry.
- Increase in reported suicides and suicide attempts by GBV survivors.

2016

2017

2018

2019

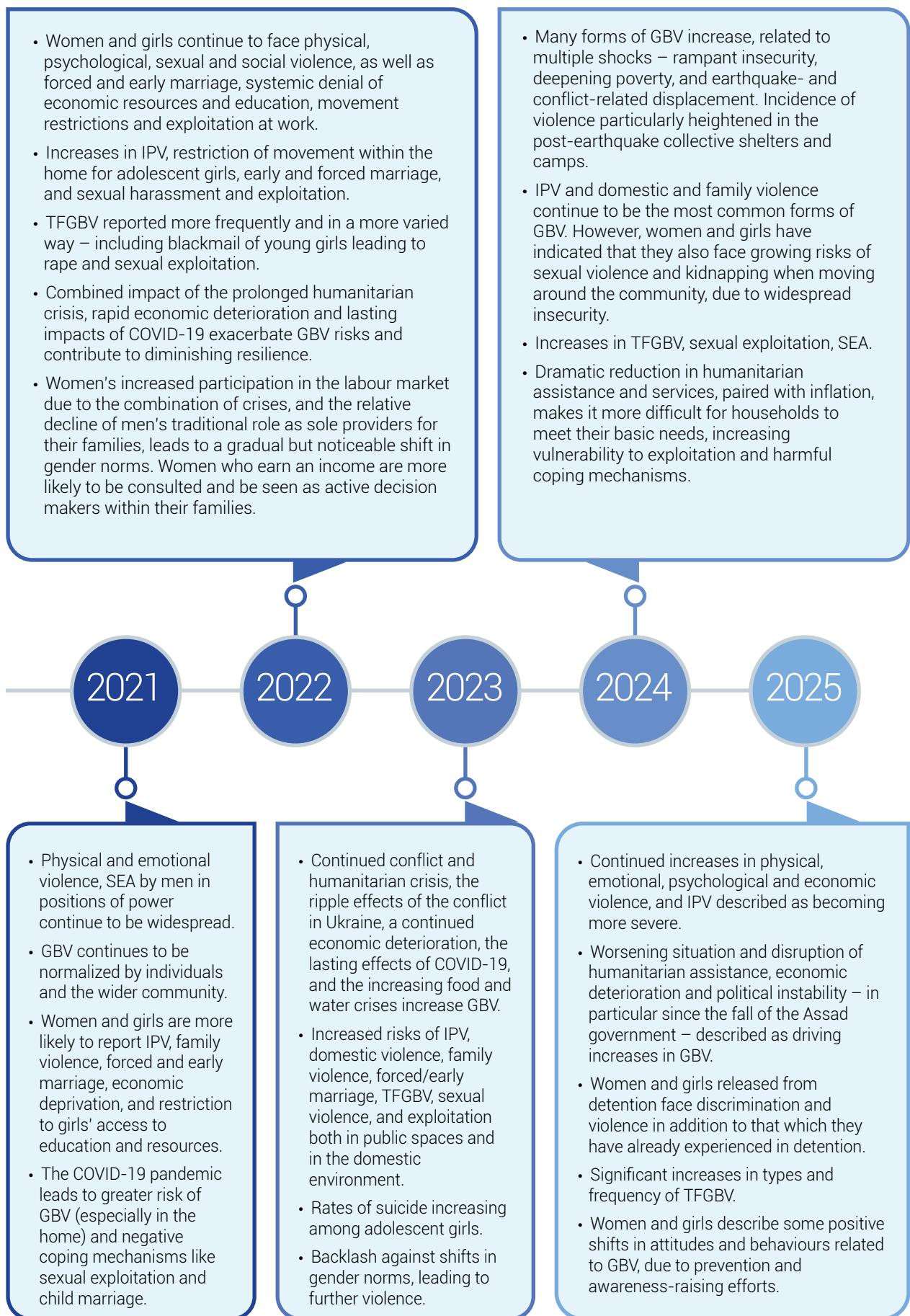
2020

Types of Violence

Women and girls have reported consistently prevalent, pervasive and varied experiences of GBV since the first publication of the Voices from Syria report. Year after year, women and girls report that many forms of GBV are increasing, and often that new forms are emerging or existing forms are becoming more widespread and varied.

- Domestic violence, child marriage, sexual harassment and sexual violence highlighted as main GBV concerns.
- Significantly wider coverage of the assessment confirms that these forms of violence are affecting women and girls across the country.
- New forms of sexual exploitation emerge more strongly, including serial temporary marriages – in which women and girls are forced to enter a series of successive marriages, either for financial gain to themselves or to their families or as rewards for fighters.

- Restriction of movement, forced and early marriage, and family and domestic violence among the most common violations.
- Armed recruitment emerges as a new conflict-related GBV risk and a form of child labour that is affecting girls.
- Another new trend is the use of technology to sexually harass adolescent girls, such as unwanted sexual text messages or blackmail using photos of women and girls.
- Crisis passes a critical threshold in terms of generational change, effectively redefining the worldview of Syrian women and – perhaps more substantively – adolescent girls. An entire generation of girls has grown up with the threat of harassment, sexual violence, forced marriage and early pregnancy.
- Awareness-raising and social advocacy shows some positive effect in influencing opinion against so-called honour crimes as a way of dealing with perceived family shame.



GBV Services

Observations

2017



- Women and girls satisfied with GBV services, though they face a wide range of barriers in accessing these – e.g. lack of nearby services and poor coordination with other services, or services reportedly not being allowed in a camp, fear that services will not be confidential, husbands preventing their wives from accessing women's services.

2018



- Number and geographical reach of GBV services increase.
- Where available, participants also express gratitude for specialized services for GBV survivors, but often emphasize that these were the only ones available in their geographical area and that there is dire need for more of them, and that they should be combined with awareness-raising sessions for all family members.
- Distance to service delivery points and lack of transportation, especially in rural areas, family restrictions and a lack of trust or fear of stigmatization are the main barriers for women and girls to access GBV services. Distance to services is often linked to the need for women and girls to have a chaperone who accompanies them there.

2019

- Women and girls express a high level of satisfaction for available services when they are able to access them. Clients of GBV services note improvements in self-confidence, trust and social connection, independence especially economic, knowledge of rights and ability to protect themselves from violence.
- Feelings of shame and stigma that prevent survivors from disclosing their experience of violence, along with cultural and safety factors related to movement restrictions, are reported to prevent survivors from seeking GBV services.



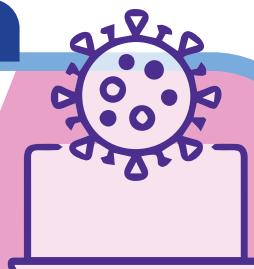
2020



- GBV services expand reach over the course of 2019.
- Increased use of GBV specialized services, including due to integration within sexual and reproductive health services, improved funding for some organizations and improved staff capacity.
- WGSS, awareness-raising, psychosocial support and vocational training particularly praised.
- Distance to services noted as a significant barrier within a context of poor roads, expensive transportation fees and safety concerns.

2021

- Number of organizations facilitating GBV assistance across WoS increased, though this was driven primarily by a greater number of actors initiating GBV activities in areas served by the Turkey Cross Border Hub.
- COVID-19 restrictions limit capacity to provide services and conduct outreach activities, especially between March and May 2020. GBV actors quickly adapt to new modalities and numbers of people accessing services begin to rise again from May 2020.



2022

- WGSS, or "safe spaces" more generally, were by far the most frequently mentioned service by women and girls.
- Stronger understanding of the role of WGSS and the support they could provide to women and girls in living lives free of violence.
- Many services and activities are moved to online platforms, organized remotely or adapted to provision and delivery via telephone lines – this limits access in some ways but is reported to increase reach to some marginalized groups.



2023



- GBV prevention and response services remain of great importance for women and girls.
- Less disruption of services due to COVID-19 prevention precautions in comparison to the previous two years. Increased seeking out of GBV services by women and girls.
- WGSS most referenced type of protection service.
- Barriers remain, including gaps in service provision in rural areas, lack of access by certain groups of women and girls, and the closure of some WGSS.

2024

- GBV prevention and response services continue to be highly appreciated by women and girls, with a particular focus on WGSS.
- However, many women and girls face barriers in accessing available WGSS and GBV services, due to family and community restrictions, distance to centres and facilities, lack of transportation, insecurity, fears of sexual violence and lack of information about available services.
- Widowed and divorced women, adolescents, and displaced women and girls face heightened barriers to accessing WGSS, due to mobility restrictions and other constraints.
- Despite growing needs, there have been increasingly widening gaps in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including the delivery of GBV services.



2025



- GBV services, and particularly WGSS, highly valued as essential and lifesaving intervention – and often the only refuge for women and girls who have no other safe space.
- Funding cuts in 2025 have a significant impact on service availability and reach, further widening the gaps between demand and delivery.
- Women and girls highlight the impact of GBV prevention and awareness-raising in reducing the risk of GBV and shifting social norms about the acceptability of violence.

Hopes and Dreams

Safety, dignity, peace, autonomy are consistent themes among the hopes and dreams of women and girls in every report where these are documented. In 2023 and 2024 reports, there are stronger calls for equality, education and professional roles.

Recommendations

The Voices from Syria report first introduced a dedicated section for recommendations in 2019. A comparison of recommendations across the years since then shows a few trends:

Women and girls highlight similar key needs and priorities

Each year, there are recommendations focusing on:

- Establishing or increasing awareness-raising and prevention of GBV;
- Establishing or increasing coverage of GBV services;
- Supporting the safe education and livelihoods development of women and girls;
- Ensuring safe and principled humanitarian service delivery.

Most reports also include at least one recommendation related to the participation and decision-making of women and girls.

This trend underscores the fact that the priorities of women and girls remain consistent: safety, freedom from violence, access to basic rights and services, and safe, supportive humanitarian assistance.

GBV services have evolved to meet expressed needs

There is some evolution in recommendations across the years – for example, the 2019 report simply advocated for increased awareness-raising, while the 2024 report recommended identifying and expanding upon effective awareness-raising and social and behaviour-change approaches. This reflects the development of successful awareness-raising approaches by GBV actors in the Syria response.

The call for increased access to GBV services, and particularly WGSS, has also become more noticeable across reports, showing that women and girls increasingly access and appreciate targeted services that meet their needs.

However, though GBV actors recognize the increasing gaps between demand and supply, funding allocations to GBV services have not allowed for adequate response to these recommendations.

Humanitarian assistance – beyond GBV services – has not adequately addressed SEA risks and the needs of women and girls

Recommendations regarding mitigating GBV risks in the delivery of humanitarian assistance have remained notably similar across reports, indicating that humanitarian sectors have not taken sufficient action to address these needs. In recent years (in particular from 2022 onwards), Voices from Syria analysis has shown that sectoral actors increasingly recognize their responsibility to provide safe, principled, protective humanitarian assistance that reduces the risk of GBV and SEA. However, the reality of delivery on the ground still demonstrates significant gaps.



5

**Governorate
Analysis**

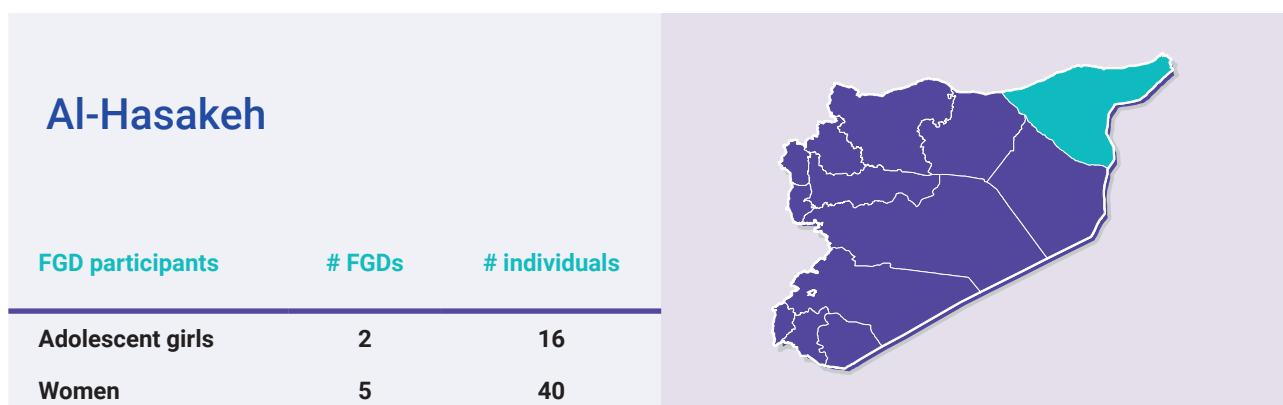
Governorate Analysis

This chapter presents a qualitative analysis of GBV trends and themes across all governorates except Quneitra, based on data gathered through FGDs. While this level of disaggregation can help surface localized dynamics and risks, it is important to interpret the findings with caution.

Several limitations shape the scope and validity of this analysis. In some governorates, the data is drawn from only one or two FGDs – often comprising fewer than 20 participants. In certain cases, such as As-Sweida, both FGDs were held exclusively with men, raising questions about whose perspectives are reflected. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the experiences and needs of women and girls in those areas. Moreover, as with any qualitative data, the information reflects self-reported perceptions and shared narratives, which may be shaped by stigma, social norms and differences in awareness or willingness to speak openly.

These limitations raise valid concerns about generalizability. However, the decision to retain a governorate-level analysis in this report was made deliberately. Qualitative data are not designed to be statistically representative, but rather to surface lived experiences, signal emerging issues and contextualize broader trends. From that perspective, even small samples can offer valuable insight – particularly for humanitarian actors seeking to strengthen the gender and protection dimensions of the HRP. Organizations operating at subnational levels have indicated that this type of localized analysis is useful in shaping programme design, outreach strategies and risk mitigation efforts.

In this spirit, the following summaries aim to reflect what participants chose to share – not as definitive portraits of each governorate, but as meaningful contributions to a broader, evolving understanding of GBV risks, services and community dynamics across Syria.



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Physical violence is widespread, often taking place in the home. It includes beatings by husbands, fathers and brothers. Women described being assaulted for "trivial reasons" and often tied it to cultural norms of male authority.

"Domestic violence is the most widespread form when the husband verbally abuses his wife, insults her and beats her, not realizing the damage caused to the wife, the children and their future behaviour." (Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh)

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence was reported extensively. Women described insults, belittling, emotional neglect and threats. This form of violence often coexists with physical or economic violence and is particularly acute for elderly women and widows.

"Today, I and many women suffer from psychological violence, through the husband threatening or intimidating his wife. Often, married women are threatened with cutting ties with their family and close friends, preventing them from practising their hobbies ... this affects her mental health, making her vulnerable to many psychological and mental illnesses." (Woman from Al-Hol camp, Hole, Al-Hasakeh Governorate)

Sexual Violence

Several women shared experiences of marital rape – described as being forced to have sex and bear children without consent. Girls and young women reported verbal and physical harassment in public and school settings. Cyber-harassment and sexual exploitation linked to humanitarian aid distribution were also noted.

"Most married women are subjected to marital rape, based on his natural right to perform any practice that satisfies his instincts, regardless of the woman's feelings and desire. They exploit the wife's silence and shyness to talk about this issue. I feel that marital rape has increased from previous years due to the frequent access to social media sites where there are men who are obsessed with pornographic movies that make them captive to sexual desire." (Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh)

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Participants reported systematic deprivation of access to education, employment and inheritance. Widows and divorced women face extreme economic violence and exploitation.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Violence by intimate partners, brothers, fathers and in-laws was commonly reported. Some women described experiencing violence throughout their life from multiple male relatives.

"I was subjected to domestic violence when I was single by my father and my brothers, and after I got married, I suffered the same thing from my husband. After my husband's death I still suffer from various forms of violence such as sexual harassment, and economic exploitation due to my social status as a widow, whether at work or from neighbours." (Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh)

Early and Forced Marriage

Early marriage, often to cousins, was reported, particularly under the pretext of "protection". Some families prevent girls from marrying outside the tribe, even if they grow old.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Participants cited insecurity in camps and communities, including fear of theft, harassment and unsafe service points. Displaced women and those living in tents feel especially vulnerable.

Gendered Social Norms

Traditional and patriarchal norms were the most consistent driver. Community tolerance or justification of violence, male dominance in decision-making and stigma around reporting were frequently mentioned.

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Living in camps and tents increases exposure to violence, limits privacy and heightens risk in public areas like distribution points and markets.

Economic Crisis

Economic pressures on men were seen as contributing to violent behaviour. Unemployment and financial dependency make it harder for women to leave abusive situations.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

In some cases, aid was reported as being offered in exchange for sexual favours. Crowding, distance and the presence of men at distribution sites increase risks for women.

Social Identity Factors

Widows, divorced women, elderly women, girls with disabilities and PWDs face heightened vulnerability. They are often denied mobility or access to services, or suffer neglect.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Some women report to community leaders, notables or field staff. However, fear of stigma, retaliation and lack of confidentiality often prevent reporting.

Community Interventions

Informal resolution through family elders, neighbours or community leaders was mentioned. Spiritual coping (prayer, withdrawal) is common, especially among older women.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and GBV Services

Several participants described transformative experiences through women's centres and safe spaces, accessing psychological support, empowerment programmes and vocational training.

"As a seamstress, I heard through my customers about an organization that provides awareness sessions ... I started visiting it and became familiar with concepts of violence."
(Woman from Ya'robiyah, Al-Hasakeh)

Other mechanisms include:

- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Emotional expression (crying, self-harm)
- Seeking refuge in safe locations like relatives' tents
- Distracting themselves with chores or hobbies

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Services include mobile teams, safe spaces, case management and psychosocial support. However, **distance** to centres, lack of transport and **mobility restrictions** prevent many – especially the elderly and PWDs – from accessing them.

Perceived Impact

Participants valued safe spaces for privacy, dignity and emotional healing. Economic empowerment programmes were seen as vital for long-term resilience.

Barriers

Barriers include:

- Lack of decision-making power to leave home
- Fear of stigma
- Harassment on the way to service points
- Misinformation or lack of awareness, especially among those without phones or literacy

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Access is inconsistent. While services technically exist, **social, physical and logistical barriers** limit use:

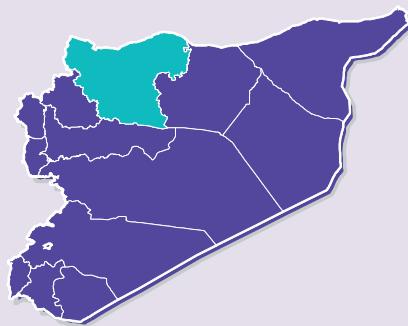
- Family prevents women from going out alone
- Distance to aid sites is prohibitive
- There is crowding and fear of harassment during distributions
- Some women face exploitation from aid providers

Women called for:

- Separate distribution days or spaces for women
- Proximity of aid points to tents
- Female staff or chaperones during service access

Aleppo

FGD participants	# FGDs	# individuals
Adolescent girls	1	8
Women	4	34
Adolescent boys	1	8
Men	1	8



Types of GBV

Physical and Sexual Violence

Reports highlight widespread physical violence, often occurring at home and in public spaces. Sexual violence, including harassment and exploitation, was frequently mentioned, with girls and women facing risks in schools, streets and camps. Cases of marital rape and assaults during aid distribution were also noted.

One woman said that she was subjected to severe violence from her husband, and although she can no longer endure it, she apologized to the husband because she knows there is no shelter and nowhere else to go. (Woman from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence – including verbal insults, emotional neglect and bullying – is pervasive. PWDs, widows and divorcees are particularly vulnerable, with many participants describing internalized shame and self-blame.

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Economic violence affects all demographics but is particularly acute for women-headed households. Some women reported being denied pocket money or the ability to make financial decisions. Most women cannot make autonomous decisions about marriage, education, childbearing or even daily affairs. Customary control by men is deeply entrenched. Women's opinions are often dismissed as unimportant.

Who are we to ask about decision-making? No one pays attention to our opinion except in determining the daily food. (Woman from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)

Early and Forced Marriage

Early marriage remains prevalent and is often tied to poverty and traditional gender roles. Adolescent girls reported pressure to marry and associated this with later divorce and dropout from school.

Violence Against Specific Groups

Widows, girls with disabilities, PWDs and adolescent girls were identified as the most at risk. Some women also described abuse in detention and violence linked to digital spaces and WhatsApp.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity and Displacement

Women and girls feel unsafe in camps, at aid distribution sites, in schools and on public transport. Darkness, lack of separation in toilets and the presence of strangers or male authority figures contribute to fear.

Gendered Social Norms

Violence is normalized in many households. Some women expressed that enduring abuse is expected of them or justified by religion or tradition. Fear of gossip, blame and retaliation leads many women and girls to remain silent – even in extreme cases. Shame around disclosing violence is amplified for widows, adolescent girls and PWDs.

Most women prefer to remain silent because they believe that this is a legitimate right of the male. (Adolescent boy from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)

Economic Crisis

The deteriorating financial situation intensifies risk, both as a trigger for violence and a barrier to escape. Women often cannot afford transport to services or legal assistance.

Lack of Freedom of Movement

Women and girls rarely move alone – especially at night or outside the camp. Common constraints include:

- Fear of harassment or violence
- Need for a male chaperone
- Financial barriers (transport costs)
- Gossip and stigma for widows or divorcees

I postpone many of my needs if there's no one to take me to the market or doctor. (Woman with disability or her caregiver from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Silence and Endurance

Silence was the most common response to violence. Participants described isolation, crying, sleeping or obeying the perpetrator as survival strategies.

Support from Women's Centres

Some women accessed **safe spaces** or **women's support centres**, reporting these services as transformative when reachable. Services that offer **case management**, **psychosocial support** and **livelihood opportunities** were especially valued.

I resort to the Women's Support centre ... I cry and isolate myself if I'm verbally abused. (Woman with disability or her caregiver from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)

Community and Informal Support

A few women mentioned relying on teachers, neighbours or community leaders. Adolescents said they may seek help from friends or quietly pass along what they learned in awareness sessions.

Harmful Coping

Self-harm, aggression towards children or imitating abusive behaviour towards others were noted among some girls and women facing unrelenting violence.

GBV Services

Availability and Awareness

Access to GBV services is inconsistent. While mobile outreach and women's centres were praised where present, awareness of services is limited. Widows, girls and PWDs are often left out due to isolation, lack of internet or movement restrictions.

Barriers to Access

Key barriers include:

- Distance to services
- Lack of transportation
- Fear of stigma or retaliation
- Restrictions on movement by male family members

Even if I wanted to go, my husband scolded me and threatened to send me back to my family. (Woman from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)

Women prioritized services offering:

- Psychological support
- Medical treatment
- Livelihood or small business opportunities
- Legal support related to divorce and child custody

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Women face considerable obstacles in safely accessing assistance. These include:

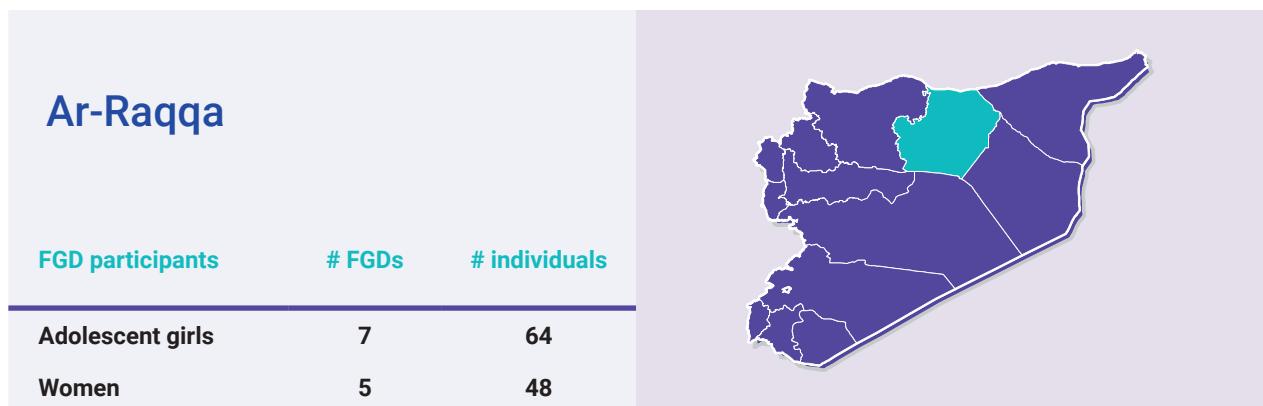
- Shared and unsafe sanitation facilities
- No designated spaces for women at distributions
- Sexual harassment during aid processes
- Lack of privacy or dignity in services

I missed the distribution because my son wasn't home and I couldn't go out alone. (Woman from A'zaz, Aleppo Governorate)

Some women described exploitation, such as being asked for favours or contact information in exchange for assistance.

Women called for:

- Increase in the number and reach of women's centres and safe spaces
- Provision of lighting, privacy and safety in public services
- Medical points and livelihood opportunities for women and PWDs
- Raised awareness for both women and men about GBV and rights



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Physical violence was widespread, especially in tents, workplaces and homes. Girls and women described beatings, hair pulling and physical assault by fathers, brothers, employers and husbands. Injuries were sometimes linked to unsafe working conditions or denial of medical care.

Girls in [the camp] suffer from all forms of physical violence by their family ... they suffer from discrimination because beautiful girls have more opportunities to work. (Adolescent girl from Al-Asadiyah camp, Maadan, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence was commonly reported and included bullying, insults, emotional neglect and threats. Girls with disabilities faced persistent verbal abuse. The impacts on mental health were described as severe and enduring.

Even if she tries to stand up to him, the consequences can be dire, such as being beaten or having her hand broken. Some families do not support their daughters. (Woman from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

Sexual Violence

Women and girls shared experiences of sexual harassment in markets, agricultural fields and streets. Adolescent girls were particularly targeted. Some reported abuse by employers or armed actors.

If she is raped, she remains silent out of fear of being slaughtered, killed, exiled, disbelieved and blamed. (Adolescent girl from Kesrah, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Participants described being denied wages, education, inheritance or healthcare. Women reported husbands controlling money and movement. Girls were often pulled out of school to marry or work.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Violence from husbands, fathers and brothers was commonly described. Several women spoke of lifelong abuse across different life stages – from childhood through marriage and widowhood.

Early and Forced Marriage

Early marriage was reported frequently, often justified by families as protection. Girls were married as young as 12 or 14, sometimes to cousins or much older men. Marriage was used to relieve financial burden or prevent perceived dishonour.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Participants described camps and public spaces as unsafe due to harassment, theft and lack of lighting or sanitation. Drug users, lack of police and roaming dogs increased fear, especially at night.

Gendered Social Norms

Patriarchal beliefs and male authority in families were cited as core causes of violence. Customs and traditions justified control over girls' mobility, marriage and life decisions.

Girls in our community cannot move freely due to restrictions imposed by the eastern community. It is considered a shame for a girl to leave the house. (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Informal camps lacking toilets, lighting and security patrols created risks for violence. Overcrowded tents limited privacy and increased psychological stress.

Economic Crisis

Displacement and unemployment intensified tensions at home. Women and girls were forced to work in exploitative settings, then had their wages confiscated by male relatives.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Distribution points were described as overcrowded, unsafe and distant. Lack of women-only spaces and female staff heightened risks. Some girls described services as inaccessible due to poverty or mobility restrictions.

Most girls have no knowledge of registration or they ask them complicated registration requirements or documents that they may not have. (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)

Social Identity Factors

Adolescent girls, widows, divorced women and women with disabilities were described as facing heightened risks, often being marginalized or excluded from services and decisions.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Very few women reported to authorities. Most feared gossip, retaliation or not being believed. Some resorted to telling mothers, sisters or neighbours.

Community Interventions

Family-based or informal coping was most common. Girls often stayed silent, cried or isolated themselves. Talking to friends or older women was seen as safer than formal services.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and GBV Services

Where available, safe spaces were highly valued, offering psychosocial support, case management and skills-building. However, many camps lacked fixed centres.

When we are subjected to violence, we can do nothing but cope. We try to minimize the impact by doing anything that makes us happy. (Woman from Ar-Raqqa, Ar-Raqqa Governorate)

Other mechanisms include:

- Emotional expression (crying, withdrawal)
- Avoiding public spaces
- Changing work or movement patterns
- Relying on mobile teams for periodic support

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Services were extremely limited in informal camps. Most respondents cited mobile teams as the only provider. Camps lacked permanent women and girls' centres, health services or protection facilities.

Perceived Impact

Where services existed, they were valued for confidentiality and emotional support. Girls expressed a desire for empowerment programmes, income-generating activities and health services inside the camps.

Barriers

Barriers included:

- Long distances and no transportation
- Fear of stigma, gossip and retaliation
- Male control over mobility
- Inadequate knowledge of available services
- Lack of disability-friendly infrastructure

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

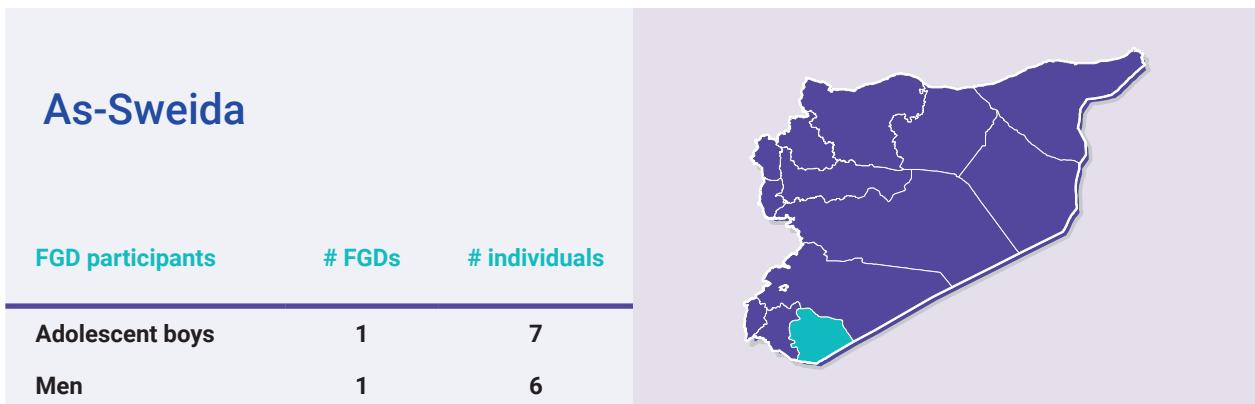
Access to aid was inconsistent and unequal. Some services (like dignity kits) were distributed by mobile teams, but many camps had no regular distribution. Women described:

- Long waits and unsafe distribution sites
- Lack of mobility and financial barriers
- Harassment or judgement at aid sites

Distribution centres are far. There are challenges and risks, such as verbal harassment when a girl is walking alone. (Adolescent girl from Ar-Raqa, Ar-Raqa Governorate)

Women called for:

- Fixed centres with multi-sector services inside camps
- Separate distribution spaces for women
- Transport and safety measures, including lighting and security patrols
- Inclusion of marginalized groups like PWDs and the elderly



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Physical violence remains prevalent, particularly within families. Divorced women and adolescent girls are frequently subjected to beatings. There is also an observed increase in violence compared with previous years.

There is physical violence by family, especially for divorced women and adolescent girls. (Adolescent boy from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Psychological Violence

Verbal abuse, emotional manipulation and stigma are widespread, especially against divorced or widowed women. Many girls are deceived by young men, leading to sadness and depression.

Many young men deceive girls and expose them to sadness and depression. (Adolescent boy from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Sexual Violence

Verbal sexual harassment in public transport and markets has increased, especially with growing transportation challenges. Women also face sexual exploitation and blackmail online through social media platforms.

It currently happens on social media and girls are exposed to exploitation and blackmail. (Adolescent boy from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Women are often deprived of inheritance and economic rights, particularly after the death of a husband. Economic violence and exclusion from property or financial decision-making were noted.

Types of GBV

The most widespread violence in our community is economic violence, deprivation of rights and inheritance, and women always feel insecure, especially after death of the husband. (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic violence – both physical and emotional – was frequently reported. Many women experience control and abuse from husbands and other family members across different life stages.

Early and Forced Marriage

Girls in rural communities are often subjected to early marriage and denied the opportunity to study or work.

Violence is most common in remote and rural areas due to ... girls' early marriage and preventing them from studying and working. (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Technology-facilitated Violence

Social media was frequently cited as a source of violence, including scams, blackmail, and exploitation of women and adolescent girls.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Women face elevated risks at night and in public spaces due to insecurity, including kidnapping and theft.

In the streets, especially at night due to insecurity and exposure to theft and kidnapping. (Adolescent boy from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Gendered Social Norms

Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and male dominance are strong contributors to violence. Women are often controlled in both public and private decisions, and silence is enforced through stigma and fear.

Women and girls are rarely able to make independent decisions without approval of parents, husband and family. (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

While not explicitly referred to as “displacement”, rural and impoverished areas were cited as more prone to violence due to traditions and poor living standards.

Economic Crisis

Economic stressors have increased the burden on men and intensified GBV. Women face both direct economic deprivation and indirect consequences from men facing financial pressure.

There are many forms of violence caused by men's exposure to economic violence and demand for them to bear the home burden alone. (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Social Identity Factors

Widows and divorced women are particularly vulnerable, facing stigma, economic exclusion and emotional abuse.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Some women report to the police or seek tribal resolution, especially in cases of domestic violence. However, many – particularly widows and divorced women – remain silent due to fear of blame.

Most women resort to submission and silence, especially widows and divorced women. (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Sometimes women and girls complain to the police. I think that many women, especially divorced and widows, do nothing because her family will accuse her of being cause of violence, especially if she goes out of the house or work. (Adolescent boy from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Community Interventions

Tribal dispute resolution mechanisms are commonly used to address domestic issues. These traditional systems are often the only recourse for women who lack family or institutional support.

If the violence is domestic, such as physical violence and divorce, women resort to the tribal solution and claim their right through it. (Man from As-Sweida, As-Sweida Governorate)

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

Awareness-raising sessions, vocational training and legal support offered through centres were mentioned positively. However, lack of outreach and strict family control still limit access for many women.

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Services such as legal aid, psychosocial support and vocational training are available, and awareness is improving through centres and social media. Yet awareness is uneven, especially among women in conservative families.

Perceived Impact

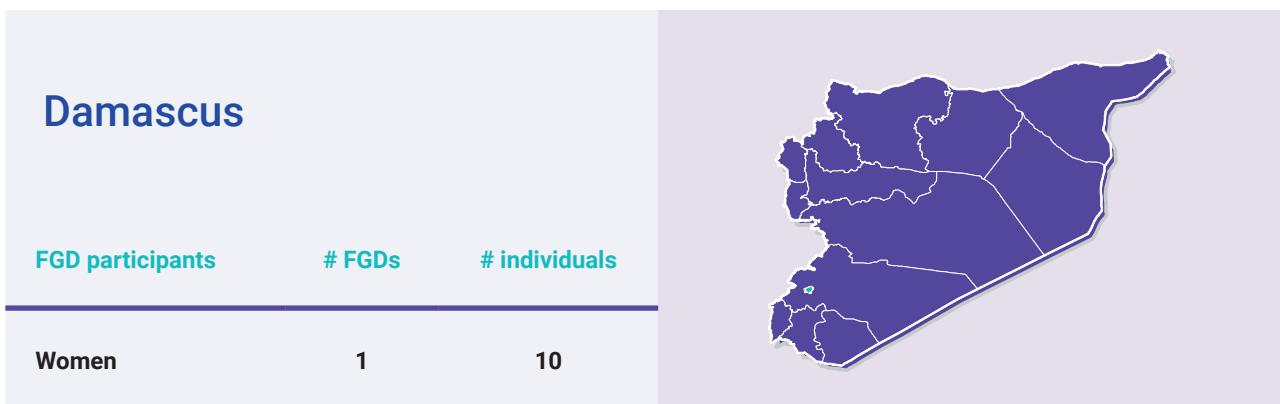
Many women who attend centres benefit from legal and psychological support. Services that combine vocational skills and emotional support were seen as especially effective.

Barriers

- Strict families preventing women from leaving home
- Stigma and fear of being blamed
- Lack of awareness among community members
- Adherence to patriarchal norms about women's roles

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Participants reported that services such as distributions and basic aid are technically available, and there were no structural barriers noted. However, mobility and safety challenges (especially at night) can hinder access. Harassment and insecurity during travel remain key concerns.



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Women and girls are subjected to physical violence within families, including beatings and repression. Child abuse was reported in public spaces, including schools and religious sites.

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence, especially from husbands, is common. Women described emotional abuse, pressure and mental health issues tied to fear of separation, social expectations and stigma.

Women are exposed to a lot of psychological pressure and physical issues and may seek help depending on the person's nature and their trust in the service provider. (Woman from Damascus, Damascus Governorate)

Sexual Violence

Harassment, particularly against girls, was highlighted in public transportation and during aid distributions. Participants noted that victims are often blamed, which discourages reporting.

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Early marriage, especially among poor families, is driven by economic hardship. Girls are often denied education to reduce household expenses, which reinforces dependency and limits opportunities.

Early marriage is widespread and it has increased recently due to poor economic situation and poverty that pushes the father to marry off his daughters at a young age and deprive them of education. (Woman from Damascus, Damascus Governorate)

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic violence is common and often goes unreported. Control over women's decisions and behaviour by husbands or fathers is a key theme.

Many cases of domestic violence have been observed and a large number of children are victims of family disintegration. (Woman from Damascus, Damascus Governorate)

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Fear of harassment, darkness and general insecurity – particularly at night – limits movement and creates unsafe conditions in streets and service areas.

Gendered Social Norms

Customs and traditions restrict women's decision-making and mobility. Social stigma, fear of blame and control by male relatives prevent women from acting independently or reporting abuse.

Economic Crisis

Poverty fuels early marriage and economic violence. Families may see girls as financial burdens and deny them education or marry them off to reduce costs.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Violence and harassment occur during aid distributions, particularly in mixed-gender queues. Women face exploitation and, if harassed, they are blamed.

Women pointed out lack of safety during standing in queues in a mixed area waiting for service where they are likely to be exploited and harassed. (Woman from Damascus, Damascus Governorate)

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Domestic violence is rarely reported. In contrast, women are more likely to seek help for harassment, sometimes using hotlines or safe spaces if trust is established.

Community Interventions

Some women share knowledge gained at empowerment centres with others in the community. Empowerment centres, education and personality development were emphasized as long-term prevention strategies.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

Training courses, public advertisements and word of mouth help inform women about services. Empowerment centres provide medical, psychological, legal and vocational support.

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Participants estimated that about one-third of women are aware of the available services. Entry points include training programmes, community outreach and informal sources like street ads. Those far from centres or confined by family are less likely to receive support.

Perceived Impact

Services such as psychological support, safe spaces, medical care and vocational training were noted as beneficial for survivors, especially when accompanied by empowerment and advocacy.

Barriers

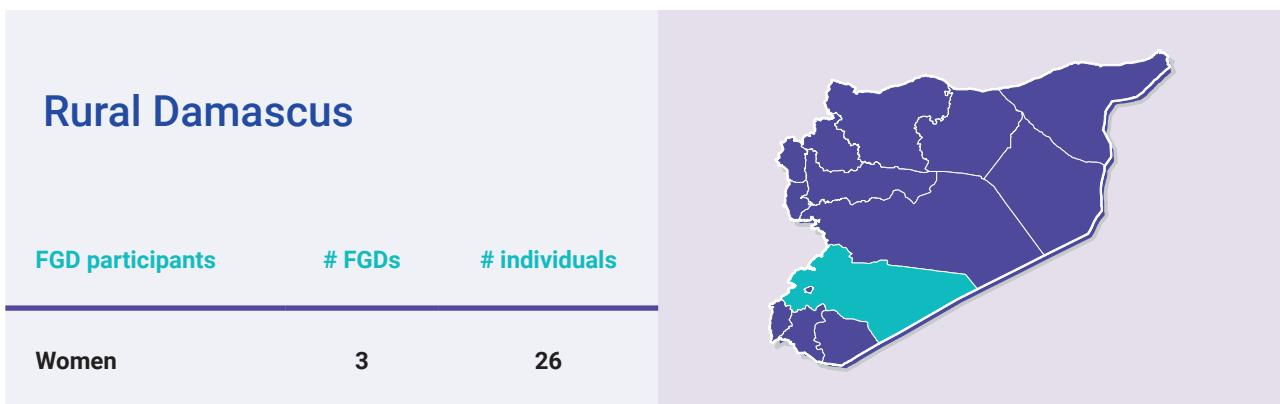
- Fear of separation, social stigma and losing children
- Family control or disapproval
- Attachment to the perpetrator
- Lack of legal protections
- Distance from services and restrictions on mobility
- Internalized fear and loss of confidence

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Women access aid but report harassment and lack of safety during distributions. Mixed-gender spaces, especially while waiting in queues, are a significant source of concern.

Women called for:

- Wider dissemination of service information through awareness campaigns
- Pre-marital and school-based education on respect and equality
- Material and psychological support for survivors
- Economic empowerment and small project funding
- Legal reform to protect women's rights and ensure accountability
- Promotion of respectful gender norms within families and communities



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Physical violence is common in households and public spaces. Some participants noted an increase in its severity due to the absence of laws and accountability, with extreme cases such as murder being cited.

A change in violence forms has been observed, especially physical violence, with lack of law in the current period and lack of accountability, so there are more cases of murder and revenge. (Woman from At-Tall, Rural Damascus Governorate)

Psychological Violence

Women and girls frequently face psychological distress stemming from harassment, discrimination and controlling family dynamics. This is particularly acute among widows, divorced women and women with disabilities.

Sexual Violence

Harassment and obscene verbal abuse are widespread in streets, schools and transportation. Some women reported partner violence and exploitation in workplaces.

Violence against women with disabilities such as verbal violence and bullying increases significantly in the street and is heard largely. (Woman from At-Tall, Rural Damascus Governorate)

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Women are denied educational and professional opportunities due to customs, economic pressures and family control. Some mentioned exploitation by employers, particularly of working women in vulnerable positions.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic violence is common. Women are pressured into silence by their families and the community. Economic dependency, emotional attachment and fear of separation or stigma prevent women from disclosing abuse.

Early and Forced Marriage

Early marriage persists due to traditional gender norms and financial strain. Some girls are married off young to protect their reputation or alleviate economic burden.

Technology-facilitated Violence

Cyber-harassment, especially among adolescents, was noted as a growing concern. Women called for awareness in schools to address online abuse.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Women reported safety concerns in dark, empty streets, transportation and service distribution sites. Schools after hours and public transport are perceived as unsafe.

Gendered Social Norms

Patriarchal norms, mistrust of women and gender-role stereotypes dominate. Women's participation in decisions is minimal, and they're often considered too emotional to lead.

Mostly not, because man holds decision and power, and due to inherited customs and traditions. (Woman from Harasta, Rural Damascus Governorate)

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Participants referenced mobility challenges, poor transportation and long distances to services. These issues are compounded for women with disabilities and those lacking financial means.

Economic Crisis

Poverty was repeatedly cited as a major driver of violence and early marriage. Financial dependency reinforces women's vulnerability and limits their ability to leave abusive situations.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Participants noted exploitation during aid distributions, particularly of widows and divorced women. Dignity kits were described as inadequate, irregular and not reaching all groups.

Social Identity Factors

Women with disabilities, widows and those who do not leave the house due to restrictions or customs face heightened barriers to service access and support.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Women rarely report violence, especially domestic abuse. Some speak to trusted relatives or object when exploitation is obvious. Others stay silent out of fear, shame or lack of support.

Community Interventions

Participants stressed the importance of dialogue, a respectful upbringing and speaking out against abuse. Women emphasized the need to raise awareness through schools, families and community events.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

Centres offering vocational training and psychosocial support were cited as key entry points for women to access services. Women emphasized their role in passing on knowledge and experiences from centres to other community members.

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Not all women are aware of available services, especially those confined to the home. Services are promoted via schools, children, local community members and the internet. Entry often begins through training or livelihood courses.

Perceived Impact

When trusted, services such as safe spaces, medical and psychosocial care, legal aid and vocational training are accessed and valued. Women feel more empowered after attending centres.

Barriers

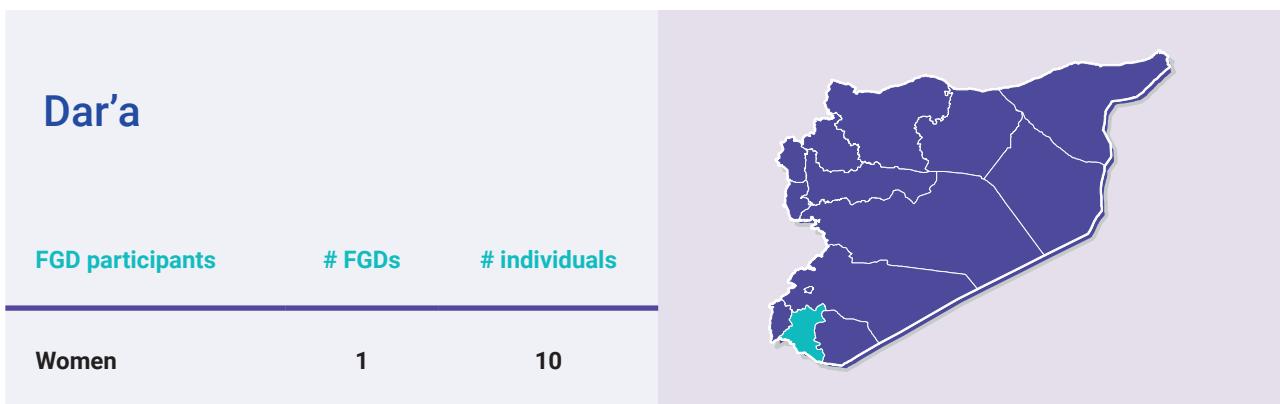
- Fear of stigma, divorce or losing children
- Family opposition and control
- No financial means or place to go
- Judgement by the community
- Poor quality, availability or credibility of services
- Discrimination during service access (especially by birth region or ability status)

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

While some women can access services, many face challenges due to long queues, safety risks, inconsistent distributions and discrimination. Transportation cost and criteria for selection limit inclusion.

Women called for:

- Expansion of vocational training and livelihood programmes for women, especially heads of households
- Awareness-raising for men and boys to address harmful gender norms and support equality
- Regular and inclusive aid distributions, including dignity kits and school supplies
- Legal reforms to hold perpetrators accountable and protect survivors
- Dedicated support for women with disabilities and vulnerable groups
- Improved access to services, especially in remote or under-resourced areas
- Support for women-led projects to promote financial independence
- Education campaigns in schools targeting early marriage, cyber-harassment and respect in relationships
- Recognition and compensation for women's unpaid domestic roles, especially housewives



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Physical abuse of women and girls was reported in multiple forms, including beatings, dragging and pulling hair – sometimes in front of children. Women returning from detention and those in economically strained families face heightened violence.

Some women suffer from extortion and sexual exploitation, where they are offered help in exchange for sex and are stigmatised if they refuse. (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence is prevalent through humiliation, threats, emotional manipulation and social rejection. Divorced and widowed women are particularly affected, often stigmatized and excluded from social spaces. Survivors of detention experience long-lasting trauma and social questioning that traumatize them.

Sexual Violence

Sexual exploitation and harassment occur both online (via social media and phones) and in person. Marital rape is reported as widespread, particularly among young married girls. Some women are forced into sexual acts for aid or protection.

Some men who were tortured in detention practice it inside their homes, beating their wives and children in similar way to what they experienced. (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Women – especially those with disabilities or caring for children – are denied services and information. Discrimination in aid access and forced requests for support from abusive men highlight deprivation of rights and safe options.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Violence by husbands, fathers and other family members was common. Women described being silenced, blamed or forced to stay with abusive partners.

Divorce cases have increased over the past year, and divorced women suffer from social stigmas and humiliation. (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)

Early and Forced Marriage

Girls are often married without their consent, with decisions made by male relatives. A case was reported where a girl was blackmailed into marriage under threat of having her photos shared, leading to a deadly incident and severe psychological harm.

Technology-facilitated Violence

Online harassment, blackmail and exploitation were reported, especially targeting girls through phones and social media. This includes emotional manipulation and threats to leak personal images.

There was an incident of a girl's marriage in which a young man blackmailed her by publishing her photos, which led to a clash and death of a young man, and the girl's entry into a bad psychological state. (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Insecurity is widespread. Women fear going out after sunset due to poor lighting and risk of harassment. Kidnapping, assassinations and violence against former detainees were noted as key triggers of stress and restrictions.

Gendered Social Norms

Patriarchal customs limit women's freedom, mobility and decision-making. Control over reproduction and movement was reported frequently.

I was pregnant and he forced me to miscarry ... when he wanted, he forced me to have a child. (Woman from Hrak, Dar'a Governorate)

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Returnees face increased family tensions and violence, especially when displaced men experience joblessness or psychological distress. These conditions also heighten risks for women.

Economic Crisis

Economic pressure leads to violence, increased divorce and sexual exploitation in exchange for aid. Women are often forced to stay silent or comply due to economic dependency.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Reports of exploitation during aid distribution were frequent. Some women were scammed into paying for promised aid that never came. Access to services is limited and sometimes conditioned by family control.

Social Identity Factors

Women with disabilities, divorced women, detainees and those without male protection face extreme stigma and vulnerability. Girls with intellectual disabilities are especially at risk of abuse.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Most women do not report violence due to fear of stigma, revenge or lack of protection. However, the recent opening of a police station has made some feel slightly more secure.

Community Interventions

Support networks are limited. Word of mouth, local safe spaces and mobile teams help disseminate awareness. Some participants promote dialogue and moral education as prevention strategies.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

A local safe space offers violence case management, psychosocial support, vocational training and legal aid. These services are essential for economic empowerment and psychological healing.

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

There are very few services in the village – only one safe space and a charity. Many women are unaware of services or are not allowed to attend sessions. Services are shared informally between women.

Perceived Impact

Where accessible, services like counselling, vocational training and legal aid are deeply appreciated. Safe spaces are critical for women's emotional and practical support needs.

Barriers

- Fear of social stigma, retaliation or family rejection
- Lack of transportation and financial means
- Mistrust in service quality or fairness in aid distribution
- Gender norms limiting women's freedom to seek help
- Lack of shelters or safe housing for those fleeing abuse

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

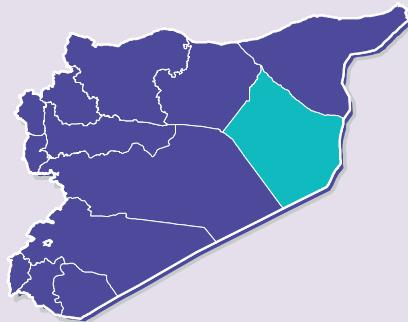
Access is limited and unreliable. Some women are forced by their husbands to obtain aid or are denied permission to go. Scams and distribution discrimination were reported. Vulnerable women, like pregnant or disabled women, are often excluded.

Women called for:

- Increased awareness of GBV services, especially through women's networks and trusted community channels
- Expanded support services, including shelters, transportation, and services for disabled women and caregivers
- Separate service points for men and women to ensure safety and comfort
- Legal protections for survivors, especially those facing reproductive coercion
- Economic empowerment to reduce dependency and offer alternatives to exploitation
- Inclusion of women in leadership roles in local councils and aid committees
- Access to safe reproductive health services without male interference
- Recognition of detention trauma and protection from post-detention stigma
- Regular monitoring of aid fairness and protection from scams or coercion

Deir Ez-Zor

FGD participants	# FGDs	# individuals
Adolescent girls	1	8
Women	1	8
Men	2	15



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Physical violence is common and affects women and girls across various settings, especially at home. Girls face beatings from fathers and older male relatives. Boys experience physical bullying in schools.

Violence occurs everywhere in the camp and is not considered a crime ... it is one of the usual daily behaviours. (Adolescent girl from Kisreh, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)

Psychological Violence

Widespread psychological violence includes verbal abuse, screaming, marginalization and community gossip. This particularly affects divorced women, widows, girls with disabilities and girls exposed to early marriage.

Many girls suffer from marginalization and are deprived of their rights. (Man from Deir-ez-Zor)

Sexual Violence

Girls and boys experience sexual harassment, especially in early or forced marriage. Girls are also emotionally manipulated or blackmailed online. There are isolated reports of sex for survival among women facing economic hardship.

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Girls are pulled out of school after the age of 12, prevented from movement and forced into early marriage. Access to income-generating opportunities and humanitarian services is highly restricted, especially for women without male support.

Women spend most of their time in houses ... She goes to school from age 7 until 10, and then stays home to learn cooking and cleaning. (Man from Deir-ez-Zor, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic violence is normalized and rarely reported. Intimate partner violence, including coercive control, was reported as increasing.

Some women try to be obedient to avoid violence from their husbands, while others refuse any kind of violence from a man and separate from him. (Man from Deir-ez-Zor, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)

Early and Forced Marriage

Girls are married off young due to traditions, economic pressures or protection concerns. This practice is seen as a way to preserve family honour or gain high dowries. Early marriage contributes to dropout from school and long-term instability.

Types of GBV

Technology-facilitated Violence

Electronic violence, including blackmail and threats via social media, is a growing concern. Though legal restrictions exist, many girls are exposed to abuse online and fear its consequences.

A new type of violence has begun to spread, which is electronic violence. (Man from Deir-ez-Zor, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Insecurity, especially in the evening or outside the camp, limits women's mobility. Detention centres and schools were cited as emerging spaces of violence. Fear of gossip or attack curtails movement and visibility.

Gendered Social Norms

Patriarchal structures deeply influence mobility, access to education and decision-making.

Even if the woman is working, she comes with the money and hands it to her husband. (Woman from Kisreh, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Camp settings, lack of privacy and economic hardship heighten exposure to violence. Overcrowding and stress in shared facilities like water tanks or food queues were sources of conflict and harassment.

Economic Crisis

Widespread poverty fuels economic violence, dependence and early marriage. Women work in harsh conditions like agricultural fields or cleaning roles. Some resort to survival sex due to desperation.

Girls resort to working in agricultural workshops ... although the work is difficult, they find it the only outlet from the tent. (Adolescent girl from Kisreh, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate)

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Though services are free, distribution can be chaotic, with long queues and insufficient medical coverage. High transport costs are a barrier. Women often rely on others for updates on aid and services.

Social Identity Factors

Girls with disabilities, widows, divorced women and adolescent girls face the greatest barriers due to stigma, mobility challenges and lack of tailored services.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Few women report to formal authorities. Case management at safe spaces is trusted by some due to confidentiality. Others confide in male relatives, while many remain silent due to fear of stigma or retaliation.

Community Interventions

Community elders sometimes intervene in family conflicts. However, traditional mechanisms often reinforce harmful norms and discourage disclosure.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

Safe spaces were widely praised for offering vocational training, legal services and psychosocial support. These spaces are viewed as women's only outlet and a rare source of dignity and community.

Women feel very comfortable inside WGSS, as they say it is their only outlet. (Woman from Kisreh, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate).

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Multiple actors operate in the camps, but few provide tailored or sustained services. Case management and legal services are especially valued.

Perceived Impact

Services like vocational training and psychosocial support empower women and provide alternatives to dependency. Many seek these services to escape or mitigate violence.

Barriers

- Fear of stigma or community gossip
- High transport costs
- Lack of female staff in some health settings
- Overburdened women lacking time to attend sessions
- Customs limiting movement for adolescent girls

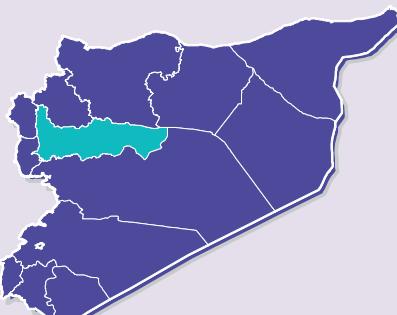
Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Access is mostly free, and gender-sensitive measures like separate queues are in place. However, service quality (especially medical) is limited, and long queues or costs of transportation remain challenges. Some women are excluded from information due to isolation or illiteracy.

Women called for:

- Dedicated high schools for girls and recognized certificates to prevent early marriage and dropout
- Economic empowerment programmes, including professional training and multipurpose cash assistance
- Spacious and private safe spaces, with psychosocial and recreational activities for women and girls
- Awareness campaigns targeting men and boys to reduce stigma and promote gender equality
- Legal protections against harassment, early marriage and IPV
- Freedom of movement, especially for girls seeking education or services
- More inclusive aid and medical services, especially for PWDs and the elderly
- Representation of women in decision-making structures, including community committees
- Transportation support to access health and humanitarian services

Hama



FGD participants	# FGDs	# individuals
Adolescent girls	1	16
Women	1	16

Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Beating is commonly reported across settings – home, school, workplace. Women described being hit by family members, especially in stepfamily dynamics.

Psychological Violence

Verbal abuse, emotional neglect, ridicule and manipulation are widespread. Older women (60+) and women with disabilities are reported to face emotional abuse in all forms.

Women are always oppressed and hear bad words for no reason. (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Sexual Violence

Harassment is frequent in coeducational schools, workplaces, streets and online.

Technology-facilitated Violence

Several participants described cyber-harassment and exploitation on social media, including incidents of image-based blackmail. Exploitation via live streaming platforms (e.g. Bigo Live) was flagged, sometimes involving coercion from male family members.

A young man talked to me online ... exploited my photos and published them. I was very affected psychologically. (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Economic Violence

Women reported having salaries taken by male relatives, unequal pay and financial dependence. Girls are encouraged into early marriage due to poverty.

My classmate failed ninth grade and did not want to complete studies because the parents can't buy notebooks. (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Denial of Resources, Rights and Opportunities

Women face barriers to inheritance, education and decision-making. Widows, IDPs and those with disabilities face further exclusion.

My companion's mother was denied inheritance because she is a female. (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Early and Forced Marriage

Girls are married early due to beauty, poverty or societal expectations.

Our neighbour's daughter married at 13 because she is more beautiful than her sisters. (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Gender Norms and Social Structures

Patriarchal systems dominate decision-making and mobility.

Girls are governed by the father, then the brother, then the husband, and then the community. (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Economic Hardship and Displacement

Poverty pushes girls to drop out of school or engage in sex for money. Displaced women face landlord exploitation.

Girls work in sex for money ... with their parents' knowledge or under threat of a husband or brother. (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Security and Instability

Participants cited escalating violence and insecurity. Safety concerns, especially after 5 p.m., prevent women and girls from attending lessons or moving freely.

Girls can't move freely ... even I can't attend a lesson at evening due to the situation and lack of safety. (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Stigma and Silence

GBV survivors are often disbelieved, blamed or silenced by families and communities.

Violence increases because she keeps silent, but there must be a solution. (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Marginalization of Specific Groups

Girls with disabilities, divorced and widowed women, and IDPs face elevated risks and limited access to services.

PWDs do not have access to services because their family feels that this group is useless. (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Silence and Submission

Many women stay silent out of fear for children, social stigma or retaliation.

Women keep silent especially for their daughters' sake, because community has no mercy on girls. (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Seeking Support in Safe Spaces

Participants who accessed centres like Mada reported personal transformation and empowerment.

I have changed 80 per cent thanks to this centre ... even my daughter has a stronger personality. (Woman from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

Peer Support and Awareness-raising

Some participants shared information about services with others and used social media to spread awareness.

Currently I try to educate my elders, even my parents and younger persons. (Adolescent girl from As-Salamiyeh, Hama Governorate)

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Mobile teams and centres like Mada are known to some but not all. Rural and displaced women often lack awareness or access. Participants preferred in-person services over virtual due to digital illiteracy or limited tech access.

Perceived Impact

Those who accessed services reported positive psychological change. Services requested include safe spaces, case management, psychosocial support, legal and medical services, and emergency hotlines.

Barriers

- High transport costs
- Lack of trust or awareness
- Family restrictions, especially for unmarried girls
- Stigma and fear of not being believed
- No tailored services for PWDs or IDPs
- Lack of physical safety on roads

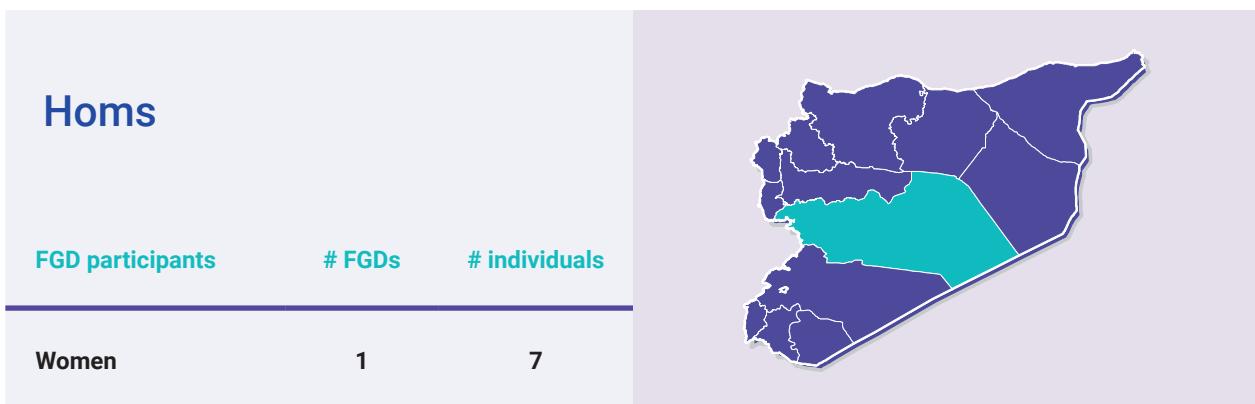
Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Access is inconsistent. While some receive dignity kits and food, many said the kits are insufficient or infrequent, or lack essential items. Crowding, verbal abuse and harassment at distribution points were noted.

Even sanitary pads are very important, but for a long time, no one has offered them. (Woman from As-Salamiyah, Hama Governorate)

Women called for:

- Legal accountability for abusers and functional reporting mechanisms
- In-person safe spaces, including case management and psychosocial support
- Increased access and coverage of services, especially for remote areas, PWDs and IDPs
- Economic empowerment programmes, including job creation and small business support
- Equal legal rights regarding inheritance and mobility
- School-based awareness campaigns on GBV and gender equality
- Awareness-raising for men and boys to shift norms and reduce discrimination
- Support for survivors, including emergency assistance and shelter
- Women in leadership roles, including community committees and governance



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Spousal violence remains the most prevalent form, including physical assault such as beatings. It is reported as a constant experience in women's lives, with no major improvement from previous years.

Psychological Violence

Participants highlighted verbal insults and behaviour aimed at destroying women's self-confidence. Emotional abuse is often paired with physical or economic violence.

Sexual Violence

Sexual harassment was discussed, mostly occurring within families. The taboo and shame around this topic result in frequent non-disclosure.

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Economic violence is pervasive. Women are denied jobs, inheritance and financial autonomy, with divorced and widowed women facing heightened deprivation.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Violence from husbands remains a central concern, but women also experience control and coercion from their natal families, particularly fathers and brothers. The threat of being denied custody or shelter makes women more vulnerable.

Early and Forced Marriage

Participants noted the continued practice of early marriage. Some expressed concern that it remains a normalized solution for families, despite its consequences.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Since December 2024, increased armed presence and prolonged electricity outages have heightened women's fear, especially at night. Dark alleys and isolated roads were identified as danger zones.

Gendered Social Norms

Social customs uphold male dominance and silence women. Fear of shame, stigma and social retaliation prevent disclosure or resistance to violence. Some women remain silent to avoid losing custody or facing rejection from their own families.

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Women living in collective shelters or poor neighbourhoods experience increased exposure to harassment and insecurity, particularly when returning home after dark.

Economic Crisis

Financial dependency and the high cost of legal separation trap women in violent marriages. Widows and divorced women face widespread discrimination and economic marginalization.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Favouritism, expired medications and discrimination in service provision were noted. Participants described feeling humiliated or being treated with arrogance by some service providers.

Social Identity Factors

Divorced, widowed and disabled women face the most severe restrictions on movement and are heavily stigmatized. They are often denied services and suffer public shaming.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Formal reporting is rare. Most disclosures are made informally to psychosocial support workers or trusted friends. Legal reporting is avoided due to fear, mistrust and lack of protection.

Community Interventions

Few community interventions were noted. Participants described reliance on friends or informal networks rather than structured community support.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

Women who accessed safe spaces valued psychosocial support, vocational training and small income-generating projects. However, these services were inconsistently available and often insufficient to meet needs.

Other mechanisms include:

- Silence and withdrawal due to shame and fear
- Social media as a source of awareness
- Limited reliance on associations due to lack of trust and distance
- Resistance through building supportive friendships

Some women remain silent about the husband's violence due to lack of family support, especially if they refuse to receive her children with her ... she moves from the husband's violence to the family's control. (Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate)

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Participants reported a general lack of nearby services and associations. Services such as legal counselling, psychosocial support and vocational training were only accessible to a few. Shelter services, hotlines and financial support were entirely absent.

Services related to shelter, a hotline or financial support are absent. On the other hand, women do not trust the process of reporting and receiving full service, such as protection with their children. (Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate)

Perceived Impact

For those able to access safe spaces, psychosocial support and vocational opportunities offered some relief. However, the support was partial, with key needs such as shelter and legal protection unmet.

Barriers

- Distance, transportation costs and lack of information
- Mistrust in confidentiality and privacy
- Fear of retaliation from husbands or family members
- Social stigma and lack of support from the community or government
- Limited availability of services for women unable to leave their homes

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Access is uneven. Participants cited discrimination in distributions, favouritism and lack of follow-up on complaints. Some women avoid accessing aid due to poor treatment by staff or fear of retaliation. There is a desire for accountability mechanisms and better staffing at aid sites.

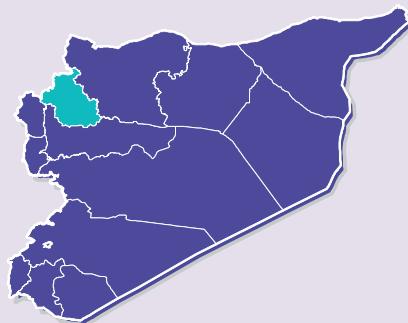
Women called for:

- Establishment and support of local associations and governmental bodies focused on women's needs
- Awareness-raising sessions on GBV, legal rights and women's empowerment
- Legal aid that covers the financial burden of lawsuits
- Job opportunities for women with flexible hours to help them balance domestic responsibilities
- Complaint boxes in women's centres with follow-up mechanisms
- Vocational kits to accompany training and support small-scale entrepreneurship
- Inclusion of women in community decision-making and consultations on public policy

We suggest placing a complaint box ... so that staff have access to the complaint and follow up on it as a solution to women's concerns. (Woman from Homs, Homs Governorate)

Idleb

FGD participants	# FGDs	# individuals
Adolescent girls	2	16
Women	5	40
Adolescent boys	2	16
Men	2	8



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Participants frequently reported physical violence, especially beatings within the family. This includes IPV and violence from male relatives.

Psychological Violence

Verbal insults, intimidation, threats and humiliation were common. Psychological abuse was described as prevalent in homes and workplaces.

Sexual Violence

Sexual harassment and assault were mentioned, particularly in public spaces and during humanitarian distributions. Some incidents of rape were noted, though stigma and fear hinder disclosure.

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Women are denied jobs, education and freedom of movement. Widows and divorced women are particularly restricted and economically excluded.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

GBV most often occurred at home, with many participants describing violence by husbands, fathers and brothers. Domestic violence was reported as both physical and psychological.

Women and girls suffer from beatings, insults and humiliation, often from their own families. It happens most at home, and girls have no one to protect them. (Adolescent boy from Al-Khateeb camp, Harim, Idleb Governorate)

Early and Forced Marriage

Early and forced marriages continue, often linked to poverty, displacement and protection concerns. Girls are sometimes married off to reduce family burden or due to pressure from armed groups.

Some girls are married off early because their families can't afford to support them anymore. Others are forced into marriage for protection from armed men. (Man from Jisr-Ash-Shugur, Idleb Governorate)

Technology-facilitated violence

Participants mentioned cyber-harassment and blackmail through social media, especially targeting adolescent girls and young women.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Participants highlighted fear of violence in public areas and camps, including from armed groups. Distribution sites and dark, poorly populated areas were identified as especially unsafe.

Gendered Social Norms

Patriarchal traditions limit women's agency. Women who speak out or dress differently face harassment. In many households, women are expected to obey male relatives without question.

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Camps and collective shelters were described as unsafe, overcrowded and lacking privacy. Displaced women are especially exposed to harassment and exploitation.

Economic Crisis

Poverty and unemployment increase stress in households, which can escalate domestic violence. Economic dependency also traps women in abusive relationships.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Women face risks and discrimination during aid distributions. Some were humiliated or harassed by service providers. Complaints are rarely addressed, and favouritism and expired items were mentioned.

Social Identity Factors

Widows, divorced women and women with disabilities face greater restrictions and vulnerability. Their freedom of movement is limited, and they are often socially ostracized.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Very few women formally report violence due to fear of revenge, shame or lack of trust. Disclosure is more common to friends or psychosocial workers.

Community Interventions

Some women turn to family members, neighbours or community leaders, but this does not always lead to support or resolution. Traditional dispute mechanisms may reinforce harmful norms.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

When services are accessed, women seek psychosocial support, medical care and legal counselling. However, access is often limited by cost, distance and lack of awareness.

Other mechanisms include:

- Staying silent to avoid escalation
- Relying on peer support when possible
- Limited access to vocational training or economic projects as a form of empowerment

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Services exist but are insufficient. Participants said awareness is low and coverage is limited. Some only hear about services through friends or social media. Those in remote areas or without mobile access are often excluded.

Perceived Impact

Where accessed, services such as psychosocial support and medical care were appreciated. However, gaps in legal assistance, shelter and financial aid reduced overall impact.

Barriers

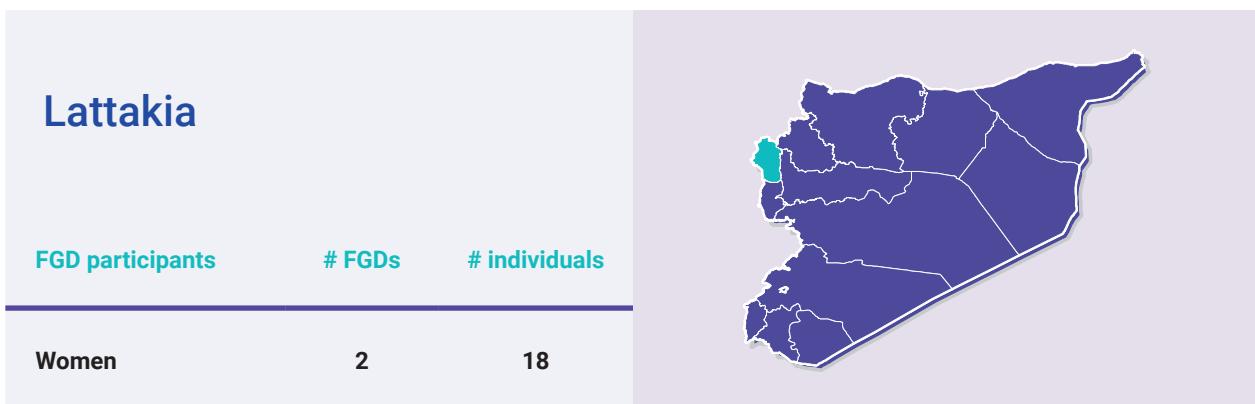
- Fear of retaliation, stigma and shame
- Lack of confidentiality or trust in service providers
- High transportation costs and distance to centres
- Limited service for women confined at home or in rural areas

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Many women struggle to access aid due to safety concerns, discrimination and logistical barriers. Some fear harassment at distribution points. Others noted systemic favouritism and lack of accountability. There is also a lack of gender-sensitive planning in aid delivery.

Women called for:

- Expanded outreach and awareness of GBV services, especially to rural and displaced populations
- Improved accountability at distribution sites, including clear complaint mechanisms
- Psychological support and legal services that are accessible and affordable
- Empowerment through livelihood programmes and vocational training
- Involvement of women in community decisions, with assurance that their voices are heard
- Creation of safe, confidential reporting pathways for survivors



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Physical violence is increasing, particularly due to the economic crisis. Participants tied this rise to stress and unemployment among men, which escalates tensions at home. Physical violence was reported at home, in schools and on public transportation.

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence was one of the most reported forms, including verbal abuse, intimidation and emotional neglect. It affects women in both urban and rural areas, and is prevalent in homes, public spaces and transportation.

Sexual Violence

Sexual harassment was reported in bakeries and on transport, with women noting physical contact and inappropriate behaviour. Widowed and divorced women face emotional and sexual exploitation, particularly in the aftermath of the earthquake and displacement.

Violence occurs in bakeries where women experience sexual harassment, and in schools where girls are subjected to psychological and physical violence. (Older woman from Jablah, Lattakia Governorate)

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Economic violence was widespread, with some women forced to pay for humanitarian assistance that should be free. Women with disabilities and displaced women are particularly affected due to exclusion from services and opportunities.

Domestic, Family and Intimate Partner Violence

Family-based violence remains widespread, including from husbands, fathers and in-laws. Some women reported being forced to wear the hijab or having their movement restricted, saying this kind of family control is framed as having religious or cultural justification.

Early and Forced Marriage

While not explicitly mentioned as a primary theme, the control over girls' mobility and decision-making suggests that early marriage may be a contextual risk, especially among adolescents.

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

Ongoing insecurity in Lattakia, particularly in the areas of Jablah and Al-Fayed, contributes to restrictions on women's movement. Chaos and sectarian tension have increased, especially affecting displaced and disabled women.

Gendered Social Norms

Participants repeatedly noted male dominance in decision-making and expectations for women to remain at home. Women's dress and behaviour are heavily policed, with older women's views dismissed due to age.

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

Displaced women face housing instability, stigmatization and economic exploitation. Some were removed from rented housing or forced to pay bribes for aid.

Economic Crisis

Rising unemployment and inflation have created pressure on men and families, fuelling violence. Women's loss of jobs has made them more dependent and vulnerable to exploitation.

Violence increased due to pressure on men under current circumstances ... widows and divorced women still suffer from emotional and sexual exploitation. (Woman from Jablah, Lattakia Governorate)

Aid Distribution and Service Access

There were reports of corruption in food distribution, with money being extorted by non-affiliated citizens. Aid is said to be lacking in items tailored to women's needs.

Social Identity Factors

Displaced women, widows, divorced women and women with disabilities face layered marginalization, stigma and access barriers. Adolescent girls lack targeted services or case management.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Some women report street harassment to nearby security officers, while others confront abusers directly. Girls and adolescents tend to remain silent due to shyness or fear. Some women said they hit back at aggressors.

Community Interventions

Participants mentioned separating men and women in transport and involving men and boys in awareness campaigns as community-level efforts. Some women avoid public life entirely as a form of self-protection.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

Centres provide case management, GBV sessions, vocational training and psychosocial support. These were highly valued by women who accessed them, though youth and PWDs often cannot.

Other mechanisms include:

- Confronting abusers publicly to discourage future violence
- Staying at home and avoiding evening outings
- Avoiding seeking help from family due to fear of backlash

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Services are available in urban centres like Jablah, but rural and displaced populations face barriers. Awareness often spreads through social media, humanitarian organizations or word of mouth.

Perceived Impact

Women valued the confidentiality and support at safe spaces, particularly case management and skills-building activities. However, legal aid, shelter and cash assistance remain underused due to stigma or fear.

Barriers

- Fear of stigma, gossip and retaliation from husbands or male relatives
- Distance to service centres and lack of transport
- Lack of services for youth, adolescent girls and women with disabilities
- Cultural expectations limiting women's agency

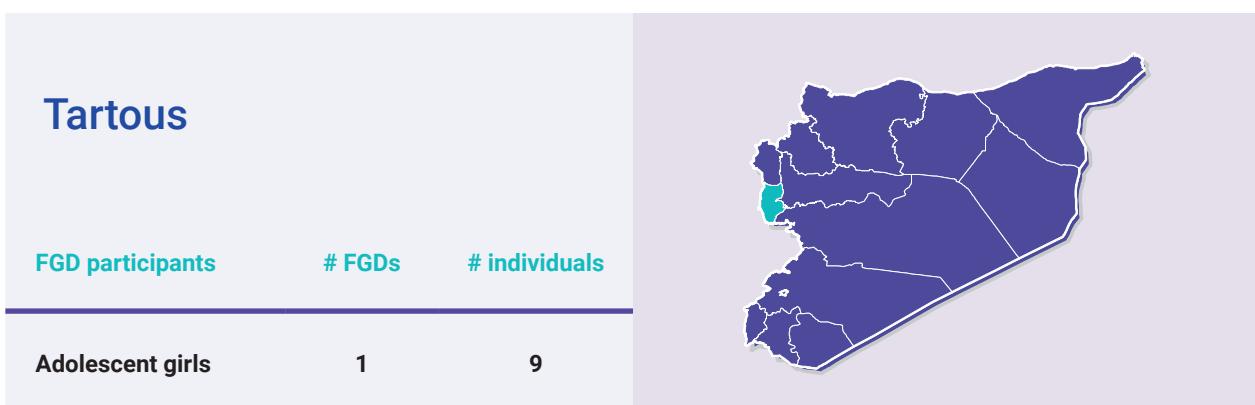
Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Access is technically available but practically restricted. Long distances, waiting times and safety concerns discourage women from seeking aid. Participants reported lack of gender-sensitive items and corruption, such as paying bribes to non-affiliated individuals for aid.

I was told about food baskets for sale after the earthquake, and the money went to a citizen, not to the association. (Woman from Jablah, Lattakia Governorate)

Women called for:

- Intensifying awareness-raising sessions on GBV, especially for youth
- Expansion of vocational training and small business support for women who have lost jobs
- Inclusion of elderly and disabled women in training programmes
- Increased male engagement in GBV prevention campaigns
- More inclusive services for adolescents and youth
- Free and fair access to humanitarian aid with better oversight mechanisms



Types of GBV

Physical Violence

Participants mentioned physical violence such as beatings, typically occurring in the home. This remains a consistent issue and may be exacerbated by the broader social and economic pressures following the war.

Psychological Violence

Emotional abuse, injustice, verbal insults and gossip were frequently cited. Some participants emphasized the psychological toll of being denied agency or dismissed in decision-making within families.

Sexual Violence

Sexual harassment and immoral threats were reported, particularly online through fake accounts and anonymous messaging. Girls and women described cyber-harassment as a form of violence that is increasing.

Denial of Resources, Services, Opportunities and Rights

Participants highlighted “cultural violence”, referring to the denial of artistic or musical hobbies solely based on gender. Others noted that women are burdened with responsibilities that exceed their physical capacity due to the absence of men (due to war or migration).

Technology-facilitated Violence

Cyberviolence was widely mentioned, including harassment through fake social media accounts and mobile numbers. Some noted that AI and anonymous digital communication are now being used to threaten or harass women.

Violence may occur online through fake accounts. Artificial intelligence has become a source of violence and cyber-harassment that may lead to harassment through fake numbers. (Adolescent girl from Tartous, Tartous Governorate)

GBV Drivers and Risk Factors

Insecurity

The current security situation has reduced women's and girls' freedom of movement and increased the risk of violence in public spaces. The war and subsequent instability were said to be primary contributors to restrictions and fear.

Gendered Social Norms

Participants discussed deeply rooted gender roles and societal expectations. Traditions, lack of trust in women's judgement and male preference in decision-making were repeatedly emphasized. In some families, only male members' opinions are considered valid.

Violence has increased after woman equality with men ... women now bear responsibilities that exceed their physical capacity due to absence of men, whether due to travel or loss due to war. (Adolescent girl from Tartous, Tartous Governorate)

Displacement and Poor Living Conditions

While not explicitly discussed in depth, displacement-related pressures were implied through discussions about the increased responsibilities and constraints placed on women due to absent male family members.

Aid Distribution and Service Access

Some participants reported blackmail and harassment during aid distribution. Women said that certain individuals demanded something in return for relief assistance, particularly food baskets.

Social Identity Factors

Women with disabilities reported experiencing discrimination both in the home and society. Some felt excluded or treated differently even within support structures. Age, marital status and disability contributed to heightened marginalization.

Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

Reporting to Authorities

Very few women report violence formally. Instead, coping mechanisms include silence, crying, avoidance and self-harm. Some women seek help online from specialists or go directly to centres when they feel safe enough to do so.

Community Interventions

Some participants noted the importance of guiding women and girls to trusted service centres and sharing their own experiences as encouragement. Peer support was considered a valuable informal resource.

Engagement in Safe Spaces and with GBV Actors

Centres providing psychological counselling and group activities were appreciated. Participants expressed the value of having spaces to express themselves, though distance and cost of transport were noted as significant barriers.

Other mechanisms include:

- Avoidance and emotional withdrawal
- Seeking psychological counselling (when available)
- Peer-to-peer encouragement to seek services
- Participation in centre activities for social relief

GBV Services

Availability and Reach

Many women were not aware of available services. Others learned through friends or direct experience. Distance and lack of centres were key challenges. One woman noted the high cost of online counselling before she found free services.

Perceived Impact

Women who used services found psychological counselling helpful. However, some felt services lacked effectiveness or clear strategies. Confidentiality and unfamiliar staff were deterrents for many.

Barriers

- Long distances and high transportation costs
- Distrust in the confidentiality of services
- Fear of being judged or exposed to unfamiliar providers
- Stigma, especially for those with disabilities or those accessing online services

Access to Humanitarian Assistance and Services

Access to aid is compromised by cost, harassment and the risk of blackmail. Parents often restrict daughters from going to distribution points. Women emphasized that some employees or intermediaries exploit their vulnerability for personal gain. Harassment was said to occur frequently in public spaces.

Women called for:

- Increased number of service centres and broader geographic coverage
- Empowering tools and spaces for open, respectful dialogue
- Greater transparency and accountability in aid distribution
- Cultural change to support women's right to express opinions and make decisions
- Opportunities for women to take on leadership roles in the community
- Awareness-raising programmes that challenge discrimination and promote inclusion

Her dream is obtaining a position through which she becomes able to make decisions in community, which enhances the woman's sense of her entity importance. (Woman from Tartous, Tartous Governorate)



6 Annexes

Annexes

Annex 1: Voices from Syria 2025 Approach and Methodology

The annual Voices from Syria report brings to the fore the voices of crisis-affected women and girls in Syria regarding the risks of gender-based violence (GBV) that affect their everyday lives.

The methodology used to collect and analyse the qualitative data that primarily informs this report has been refined over the years, in order to amplify the lived experiences of women and girls in Syria as experts on their own lives. This qualitative focus provides a nuanced and holistic perspective on violence against women and girls in the Whole of Syria (WoS).

Prioritizing and amplifying the narratives of women and girls is based on the feminist understanding that their experiences and perspectives are vital knowledge to inform humanitarian programming. The report recognizes GBV as part of and rooted in a larger, more 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.

Voices from Syria highlights the intersections of vulnerable and stigmatized social categories that may compound or create more risks. This intersectional analysis conveys the ways in which discrimination and violence based on gender, age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, displacement status, ability, marital status and diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC) are interconnected.

The commitment to centre women's and girls' voices is carried throughout the process of data collection and analysis and within the report itself. The use of qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) as the primary method of data collection provides a space for women and girls across Syria to be heard and share their experiences, fears and hopes. By drawing on what women and girls directly express, Voices from Syria ensures that their voices remain central and prominent in the analysis and presentation of findings and recommendations. Voices from Syria is a vehicle to elevate the voices of women and girls to directly influence decisions made about the GBV programmes in which they participate and humanitarian assistance and services more broadly. For the reader, the report represents a unique opportunity to hear what women and girls in Syria have to say, not just about the violence they face, but also about their resilience and hopes for the future.

Four Key Principles for Voices from Syria 2025

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 advances their struggles for empowerment and equality. The methodology adheres to a do-no-harm principle and survivor-centred approach, in line with the GBV guiding principles (safety, confidentiality, respect and non-discrimination).

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, age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, displacement status, ability, marital status and diverse SOGIESC are interconnected and can compound vulnerability. Women and girls in their diversity are included and considered within the research approach, with attention to the specific GBV risks and access barriers faced by different marginalized groups.

Contextualization and Localization: The analysis is rooted within the context of Syria to ensure the relevance of findings and recommendations. There is an understanding that GBV trends can vary by region, locality and affected group. Voices from Syria recognizes the valuable knowledge of women and girls across the WoS regarding their specific realities. It also builds on the existing expertise and learning of the WoS GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) partners and experts supporting efforts to address GBV in the context.

Participation: Participatory approaches are promoted throughout the annual Voices from Syria exercise to hear from women and girls and elevate their voices. The Voices from Syria 2025 methodology was developed and adapted from an iterative process established over the years. There were several rounds of feedback and revision to refine the report findings and recommendations.

Data Sources, Collection and Analysis

The report is based on the following sources of quantitative and qualitative data:

1. 53 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 19–60), 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. Two FGDs with GBV experts working in the Syrian humanitarian response (covering Aleppo and Idlib, and areas formerly under the control of the Assad government).
3. Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) data.

4. Secondary literature, including reports, studies and media.
5. Programme data collected through 4Ws and available on the WoS GBV AoR Dashboard.
6. GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) quarterly data produced by the North-West Syria GBV AoR.

The number of FGDs conducted to inform this report was significantly reduced from previous years (53 compared with 134 for Voices from Syria 2024).

All FGDs were led by a trained facilitator, supported by a notetaker, using a tested qualitative questionnaire. 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 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.

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. In total, 424 people participated in FGDs.

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 coding system adapted from that used for previous Voices from Syria reports. 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.

Two FGDs were also conducted with GBV experts working in Aleppo and Idlib, and areas formerly under the control of the Assad government. As in previous years, the Delphi method⁶² was used for these discussions to facilitate consensus among the participating experts.

Quantitative findings of the RNA conducted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in collaboration with humanitarian actors operating in Syria were also integrated in this report, helping to triangulate qualitative data emerging from FGDs. These data were drawn from 7,617 key informant interviews conducted across 2,600 communities between 5 and 15 February 2025.

Quantitative data on service provision and programming was also derived from the WoS GBV AoR 2024 dashboard and GBVIMS reports from the North-West Syria GBV AoR.

A thematic literature review of secondary sources was

conducted using the same coding system as the qualitative data, providing additional information related to themes identified through FGDs, as well as contextual data.

Limitations and Challenges

- Security: Security concerns limited the access of research teams and GBV partners to some areas of the country; therefore, there is less data from certain governorates compared with others.
- Reduced scope: The reduced scope of primary data collection limits the possible analysis; for example, the governorate analysis faces significant limitations.
- Data: While data collection methods were focused on the do-no-harm principle, the amount of information that participants were comfortable sharing may vary and is outside of the facilitators' control. Individuals may not have felt comfortable sharing types and details of violence taking place in the community, including due to risks of social stigma or other consequences, which are explored throughout this report. For instance, there may have been a fear of judgement by facilitators or other participants, or concerns that confidentiality would be broken.
- Bias: Participants' relationships with organizations and facilitators may have also negatively or positively informed the data collected. In addition, there may have been selection bias related to the capacity and reach of agencies to identify and mobilize participants. Often the composition of groups in such exercises tends to skew towards women and girls already engaged in GBV and women empowerment programming.
- Time: The time allowed for FGDs may have also been insufficient to break the ice and build trust with participants. 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 break down definitions to meet localized understandings of concepts.
- Space: Confidential spaces to conduct discussions are often limited, especially in camps and informal settlements.
- Access: It is likely that participation in FGDs is skewed towards those who live in closer proximity to centres where discussions were held. Persons with mobility and other constraints are less likely to have been able to participate, particularly in light of challenges related to transportation in the context.
- Limited data on marginalized groups: 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. As noted in previous years, FGDs did not include sufficient information from widow camps, pregnant and lactating women and girls, and so on, to allow for specific analysis of the violence or barriers faced by these groups.
- Quantitative data: There is limited quantitative data available for triangulation and integration in Voices from Syria 2025.

⁶² 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.

Annex 2: Acronyms

AoR	Area of Responsibility	PSEA	protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
FGD	focus group discussion	PWD	person with disabilities
GBV	gender-based violence	RNA	Rapid Needs Assessment
HLP	housing, land and property	SOGIESC	sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan	TFGBV	technology-facilitated gender-based violence
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee	UNDP	United Nations Development Program
IBA	image-based abuse	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
IDP	internally displaced person	UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
IPV	intimate partner violence	US	United States (of America)
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex	WGSS	Women and Girls' Safe Spaces
MHPSS	mental health and psychosocial support	WLO	women-led organization
NFI	non-food item	WoS	Whole of Syria
NGO	non-governmental organization	WRO	women's rights organization
NWS	North-West Syria		
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs		

Annex 3: Key Terminology

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.⁶³

Child or Minor

Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 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".⁶⁴ The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the monitoring body for the Convention, has encouraged Member 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, such as for marriage.

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.⁶⁵ 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.

Child Marriage (or Early Marriage)

Child marriage is a formal marriage or informal union before age 18. Both girls and boys can be affected, although girls disproportionately experience child marriage globally. 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.⁶⁶

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is 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 contexts with mandatory reporting, in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by humanitarian workers or with clients who express intent to harm themselves or someone else.⁶⁷

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.⁶⁸

63 GBV AoR, The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming (2019).

64 United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

65 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, & Aiding Recovery (Publishing location, 2015).

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

Denial of Resources, Opportunities or Services

Denial of rightful access to economic resources/assets, livelihood opportunities, and education, health or other social services. Examples include a widow being deprived of receiving an inheritance, earnings forcibly taken by an intimate partner or family member, a woman being prevented from using contraceptives or a girl being restricted from attending school. Economic abuse is included in this category. Some acts of confinement may also fall under this category.⁶⁹

Denial of Rights

Denial of and active repression of rights, including the right to work, education, health, housing, inheritance and housing, land and property, freedom, expression, privacy and movement. Examples include restrictions imposed by families on the movement, attire and dress, and ability to work or go to school for women and girls.⁷⁰ Denial of Rights includes Denial of Resources, Opportunities or Services as part of a wider category.

Disability

PWDs 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.⁷¹

Domestic Violence and Family Violence

Domestic Violence and Family Violence are often used interchangeably and refer to violence between family members or within the household. "Domestic violence" is a term used to describe GBV that takes place within the home or family between intimate partners as well as between other family members.⁷² It includes IPV but can also refer to violence from parents, siblings, in-laws and other relatives or household members. Family violence refers to violence more widely that takes place within the family and household, which can also include abuse of children by parents. See also "Intimate Partner Violence".

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.⁷³

69 Ibid.

70 International Labour Organization, What Is Child Labor [Webpage, 2015]; Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (IASC), Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing Risk, Promoting Resilience, and Aiding Recovery (2015).

71 United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

72 IASC, Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions.

73 Ibid.

Emotional Abuse/Psychological Violence

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, or destruction of cherished things.⁷⁴

Empowerment of Women and Girls

Empowerment is a process, although the results of the process may also be termed empowerment. 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 domination.⁷⁵

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 (former) partner or a male family member. Femicide can be the final outcome of IPV and domestic abuse. It can be a form of enforcement, backlash and retaliation for women and girls not fulfilling socially ascribed gender roles and expectations. As part of this, 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 the marriage of an individual or both persons against their will. It includes cases in which a person does not have the capacity, is unable, or does not feel they have the power to provide informed consent. The pressure put on people to marry against their will may be physical violence or other forms of coercion, such as making someone feel they are bringing "shame" on their family. Child (or early) marriage is a form of forced marriage, as children are not legally competent to agree to such unions, and thus it is given that one and/or both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent. See also "Child Marriage".

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

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. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization 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, and access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader sociocultural context.⁷⁶

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

of 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.⁷⁷

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, recognizing 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.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

Gender Expression

It refers to external manifestations of gender, expressed through one's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice or body characteristics.⁷⁸

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 and 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.⁷⁹

Intimate Partner Violence

Applies specifically to violence occurring between intimate partners (married, cohabiting, boyfriend/girlfriend or other close relationships) and is defined by the World Health Organization as 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. IPV is rooted in gender inequality and power imbalance among intimate partners. This abuse is typically manifested as a pattern of abusive behaviour towards 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 it refers more widely to violence that takes place within the home or between family members. See also "Domestic Violence and Family Violence".⁸⁰

Perpetrator

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

Physical Violence/Assault

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.

78 IASC, Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

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) 28, PSEA relates specifically to the responsibilities of humanitarian, development and peacekeeping actors to prevent incidents of SEA committed by United Nations, non-governmental organizations and inter-government personnel and other actors involved in the delivery of aid against the affected population; set up confidential reporting mechanisms; and take safe and ethical action as quickly as possible when incidents do occur.⁸¹

Psychosocial Support (PSS)

Any type of support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being and/or prevent or treat mental disorders, including to help to heal psychological wounds after an emergency or critical event. Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in emergencies includes four layers: basic services and support; community and family supports; focused non-specialized services; and specialized services. Focused PSS services can be provided for GBV survivors through individual or group support aimed at addressing the harmful emotional, psychological and social effects of GBV.⁸²

Rape

Physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration 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.⁸³

Sextortion

Sextortion or sexual extortion occurs when an individual has, or claims to have, a sexual image of another person or other materials (e.g. recordings or messages) implicating them and/or threatens to spread allegations about them in order to use this to coerce a person into doing something they do not want to do. This commonly includes coercion of a person to engage in nonconsensual and desired sexual acts. Sextortion is based on gender norms and expectations – related to the control over women and girls' sexuality – and uses fear of "shame" to apply pressure on victims.

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.⁸⁴

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

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.

Sexual Harassment

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

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sexual Characteristics (SOGIESC)

The acronym SOGIESC combines different terms to refer to individuals and groups that do not fit within normative standards of sexuality, gender identity and gender expression. Sexual orientation is understood to refer to each person's capacity for 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 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 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 or 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.

81 UNSG's Bulletin, Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2003).

82 IASC, Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (Publishing location, 2007).

83 IASC, Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions.

84 Ibid.

Sex Work/Transactional Sex/Survival Sex

The terms “sex work”, “transactional sex”, and “survival sex” are often used interchangeably and can overlap. Sex work is when persons over the age of 18 receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally.

Sex work may vary in the degree to which it is “formal” or organized. Transactional sex refers to the exchange of sex for money, goods or services in return. Survival sex uses sex as a commodity in exchange for goods, services, money, accommodation or other basic necessities.

So-called “Honour” Violence and Killings

Violence, including murder, stemming from a perceived desire to safeguard family “honour” and punish behaviour that is perceived as socially unacceptable and challenging men’s control over women, based on sexual, familial and social roles and expectations assigned to women by patriarchal ideology. Family “honour” is considered to be embodied in the behaviour and reputation of women and girls. Such behaviour may include adultery, extramarital sex or premarital relationships that may or may not include sexual relations; rape and other forms of sexual violence; or dating someone unacceptable to the family, violations of restrictions imposed on women’s and girl’s dress, contact with men and boys, employment or educational opportunities, social lifestyle, or freedom of movement.

Survivor/Victim

A survivor, or victim, is a person who has experienced GBV. The term recognizes 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.

Technology-facilitated GBV

The use of technology, digital tools and online platforms to perpetuate gender-based violence. It 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. It 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 threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, or 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 includes 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 (UASC)/“Orphans”

The term “unaccompanied children” refers to 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. In the context of Syria, children who have lost one or both parents are typically referred to as “orphans”.

Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS)

A WGSS is a structured place where women’s 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 well-being and more fully realize their rights.

Annex 4: References

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